**Summary**

Regina walks into a diner and makes a connection with a waitress, Emma.
Within a few days, the women turn each other's lives upside down. However, the past haunts each woman.

SwanQueen slow burn AU

**Notes**

Slight BDMS theme, nothing substantial. Consensual F/F relationship. Killian/Emma fans should not read this.
Chapter 1

She usually spent her short break reading, today she looked into eternity, seeing everything and understanding nothing. She was living the cliché, and she had no idea how she got there. Her long golden hair pulled back into a ponytail, waving in the breeze, did nothing to deter the heat of the day. She closed her eyes, breathing in the fresh air. It was about the only thing in the small backward town that she enjoyed, the fresh air. Everything else was stale and mundane. Thus the cliché. Ward of the State with big green eyes full of hope for at least making a better future for herself, and here she was four years later, waiting on tables, dressed, as required by Bob, eye candy to attract more customers.

“Emma!” Bob’s voice of Bob’s Diner. The originality of the name still astounds her. It was not Bob’s food or the quality of the diner that attracted people to it, no, it was her, with her forest green eyes, her star-studded smile and the long blond hair that makes the men come back. That and the fact that it was one of the few truck stops between nowhere and New York. Sometime she would look to the east, and it amazed her that New York City was only a two-hour drive away. A marvel of dreams or broken hope. “Emma!” The impatience in his voice was evident. She still had two minutes. Yep, living the cliché, working to make a little money to one day hop on a bus and live the dream, or return with broken hopes. She snorted at her thoughts. Yeah, broken hopes and marry Billy. She could not say what frightened her more. She went back inside the oppressive diner to server ungrateful grabby, sweaty men. The delight of it overwhelmed her. She plastered on her smile and flicked the ponytail back over her shoulder and yelled at Bob that she still had a few minutes break.

It was some time after the lunch rush that she looked up and stopped cleaning the counter. She could see that every man on the street was doing the same. Emma’s eyes were big, the small frown, indicated that she was much confused. The subject of all the attention walked into Bob’s Diner and came to sit in front of Emma. She draped the back of her neck with a silk scarf. Emma watched as the sleek sheen of sweat on the woman gathered and slipped from the side of her neck down into the ample cleavage. She swallowed. The dark-haired woman walked in with a pair of 4-inch heels Casadei designer shoes, an LBN ModCloth sleeveless dress and a Louis Vuitton Women’s Designer Travel Bag and now she was looking at Emma.

“What can I get for you, Ma’am?”

“Michael.”

“Excuse me?”

“My name, it is Michael.” The melted chocolate eyes looked at the waitress. She turned her head slightly, before closing her eyes and try to wipe more of the damp of her skin. “Please call me Michael, Miss Swan. Can you please serve me bottled water and the best Scotch you have?” Emma swallowed, in one look this woman saw everything, including her name tag, most customers referred to her in every distasteful, degrading chauvinistic term known to man. If she thought this woman was beyond beautiful and sophisticated, she had an utter lack of describing her warm, husky voice. She wanted to slap herself for the sudden poetic thoughts in her head, but her mind asked the question, how would you describe perfection?

“I am sorry, Ma’a, Miss Michael, we only serve beer.” She held her breath, and the dark, pensive eyes were on her again. “Then please serve me the water and six cold beers?” She gave Emma a glimpse of a smile. Gods, Emma thought, even her mouth was perfect.
She had a faint scar on her right upper lip, it only added to the allure of her mouth. All Emma could do was smile back and busy herself with the job. She placed the bottle of water in front of Michael first. As she put the water down, she discovered that a middling number of truckers and lumberjack were entering the small business. Emma wanted to roll her eyes. She observed Michael through her side vision. She drank a bit of the water and then dabbed some of it into the scarlet scarf to rinse her neck with the coldness. Emma was pouring the third beer when the honey voice addressed her once more. “Miss Swan, is there perhaps a place where a girl could freshen up a bit?” Emma smiled at her. “The ladies are through that door,” She indicated to Michael. “It is not the Ritz, but it is clean.” She added apologetically. Michael stood up, and Emma’s hand snaked out to take hold of her forearm. She received a razor glare for her efforts and guided her hand aside as if it has been burned. Her voice was low and gentle when she spoke once more. “I apologize, but your presence here drew quite a crowd.”

Michael gave her a half smile again and patted her comforting on the hand. “Thank you for the head’s up dear.” With that, she raised, took her travel case and walked to the ladies as if she was walking a runway.

Michael returned, she threw on a crisp, clean shirt, with a navy mini and matching shoes. She somehow managed to recover, looking more desirable than when she went in. The collar of the shirt was slightly turned up, three buttons loose. It made her olive skin tone stand out more, and the light color enhanced her dark eyes. Emma watched her in admiration. *She lived the cliché, and this woman was living the American dream.* They were worlds apart, and Emma felt a twinge in her chest. When Michael sat down again, she took the last stool at the counter and strategically placed her bag between her and the next stool. Emma moved the water and the beers to the new seat. As soon as a glass landed in front of her, she downed it. Emma looked on with raised eyebrows. The men often indulged in competitions late at night when most of them already had too much to drink, but when the glass hit the counter, Emma was sure this sophisticated woman would have beaten them all. She did the same with the second beer. Only when she was finished did she look at Emma again.

Her body seemed more relaxed now that she was in fresh clothes again, her eyes had a twinkle in them. “Men!” She said to Emma as she drank the third beer much slower. Emma gave her a knowing smile. “And here it comes,” Emma warned through a smile. A lumberjack finally dared to approach. “Hello, sweet thing.” He said, grinning at Michael. She turned to him slowly. “I hope you did not just address me?” She turned back to Emma. “Am I mistaken, Miss Swan, or did he just address me?” Emma tried her utmost to keep a straight face. “I believe he did Miss Michael.” Michael turned to the man. “I will try not to be presumptuous and assume your mother did teach you more erudite mannerisms and conventions to address a lady?” The man looked at her stupefied. “Whatever.” He said and stood up. Michael breathed deep and swallowed the last of the beer in her glass. “Please tell me that he was the main man and that I will not be bothered any further?” Emma smiled at her in complete awe. She bit her bottom lip and Michael watched her mouth as a smile formed. “Yes to the main man, and unfortunately no to other attempts. Their jest and courage to approach you will increase with the amount of beer they consume.”

Michael turned her head and carefully looked Emma over. She was beautiful. She had a natural beauty and stance about her that did not fit in with her environment. “And you fend them off every day?” Emma only gave her a shrug. She left Michael’s company to help out one of the other girls with the orders that were now streaming in. Michael turned to watch. A few men only ogled her. A big rough trucker smashed her on the butt. Michael, felt the anger seep from her. She took another beer and drank half of it while removing an item from the side of her bag. Her eyes rested on the truck driver. When Emma past him again, he grabbed her ass and made a rude comment. Michael
saw the stiffness in the lean body. She observed similar actions towards the other waitresses. She got up. Emma saw the look in her eyes and opened her mouth to say something, but Michael held up a perfectly manicured finger to stop her from interfering.

The trucker wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and pulled away from the table he was sitting at, opening his legs and patted his thigh for Michael to sit on. She gave him a lascivious smile, and she was sure he creamed himself. “Well, if you aren’t the big boy?” Her eyes gleamed dangerously. He took it for lust. *Moron.* With intensity, he would never consider a woman to have she kicked his chair further back, and before he could move, she pinned him down with the toe of her shoe, the four-inch navy Casadei heel pressing hard into his crotch. He tried to move, and Michael placed more pressure on him with the heel. “Uh ah,” she said as she wagged a finger at him. “If you get to be barbaric, I get a turn too.” She leaned in closer for effect, regretting the decision immediately. He smelled of beer and stale sweat.

Where Emma was standing, all she could do was to look at the muscular, yet feminine thigh that was showing where the mini pulled up for Michael to take this aggressive stance. There was complete silence in the diner where only moments before there was a buzz.

“Now please be so kind and apologize to Miss Swan for your complete and utter disrespect?” He flushed red, but when the woman pressed down harder, he swallowed and said, “Sorry Em.” The fury of Michael hit him like something tangible, and when he looked into her eyes, he realized what it was that he saw there. He cleared his throat.

“I apologize for my rude behavior, Miss Swan.” Emma nodded an acceptance and Michael took her foot away. The trucker got ready to get up, but a firm hand pushed him back in his seat. Bob chose that moment to make his appearance.

“What in blazes?” He asked. Michael pout at him. “I assume you are the owner?” “Damn right I am!” He yelled at her and his red face, turned a shade darker. Michael lifted an irritating brow at him. *Cholesterol,* she concluded, most likely overeating of his own burgers.

Michael turned to him, and the trucker saw it as his opportunity to make an exit. Michael, however, knew men, she knew them all too well, the moment his weight shifted, she let go of the item she took out of her bag.

The trucker looked down and swallowed audible. Michael threw a dagger between his legs, half an inch away from being a eunuch. “Who said you could get up charming?” His eyes held fear. *Good, now you know how it feels.* Michael thought. She turned to Bob. “As your misfortune would have it, I will be in your atrocious little town for the present moment, if I observe, similar behavior as applied to Miss Swan, that dagger will be pinned a half an inch closer to its current mark.” She could see every man in the establishment cling tighter to their balls.

“Now just a minute, who the fuck do you think you are?” Michael moved closer to Emma, and as she passed her on her way towards Bob, she took the tin tray from her hands. “Google biggest Bitch in New York City and my picture will show.” With those words she slammed the tray into Bob’s
“What the fuck lady, I am calling the cops!” He yelled as the blood streamed from his face. Michael was walking towards Emma, who had a look of horror and admiration at the same time. The dark woman came to stand before her and started to untie Bob’s Diner yellow and red shirt that was knotted to expose the waitress’ fabulously toned abdominal muscles. Her eyes never left Emma’s.

“Please do Bob? I would like to apply for a few lawsuits on behalf of your staff, starting with harassment, sexual assault, sexism, unbearable working conditions and not least of all, I am sure, health risks. I will have my team of lawyers here before; your physician can reset your nose. I will have this shit hole closed down and tied up in red tape for years.” She saw him holding up his hands and departed back to the kitchen.

When Emma’s shirt was straightened out, Michael said kindly to her. “Respect is something that you earn, and for them to treat you like the lady you are, you need to dress like one.” She got a small, sad smile in return. She turned to the trucker that did not move an inch.

“Are we clear now on manners, Sir?” He shook his head as a yes and Michael gave him her most charming smile. She pulled the dagger from the chair and tapped it carelessly against her palm before she turned and took up her seat at the counter again. The trucker could not move fast enough, as he got to the door, Michael’s voice washed over him like cold water.

“Don’t forget to leave a generous tip.” He swallowed, threw a twenty on the table and moved out. His friends all watching his departure. It would have been funny on any other day, but each and every man felt for him, he pissed in his pants as the dangerous woman threw the dagger to his crotch and his departure made it visible for all.

Michael drank the other two beers as the men flooded out, as eager as they came in. They all left decent tips, and like Emma, the other girls untied their shirts as well. They came to stand by Emma.

“Your friend certainly leaves an impression.” One commented. “She certainly did, and in a few days when she is gone, it will be all business as usual, if we still have jobs.” Michael’s eyes soften as she turned her head to look at Emma. Her green eyes were dark with anger. “You will still have a job, Miss Swan, I assure you, Bob will not come for a second round with me.” Emma flashed her an appreciative look.

“Do you have some time Miss Swan?” Emma nodded. “I am in need of some assistance? My car broke down a few miles from here. Is there a garage that can tow it in?” Emma stared at her.

“What type of car and where is it more or less?”

“Black Mercedes Benz SLK 350 convertible, on the I-84, just before the turnoff towards the town.” Emma inhaled.

“I will call Billy.” Michael took out her cell phone, unlocked it and handed it to Emma. “Thank you, Miss Swan. I will also need a place to sleep.” One of the other girls chirped in while Emma was dialing. “There is a B&B Motel just across the road.”
Michael took out a second phone from her bag. She pressed a speed dial button. And waited impatiently for her call to be answered. “Where the hell are you?” The voice came through clear enough for Emma to hear the conversation. “And a good afternoon to you as well Miss Blanchard.” The sarcasm dripped from the smoky voice. “Really?” Miss Blanchard asked. Michael gave an uncharacteristic sigh. “What is the problem?” She asked.

“What is the problem?” The clear question came from a light voice. “Michael, I swear to god if you are in some woman’s bed…” Michael smirked. “Miss Blanchard if I were in some woman’s bed, you would be the last person I would call.” There was silence for a moment, and Emma imagined this Miss Blanchard tried to keep her temper in tacked while speaking to Michael.

“Fine, where are you, you have missed two appointments, you should have been back hours ago.” There was a slight worry in the other woman’s voice.

“My car broke down,” Michael said as if it was the end of the world. A New York woman, being stuck in the sleepy little, town, Emma could imagine that for a woman like Michael it would seem like the end of life as she knew it. It caused a faint smile on Emma’s face. She had finished her conversation with Billy and placed the smartphone back in front of its owner.

“Alright, where are you? I will come and get you.” Michael gave a sad smile. “No, it is late already, and David would kill me if I let you drive all this way at night.”

“Michael…” It sounded like a whine. “I know how you hate sleeping in a strange bed.” Michael let her head fall forward, and she rested it in her hand. Emma saw it as a deliberate move, Michael did not want the blonde to see her eyes. “I will be fine Mary Margaret. I only called to let you know that I am stuck.” She tried to sound reassuring. “I will call Mark for you.” Michael took a breath. “Thank you, that is kind, but a local lady is helping me to get the car towed to town, as soon as someone can tell me what is wrong with it, I will call Mark if they are unable to fix it.”

“Are you sure?” Emma could now hear a clear concern. “It is only for one night, Miss Blanchard, I will be fine, I only need a few things and a bottle of Scotch.” Emma touched her shoulder.

“Hold on a sec Mary Margaret.” She placed the phone down and gave all her attention to Emma.

“This is Billy.” A young skinny man with a work overall and a cap in his hands stood before her. “He is our best mechanic, and he will tow your car,” Emma explained.

“Billy?” Michael asked. Emma smiled, so it is not only women you treat with respect. “Martin,” Emma added. Michael handed him the keys to her car.

“I appreciate your assistance, Mr. Martin.” The boy blushed and said something, but his Southern accent was so thick that Michael only smiled at him and he was off.

“Thank you, Miss Swan,” She said as she picked up the phone to continue her conversation with Mary Margaret. “Sorry Miss Blanchard that was the mechanic.”
“And who is Miss Swan?” Michael tried her best not to blush, but a slight flush crawled up her cheeks. Emma smiled at her amused. “The lady that is helping me out, and from the looks of it, Billy’s true love.” She said it while looking directly into Emma’s green eyes and it was her turn to blush. Michael thought it to be priceless and very charming.

“Are you sure you will be alright?” Emma thought she saw a twist of pain on Michael’s face before she answered.

“I will be fine Mary Margaret, now stop worrying, I will most likely be home tomorrow.”

“Alright, call me if things change.” There was less worry in her voice this time. “And for god’s sake, try and behave?” Michael’s face exploded into a brilliant smile and Emma had to hold her breath. Wow, she was stunning, Emma thought. She heard Michael reply, “Now Miss Blanchard, you know that is not something I can promise. Send my love to David and get some rest while the Evil Queen is away.” Emma heard a light laugh and a goodbye. The dark-haired woman placed the phone back on the counter and did a nervous rub of her fingers in a palmed fist.

Emma saw the movement but said nothing as she continued to steam and clean glasses. She did not ease in her task as she asked, “Is there anything more I can help you with Miss Michael?” When the woman first told Emma that it was her name, she thought the woman was playing with her, but it was what Mary Margaret aka Miss Blanchard called her as well. The name rolled off Emma’s tongue easier.

“I need Scotch and clean linen. If you can direct me, I would appreciate it.” Emma looked at the clock. It was Thursday, and one of the few days she did not work a double.

“My shift ends in an hour. If you wait, I will take you.” Michael rubbed her fingers and thumb into her palm again, apparently a telltale.

“Thank you, Miss Swan.” She sat with Emma in a comfortable silence. Emma was cleaning glasses while she was on her laptop, going through emails. Emma’s phone rang, she picked it up and listened.

“Okay, we will be there in a few minutes.” The clock said that she needed to stay for another nine minutes. “That was Billy. He needs you to come to the garage.” Michael frowned.

“Why, is there a problem?” Emma tried to keep calm. She somehow knew that this woman was not going to be happy with Billy’s explanation.

“We have a few minutes to go. Then I will take you to the garage, alright?” Michael nodded. She was feeling more uncomfortable with every passing minute. She wiped her palm again. Emma pretended not to notice.

A few minutes later, Emma handed over to a charming redhead who would run the bar for the night. Emma waved goodbye to the other girls and led Michael out of the Diner.

“My car is around the corner,” Emma said, and when they turned to the back of Bob’s Diner, Michael looked at the beat-up yellow Bug. Her mouth opened and she was about to say something
when she remembered that this woman was helping her. She swallowed her pride and placed her travel bag in the front boot of the Bug that Emma held open for her, while she kept the other bag with her.

“Thank you, Miss Swan.” Emma smiled at her. Michael seemed even more nervous than a moment before. Emma looked at her, trying to figure out what the problem was. “Are you alright?” Michael breathed deep.

“I have issues with circumstances that are unplanned or unknown.” Emma smiled as she drove off. “You could have said, I am a control freak, or I have OCD.” Michael gave her a raised eyebrow, but there was a light in her eyes.

“I am not OCD!” She said, and it made Emma laugh. The laughter calmed Michael. It was full and unexpected. Most people that knew her would never dare to laugh at her control issues.

When they stopped at the garage, Billy came to open the door for Emma. It amused Michael. He tried so hard. She followed them to the Mercedes and watched the other two men look at the engine. Billy started to explain in his heavy accent. Michael tried desperately to follow his speech. She nodded her head when she felt it appropriate and when he finished, she thanked him. She took out her phone and called Mark.

“Michael, and to what do I owe this unpleasant surprise?” She rolled her eyes. Emma was listening to the conversation again.

“Do you want to fuck with me at this current moment?” She asked. Her face, attitude, and voice changed in an instant. The assertive woman that walked into the Diner hours earlier was back, and Emma could see that she was more relaxed. She received a deep laugh from Mark. “Anyway, my car broke down.” She sighed.

“That is because you missed your last service, it is called preventative maintenance for a reason Michael.” Mark reasoned with her.

“Yeah, yeah, anyway, there is something wrong with my Flux Capacitor.” She was met with complete silence. “Mark?” On his side, he was trying to control his hysterical laughter. He cleared his throat. “Your Flux Capacitor hey? Michael, may I speak to one of the mechanics?” That was when Emma held out her hand, also trying desperately to hide her smile.

“Fine, here!” Mark heard as she passed the phone to Emma.

“Hello Mark, my name is Emma.”

“I assume you are not the mechanic?” He chuckled.

“No, but I understand the problem. When the boys popped the hood and saw the engine, one of them remarked that it looks like a Flux Capacitor.” She heard Mark give a belly laugh. “Can they give me any information?” He asked.

“From what they can make out, it does not seem to be mechanical. The ESP light comes on when you start the car. Mark these guys are some of the best mechanics I know, they can fix anything if it is a diesel truck engine.”
“Sure, sure.” He said and then added, “May I please speak to Michael again?” Emma handed the phone back to the brunette.

“So what is wrong?” She asked bluntly. Mark shook his head and answered.

“Michael, the mere fact that you do not know what a Flux Capacitor is, hurts me more than what you will ever realize.” His words were sincere, and it threw Michael off balance again. Mark carried on. “I pulled your GPS co-ordinates from the car. Would you like me to send someone now?” Michael did her telltale again, and Emma came to stand closer to her, the move somewhat calmed her.

“No, Mark it is already late, and with New York traffic, it will take you engineer hours to get here. You can send him in the morning.” Mark frowned on his side. Michael was very accommodating, which was rare.

“I will book it for you immediately, and I will call you as soon as my tech knows what is wrong, it is most likely the onboard computer that needs a reset.” Michael blew out the breath she was holding.

“Thank you, Mark, speak to you tomorrow.” She killed the call and looked at Emma and the three mechanics. She was missing something, and she hated to be in the dark. “Thank you for your assistance, gentlemen. They will send someone out tomorrow to have a look. She pulled three hundred dollar bills from her bag and handed each man a bill. They looked at her very strangely.

“My understanding is that you are currently working overtime and that you did that just for me. It is a token of appreciation. I will settle the tow bill and whatever other costs, there is tomorrow. Good night, gentlemen.”

Emma shrugged her shoulders at the questions the men had and then fell into step with Michael again. Michael removed a few items from the car and carried it to the Bug. “That was very kind of you.” Michael looked at Emma.

“It has nothing to do with kindness Miss Swan. It is about service. I missed something back there, didn’t I?”

Emma smiled, “Yes, Miss Michael you did, and I agree with Mark, it is sad that you do not know what a Flux Capacitor is.” Michael thought about it.

“Why?” Emma turned to her. Her eyes were earnest. “Michael,” her voice was softer, and it soothed the mood of the dark woman. “My childhood was pretty shitty, and somehow, despite your class, I am sure yours was even shittier.” Michael turned her head, and her deep dark brown eyes looked intensely at Emma.

“And you concluded this, just because I do not know what a Flux Capacitor is?” Emma looked back.

“Am I wrong?” Michael was sitting back in the seat closing her eyes. “No, but I still don’t get it.”

“Do you know who Michael J Fox is?”

“Sure,” Michael answered.

“The Flux Capacitor is the engine that transport Marty McFly to 1955 in the movie Back to the Future,” Emma explained, Michael turned her head more.
“And that is why this is so sad Michael. Even today it is one of my favorite movies and something every kid watched at some point in their lives.” Emma concluded. She sighed and continued with a different subject. “The money, it is almost as much as the boys get paid per day, hell it is what I get on a busy Friday night.” Michael opened her eyes.

“You are fucking kidding me?” Emma gave her half a smile.

“Nope.” Michael rested her head back against the seat.

“I should have hit Bob harder,” Michael said annoyed. Emma gave a carefree laugh. The sound filled Michael with warmth.

“I will drop you off at the convenient store. They will have everything you will need.”

“Do they have Scotch?” Michael asked with her eyes still closed. Emma looked the woman over. The nervousness eased from her body, she seemed almost relaxed with her eyes closed, leaning back in Emma’s Bug.

“See anything you like?” Michael asked, her eyes still closed.

“How did you do that?” Emma asked.

“How do you know when one of your asshole customers is staring at your ass?” Emma thought about it for a moment. *Yeah, she could feel it.*

“Are you tired?” Emma asked all of a sudden. It was only now that she noticed that Michael had dark circles under her eyes.

“Yes, a little, you must be tired as well?” She was still in the same position.

“I am, that is why I am asking you if I can drop you at the convenient store, and you can buy what you need, while I go home and grab a shower. I will pick you up later and take you to the motel?” Michael answered without moving.

“Who is kind now?” She opened her eyes to look at Emma while she was pulling out of the garage. “Thank you, Miss Swan, you trouble is much appreciated. Your plan is sound, and I will comply only if you join me for dinner afterwards, and with that, I mean anywhere accept Bob’s.” Emma giggled.

“You are in luck. There is one other Diner in this place, and it serves half decent food.” Michael smiled.

“Good.” For some reason, she was not ready to say goodnight to the blonde just yet.

They met up an hour later. From the looks of it, Michael bought half of the shop. “This is just a Bug, and you are sleeping over for one night, what the hell?” Emma asked. Michael was speechless. The young woman looked so different. She had skinny jeans on with a white tank top and a beautiful, comfortable red jacket, but that was not what caught Michael’s eye. She applied a little makeup, just enough to enhance her already striking features. The blonde hair now untied and fell in curls around
“You never know, I might get hungry in the middle of the night.”

“Looks more like thirsty.” Emma replied as she helped Michael to pack some beers and a bottle of Scotch and wine in the car. Michael was amused but said nothing. They drove to the motel, and Michael booked in, Emma asked for the pink room.

“Pink, really?” Michael asked after she paid and Emma walked her to the room. “Believe me. You want the pink room.”

“How?” As Emma opened the door for her, she understood. Not only was the room pink, but it was also frilly. On most days Michael would rather die than sleep in a room like this, but she understood Emma’s motivation. “I suppose not a lot of truckers sleep in the pink room?” Emma gave her a knowing smile. The room was a decent size, with a small bathroom and a breakfast nook. It was also not adjacent to other rooms, excellent, Michael thought. At least she would not have to listen to some trucker banning his lasted conquest.

She took out a few things from the bags Emma helped her carry in. Sanitizer, and a lot of it. Michael took off the bedding and the pillows and sprayed the sanitizer over the bedding and the bed. She did the same with the kitchen and bathroom. Emma looked on. “Mysophobia, OCD and hypochondria?” Michael looked at her.

“No!” She stretched the word. Emma watched as she remade the bed and covered it with cotton, linen she bought at the store. “I will take a quick shower, and then we can get supper?” Emma nodded. The more time she spent with this dark woman, the less she understood. Emma was unpacking some of the groceries, when Michael came out of the shower, her shoulder length hair being towel dried. She only had her white shirt on while busy with the job. Emma stood frozen they were a distance apart, but Emma could now see all of the muscular, tanned legs. The sight made a fumble in Emma’s stomach. She watched as Michael pulled out a few things she bought. She disappeared back into the bathroom, and Emma felt like she could breathe again. What the hell Swan? She questioned her sanity.

When Michael returned her hair was stylishly blow dried, she also picked a tight jean and Emma now appreciated the fabulous view, while Michael was tying her sneakers. Pull it together? She reprimanded herself. It was not the first time she felt attracted to a woman, but here in this town, she was about the only good looking girl, that was until this afternoon when the dark headed, sexy Michael walked into the Diner. Emma felt a shudder. And Michael smiled to herself. Might be an exciting night after all.
The other diner seemed to be more of a family-friendly place. The men were all clean shaven, and the atmosphere was defiantly testosterone-free. Emma greeted the locals and made her way to a corner table. She took the seat with her back to the crowd, Michael said nothing, but gratefully accepted her position, viewing everyone.

A friendly waitress appeared, she and Emma talked for a few moments before she took their drinks order. Still no Scotch. Michael sighed. “You have a question, Miss Swan?” She observed that the blonde had been itching to ask something ever since they left the garage.

“How did you land up here?”

“Car broke down.” Emma threw her a look. *What the hell, Michael thought I got a look? “Fine, I did some work at Scranton, Lake, I was on my way back to New York when I stumbled upon your charming little town.”* Emma smiled. *Gods she had a beautiful smile,* Michael thought.

“What is your last name?” Michael turned her head in that sexy way Emma was getting used to as if she was thinking how to answer while plotting where to bury your body as well. It made Emma’s insides turn again.

“Michael.” She answered simply. Emma folded her arms, clearly not impressed with the answer. “What is this a Gordon Gordon thing?”


“So what do you do in your free time, Michael Michael?” Emma asked sarcastically. The dark eyes gleamed. She loved the way Emma said the second Michael.
“Besides having little of that, I guess my work is my hobby, so I don’t need free time.” Emma sat back in her seat and looked at Michael intensely. Michael picked the label of her beer as if she needed to keep busy one way or another.

“So, you do not relax, and I do not mean that you are stressed. You are on constant alert. You have no pastime, you work in your free time, telling yourself that your work is your hobby. You get nervous in crowds and situations you cannot control, you are a perfectionist, you drink too much and would rather travel in your car than sleep over. Your most prized position is in the bag you have with you currently, and you depend on your cell, but you hate to speak to people on the phone. Your name is not Michael. It is a wall you built to protect you from whatever happened to you as a child. You are harder on yourself than what anyone else could ever be. You are self-made and self-driven. How am I doing?”

The dark eyes looked back, a pleasant smile on her face. “Not bad.”

“What did I get wrong?” Emma asked in earnest.

“Oh no, Miss Swan, it is my turn.” Her brown eyes melted with the green once and the rest of the world fell away. “You are an orphan, you most likely picked your last name. You have dreams of being more than what you are because you know that not only do you deserve better, you are better. You grew up with dysfunction, and a lot at that, it is the reason why you are so sensitive towards other people’s drinking habits. Most things you know is self-taught, and you like Billy, you don’t love him.” Michael saw a tweak on Emma’s face. She knew she got it correct. It was part of her job to read people.

“What did I get wrong?” Emma asked again.

“I am not quite self-made,” Michael answered. “I come from a family of old money, and my ex-husband was also very wealthy, so the business that I run was set up with his money.”

“Ex-husband? I thought you liked girls?” Michael smiled and took another sip of beer. “And I thought you liked men.” At the words Emma found herself breathing a bit harder. “How did you know I was an orphan?” Emma asked, there were very few people in this town that knew that.

Michael shrugged. “Your car.”

“My car?” Emma asked confused.

“It is old and beat up on the outside, you most; likely fix it as you can. The interior, however, is immaculate. You take care of things. Typically, people that grew up with very little do that. Swan is a very unusual last name, and you split your tips.” Emma’s frown was clear now.

“I split my tips?” Michael nodded.

“By now you are not even aware that you do it. You place all the small change in your apron pocket until it starts to cling, then you put it into your bag. Bills less than five dollars goes into your right back pocket, and bigger tips go into your left front pocket. Only people I know that do that are drug
dealers and orphans. I assume that you are not the local pusher?”

Emma thought about it. Michael answered another question. “You most likely have less money in the bank than what you stashed away in your home. You do not trust easily.” They sat in silence for a while, Emma in thought of all the things Michael said, she did believe that she was hiding better than this. The only relief she felt was that at no point did Michael sound like she pitied her, or that she looked down at her. The words, however, did spark something in Emma. “Michael?” She looked up into the green eyes. Emma continued, she did not want to scare this woman. “How do you know these things, you obviously grew up in a healthy, stable environment?” Michael wanted to laugh.

“You just made an assumption and a bad one at that.” She turned her head as she looked at Emma. “May I ask how much Bob pays you?” She asked carefully. She did not want to offend Emma.

“Average to minimum tipped wage, two dollars fifty cents an hour. Beer is four fifty at Bob’s so I usually get either a fifty cent tip and if I am lucky one dollar fifty.” Michael got a look in her eyes that Emma could not read. “As you can imagine, today was a perfect tip day.” She laughed again thinking of Michael’s antics earlier in the day. “Man, I have never seen anything like what you did today. Neither did any of these men, a woman handling herself…” She stopped. Michael raised an eyebrow. “You don’t feel safe,” Emma said it so softly that Michael nearly missed it.

Michael instantly changed the subject back to Emma. “There is a good reason why I asked. What you did earlier, your analysis about me, the manner in which you did it. Accumulate all the information you gathered during the day and incorporate the pieces together. In New York, we call people like you Social Analyst. A good Social Analysts can earn up to eighty thousand dollars a year. The average wage is about sixty-five thousand. That would be close to two hundred and fifty dollars a day working on a 22.67 day month.”

Emma looked at her as if she did not quite hear correctly. She felt the heat of hope, and as soon as it came, it extinguished.

“I only have a high school certificate.” Her voice was soft. Michael reached over and took the slender, soft hand. She felt a shiver go through her body as she did so.

“Emma, with a talent like yours, it is all you need if you know the right people.” The green eyes met the dark once with a challenge.

“And I suppose you are the right people?” Michael let go of her hand.

_Gods, what a time to pick pride over common sense._ “I was only trying to help Miss Swan.” The mask that slightly dropped for a few minutes was back in place. Emma wanted to slap herself, but all logic went out the door the moment Michael touched her.

“I do not need your pity, Michael. There is no need for you to help me out, I can do it on my own, as I always have.” Emma’s head yelled at her, Michael placed all her dreams on a platter in front of her, and she spat at it. _What the hell are you thinking?_ The conversation went quiet between them. Each woman stuck with her thoughts.
“Prince,” Michael said all of a sudden.

“What?” Emma was confused, and she was still berating herself for not accepting Michael’s offer.

“My name, it is like Prince.” Emma started to laugh.

“Prince, really? Could you not go for Shakira or Anastasia? It had to be Prince?” There was a dark flicker in Michael’s eyes, and it stirred something in Emma.

“Suit’s me, don’t you think?” Emma relaxed and held out the bottle of beer. “I’ll drink to that.”

The two women continued with a casual conversation over their meal. The food was better than what Michael expected. She watched Emma a few times, trying to be inconspicuous, she fidgets.

“You do not like sitting with your back to the crowd?” Michael stated. Emma turned her look to the woman.

“No, I do not, but neither do you?” Michael smiled, the scar on her lip pulling up. “Please, join me on this side?” Emma considered the request. She would feel far more comfortable facing the crowd, but being that close, to Michael would also be a problem.

The brown eyes stared at her in challenge. Emma Swan never backed away from a challenge. “Thank you.” Michael moved up to make space for the blonde. She took another sip of beer and turned her attention entirely to Emma.

“Let’s play a game, shall we?” Emma raised an eyebrow.

“If it involves you throwing daggers, then no thanks.” Michael laughed, a bright, carefree laugh. It sounded strange to her ears, but Emma loved the sound.

“Maybe on our third date Miss Swan?” Emma stopped halfway while drinking her beer.

“This is a date?” Michael tilted her head and cast her eyes down before looking up at Emma again. *Hot damn!* Emma thought *she is flirting with me!*

“It could be if you like?” Michael answered with a low silky voice that hit Emma right in her center. She smiled at Michael. She has never met anyone, like herself that was well guarded while playing the seductive game as well. Michael seemed to be in her element. The subtle smiles, her coquettish glances. She affected Emma in a way. The blonde did not fully understand.

“Alright, what game?” Michael looked pleased as Emma asked. She loved this game, very few people had the intelligence, common sense and imagination, to play it to her satisfaction.

“Good.” Her voice was that alluring husky once more. “Do you know everyone here tonight?” Emma looked around the diner.
“No, there are always truckers and salespeople that I do not know.” Michael nodded. “We can only play with them.” Emma looked intrigued. “Who shall we start with?” Emma picked the bald man at the bar that passed out twenties at all the waitresses. Michael smiled, he was perfect.

“Salesman. He is so self-assured and egocentric that he does not see the difference between a working single mom waitress and a hooker. He believes he is god’s gift to women. His wife is having an affair with a much younger Hispanic man. She is glad her children are out of the house, that her unfaithful husband travels a lot. She has lost a lot of weight recently, he gained, believing he is still attractive, dishing out money because his wife and all women adore him.” Emma laughed. “I’ll buy that! Alright.” She took a swig of her beer and rubbed her hands together.

“The big guy with the beard, trucker obviously.” Michael’s eyes sparkled as she observed Emma openly. “He is not your typical big guy, brawl, and no brains. No, he is intelligent and hates his job, he does it for the money only. He will take on ice routes and ruthless mountain passes to bring in more cash. He is lonely. Right now he is talking to his life partner who he met in college. He is an interior decorator and the reason why Big Boy is working his shit job. The market is not so good for interior design, and his lover could not find another job. So, John Cena, there has beautiful soft silk and lace underwear on, and he is going to leave in a moment to take care of the need his lover created with the telephone call.”

Michael broke up in laughter. “Good one.” They played a few more rounds when Michael noticed that they were the last customers. Their waitress and one chef waited for them.

“Sorry, New York never closes down.” Emma gave her a small smile. She was tired as well. Michael paid their bill and tipped both the waitress and the chef with a hundred for waiting for them. Both gave her a grateful smile. Emma drove back to the motel and called it a night. Michael had other ideas. “Please come in and join me for a nightcap?” Emma licked her lips. If she worked a double, she would still be up, so she took Michael up on her offer.

The pink room shocked Michael all over again. She took out her phone and snapped a few shots. “Mary Margaret will never believe that I slept in a place like this.” She giggled, it was so unlike her. She turned to her companion. “I cannot remember the last time I had enjoyed an evening so much.” The words made Emma sad. It brought the memory of earlier and the Flux Capacitor back.

“Mind if I ask you something?” Michael answered with a sure, Emma knew it would be a question that the stunning woman might not answer. “Earlier, I said you came from a stable background. I asked how you knew other things?” Michael came to stand before her. She was slightly shorter than Emma with flat shoes. “Only if I get to ask an inappropriate personal question as well?” Emma nodded and took the offered scotch.

“At long fucking last!” Michael said out of character, as she tasted the first sip of the scotch. Her eyes closed and she made an hmm sound as she appreciated the burn of the liquid. Emma watched closely. She thought that by the way, Michael carried on about the scotch that she would have downed it by now, not nurse it like a special friend. She placed the drink on the nightstand and spread herself out over the bed. It was only a double, but for one night it will do. She patted the side next to her for Emma to sit. The blonde raises an eyebrow.
“I don’t bite unless you ask me to?” Michael’s eyes were dark, and Emma thought she could get lost in them as she felt the comment stir her again. “I want to take my shoes off, but there is no way I am walking barefoot on that carpet.” The explanation made Emma giggle.

“So your upper life stable background?” Emma asked again. Michael gave her a come-hither smile. “What about it?” She asked, her voice soft. Emma could hear that it was a tender subject and she trod carefully. “Certain things about you does not add up.” This time Michael smiled amused.

“Go on?” She encouraged Emma.

“You come from old money you said, and you certainly spend it like there is no tomorrow. But there is something dark about you. It is not only the demeanor you displayed towards that trucker, but it was also that perfect thrown dagger, the way you look around you, your alertness. It is not about adapting to circumstances, from what I see you have the cunning to adapt to anything, it is something more…” Michael drank some of the amber liquid before she looked at Emma.

“More what Miss Swan?” Her voice was indulgent, for a moment Emma thought the voice was threatening, Emma realized it was honesty. Michael wanted to see if Emma could solve the puzzle. She thought for a moment. A small frown forming, her head tilted as she thought. Michael held a breath. *If you get it even half right, there is no way I am going to New York without you in my car.*

Emma looked up. She had an answer, a frightful one. “Your family…” Emma swallowed. “It’s like the family?” Michael frowned and there was a hint of disappointment in her eyes. “The family?” She returned the question to Emma while she got up and got the bottle of scotch.

“Yes,” Emma said carefully. “Like the Godfather.” With those words, Michael swung around, and Emma saw something in her eyes, she has only seen once in her life. It was pride. *Why the hell would this woman look at her with pride?*

Michael leaned back on the dresser in front of the bed. She looked at Emma for a very long time. Then she took the bottle, got back on the bed and asked Emma if she would like some more. She didn’t, but Michael’s stare made her uncomfortable, and she needed the drink to calm her nerves. Michael poured them each a bit, and she started to sip away. Emma observed her. She was in deep thought.

When Michael turned to look at Emma, there was a seriousness to her expression that was not there a moment before. She reached out and took Emma’s hand. “Emma, about what I said earlier, about having a talent for Social Analytics, if you do not wish to work for me, then come with me? I know a lot of people. You can go for interviews and get the job yourself. I will only set it up? Please Emma, will you think about it?”

Emma nodded, somehow she knew that the word please did not often pass Michael’s lips. The woman seemed to relax a bit as she pulled away from Emma. She made herself comfortable, leaning on her elbow. Michael looked up at Emma and then started to draw lazy patterns on the bedspread. *Always busy with her hands,* Emma thought. Michael began with the story…
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

Thank you for all the support.

Fluffy F/F

Chapter 3

“People assume that when you are wealthy, that everything in your life is perfect, it is not. I know that money makes certain things easier, but even the rich abide by the natural laws like every other person. Yes, some parts of my childhood are every child’s dream. I had my own horse, an indoor swimming pool, servants, and luxury, but like any young girl, I fell in love. It was true love. True love is magic. I saw my future reflected in his eyes, all my dreams and hopes with it. He was from the working class, though, my mother is not only an elitist, she likes her standing in life and all of the statuses that go with it. Daniel did not fit in anywhere. She paid him to leave me and break my heart. He refused, he stayed. Daniel chose me. Those were some of the happiest days of my life.”

Michael stopped and took a sip of her scotch.

“Then he died.” There was so much emotion in the small words, and Emma had to keep from reaching out and comfort Michael. Somehow Emma knew that not only was this painful, but something Michael did not often talk about and pity or comfort would not go down well with the dark woman, so Emma kept her hands to herself as the woman, wiped a tear off her cheek.

“Needless to say, my world shattered. My mother was there to comfort me. It was only years later that I learned the hit and ran was really just a hit, planned by my ex.” She inhaled, and Emma realized that the difficult part was only starting. She wanted to hold Michael and keep her safe, or at least try and make her feel that way.

“My ex. Gods, where do I start? He was a very successful lawyer in New York, extremely wealthy. My mother liked everything about his standing in life.” The sarcasm dripped bitter at her words. “It did not matter to her that he was twenty years older than me. By then, I did not care too much about my life. I tried to kill myself twice by then. I felt so lost without Daniel. So right after Graduation, I became Mrs. Leopold Carmichael.” Michael swallowed the rest of her drink as if the mere words spoken left a bad taste in her mouth.

“So began my horrid life. Leopold had a manner, a charm about him that made him very likable, but that first night when we were alone, I met another man. I was still a virgin and to say that his treatment of my body was painful, would be a euphemism. He was brutal, vicious and demanding. In the midst of this, he introduced me to his world.” She smirked at the thought but carried on.
“When the rich get bored Miss Swan, they do whatever they want, drink, drugs, sex, the list is endless. For Leopold, it was sex, more specifically BDMS.” The acronym made Emma catch her breath. Michael only smiled at her.

“It is not what you think Miss Swan. It actually became something I enjoy to a certain extent.” The way Michael said it in a low husky, sensual voice, made Emma throb again. It was not something she contemplated, but the way Michael said it, sent shivers through her body.

Michael watched the reaction to her words with amusement. She decided to push a bit. “In fact, Miss Swan, you would be the perfect little toy to play with.” Emma swallowed, gods that voice... Michael said play, soft, slow, her tongue moving with the word and despite Emma’s mental insistence that it was not something she would try, her nipples went hard, and Michael observed it with delight. She watched as Emma struggled with her breathing. Everything inside of Michael wanted to lean forward and kiss this beautiful woman senseless. She smiled at Emma and continued her story to the relief of the blonde.

“Leopold liked to be submissive. He argued that he had all kinds of stress in his life and that while we played, I was to be in complete command of him, his needs and his discipline. The unfortunate part of this was that we only ever played on weekends. When he was home during the week, his brutality increased. He thought that since he liked it unrestrained and demeaning, I would as well.” Michael shook her head. She did not mean to tell Emma that.

“The good things were there. He insisted that I stayed in shape and learned self-defense. I had a personal trainer, and he was the man that insisted I learn how to use knives. Leopold also allowed me to work at his publishing house, the business I preside over currently. Most importantly, he introduced me to Mary Margaret. She had no idea what Leopold was like, but we became friends, and in times where I felt trapped in a loveless marriage, she was there.”

Michael took a breath and Emma interrupted. “She, she is your toy?” Michael looked at Emma in total shock and horror, before she realized why Emma asked the question, it happened when you purposely left parts out of your story.

Michael began to shake with laughter. “Dear gods, no!” She giggled again and wiped laughing tears from her face. “No.” She said more controlled with a smile. “Mary Margaret is a lot of things, an essential person in my life, but she never was, neither would she ever be, someone that I would have sex with.” The thought made her smile. “When you meet her, perhaps you will understand better?” Michael said it as if Emma had already made up her mind to go to New York with her.

“It was during a mixed play session that I realized. I liked sex with women a lot more than with Leopold. I don’t know if it was just him and his brutality or the softness of women even when the sex was rough, but I liked it. I learned I implemented, and I became a good Dominant over Leo. By then I had resided to the fact that this was going to be my life. Leopold did not want to have
children, and so I knew the empty house, the empty, meaningless sex was all there was. So I excelled at the sex, my training in self-defense and the publishing house kept me intellectually sane.” She sighed. Looking back at it now, she often wondered how she survived that time of her life.

“From the onset of our marriage, I knew there was something, apprehensive. I soon was educated that my role was to look ravishing, give my husband what he wanted when he wanted it. Questions about his business were not tolerated. So I kept to myself, and I kept my mouth shut. But men are so stupid. They think you do not have a brain. At least Leopold did. I met his associate’s wives, and yes, the lights were on, but no one was home. Either because they were uneducated, only there to be pretty or they used too many drugs too often. I was intelligent and beautiful, I listened, and even though I did not put all the pieces together, I knew Leopold made most of his money in an illegitimate manner.”

Emma frowned, Michael, answered her questioning eyes. “He was the cardinal lawyer for the Irish regarding organized crime on the East Coast.” Emma gulped. “He worked for the Irish mob?” She asked softly, too terrified to even think of the implications. Michael inclined her head. “He was astute about it, however. He was the lawyer, not the face and not the firm. He ran everything through an associate company, as one criminal after the other was set free due to technicalities or lack of evidence the police and the FBI got more and more frustrated until they found Leopold.”

He was laundering money for them as well, using the publishing house as a front. It was a clever setup.” She shook her head. She often felt that she should have seen it earlier. Michael’s only feat, in her mind, was keeping Mary Margaret save. “That was how I met David and Rumple, except I knew them as James and Acer. Acer was a hitman for the mob, and he made sure people disappeared and stayed that way. James became my driver. Acer was a nasty piece of work. He made my skin crawl. He was shady as shit and the manner in which he spoke, gods, he used to send shivers down my spine.”

One particular day James picked me up, but we were ambushed, and I was abducted.” She heard Emma inhale and smiled at her softly. “It was not as dramatic as it sounds dear.” She patted Emma on her hand to reassure her. “A bag was placed over my head, and my hands were tied. When the bag was ripped off I found myself with a blinding light in my eyes, and I could feel people around me, but I could not make out anything. Then the interrogation started. Hours and hours of questions. I thought it was Leopold’s people that he was trying to find out how much I knew. I was hooked up to a lie detector machine, even though I only found that out much later. I passed with flying colors apparently. They drugged me, and when I woke up, I was in my car, hearing a banging noise. It came from the boot, and when I opened it, I found James inside. He took me home, I ran into Leopold’s arms, the distressed crying delicate flower and told him what occurred. He was furious. That was when I learned that it was not his men. James was rewarded for trying to protect me. He took quite the beating. So Acer became my bodyguard. That was the status quo for a few months.”

“Acer is a brilliant man, though. It did not take him too long to figure out I knew a lot more than what I lead on. The next time they were a bit more direct but, subtle. I was having lunch when a
beautiful Asian woman made herself at home opposite me. I did not know what to make of the situation. She started talking. She filled in all the missing pieces. She showed me surveillance, she told me what my husband was like and then she asked me if I would be willing to help them make a case against him and the organized crime bosses he worked for. I laughed and got up. She followed me, I told her that she was insane. I might not have liked or agreed with anything she told me, but I was not naïve about what she asked me to do. She left her card with me. I hid it and asked James to stop at a pay phone, I called my father and set up a meeting with him.” She stopped all of a sudden, Emma was enthralled with the tale. Michael frowned at her.

“I must either be more tired or more intoxicated than what I thought. I never speak of these things, least of all to a stranger.” It started to intrigue her. Yes, Emma could read every single thing she was just told on the internet. The gods know the media covered the case long enough. But Michael did not trust, and yet here she was, revealing small details that were not in the paper. She let out a big sigh as if voicing her past aloud to Emma so freely did lift an enormous weight. “Anyway, to answer your question. My married family was part of the family. After I divorced Leopold, I had to deal with a lot of shady characters to get the publishing house’s name and reputation clean. I paid off a lot of people. Presently the business is mine, the name and reputation that goes with it is mine. I found that the name Carmichael instill fear and respect, so despite the fact that I hated the name, I kept it, it served me well.”

She ended the tale. Emma was very disappointed. She just left out a whole portion. She opened her mouth to protest when one of Michael's perfectly manicured fingers landed on her lips. “Not tonight, dear. Now I want to know about you?” Her voice was more husky from all the talking, and it took on a voracious tone. Emma could not believe that this woman’s voice could cause so much havoc with her emotions.

“So Mr. Martin?” Emma swallowed hard. “Is that your question Miss Michael?” Michael rolled her eyes. “Tell me some juice Emma, what is the sex like? Why him? What the hell are you doing in this shit hole? You can be so much more with those looks alone.” Emma indicated, yes she could, she tried it more than once as well. She sighed.

“My looks is something that has landed me up in shit more than once. In the foster system I was moved around a lot and the older I got, the harder it became. Some homes,” She said the word with venom. “Daddy wanted me to sit on his lap, or he would watch me while I showered. So I was rehoused because of that, or some of the boys would take too much interest in me, and it was always my fault. I was the slut or the whore that encouraged them. Other times the men were harmless, but the woman felt threatened by me, so I was wrapped up and returned.” Emma’s voice grew soft, and Michael was not blind to the woman’s pain. “My last home was the best. Single mother. She only fostered me for four months, it was not enough time to bond with her, but I remembered the way she looked at me when I graduated high school. I had four schools that year, and my GED was above average. She looked at me the way you looked at me earlier….”

Emma trailed off, and Michael thought back as to what look she referred to, she has been giving Emma several and not all of them with good intentions. Then she remembered. “When you got the
mob connection when I looked at you with pride?” Emma did not look up. She did not want Michael to see her eyes, the woman, however, had a mind of her own and tilted Emma’s head up, with two fingers softly by her chin. Michael had to use all of her will not to react to what she saw in Emma’s eyes. She took the easy route for both of their sakes. She turned to get her drink and swallowed a few sips, by the time she looked back to Emma, the confused, pained emotion was gone.

Michael tested the waters. She talked nonchalantly. “I know I am a little tipsy, but as I recall, I told you that you would make an excellent toy?” Emma nodded, and Michael explained. “You have this quiet submission to you and yet there is this fire burning. I would guess that if you are pushed too hard, too far, whoever is doing the pushing will live to regret it. When I play, I like to push limits. I like a submissive woman, I appreciate a woman’s beauty and softness, in fact, there is very little about women that I do not like.” Her eyes were burning into Emma’s, and she could feel the sensuality and conviction of Michael’s words wash over her. It left Emma breathless.

“When I play, it's about wants and needs. Limits, rewards, ecstasy, and pain. Playing is more about the needs of the submissive than it is about the need of the dominant. I learned that the hard way and I apply some of those rules to my employees.”

Emma’s eyes went wide, and Michael chuckled. “They can only wish.” She said with a smirk and Emma relaxed, waiting for an explanation. “You learned to keep quiet and observe people. You became what is referred to as the invisible child in dysfunctional homes. The child that reads and does everything not to be noticed. You do not crave negative attention or positive confirmation. You have your own little things that only you know about that makes you happy and validate actions for you. Am I correct?”

Emma nodded. “If I told you that I was proud of you solving the puzzle of my life, the conundrum you picked up. It would mean little to you, words mean little to you. You would be absolutely sure that what you are told is not a lie, and yet, a compliment or praise would have little effect on you. Body language, however, is something you can read, and it does not lie. The look I gave you, you did not expect it, you do not know why I gave it to you, but you knew the look, and you knew it was not a lie.” Emma understood, she still did not get why Michael was proud, but she followed.

“When I play, I expect certain things. If you do what I command, you will get rewarded, if not, you will be punished, and with every individual, it would be different. For you praise would have little value, as will reprimand, it is one of the reasons why you tolerate working at Bob’s. You do not hear the comments, but when the men touch you, that becomes a different scenario. You did not admire the fact that I got the dickhead to apologize to you, you felt vindicated when you saw that he pissed himself.” Emma thought about the words. Michael was correct with everything.

“How does this all fit into your work?” Emma was curious from the moment Michael mentioned it. The dark eyes held some mystery to them when Michael answered. “With you, it will be of no use to entice you with a bonus. The promise of money will not motivate you. Neither will yelling at you help, showing you that you did something wrong would have far more effective than telling you, it is
incorrect?” Emma followed.

“And with playing?” Michael smiled a very seductive smile. “Oh, with that, showing is always better than telling dear.” Emma blushed to the roots, and Michael found it very endearing. “Care to try?” Michael asked softly. There it was, Emma indicates her consent because she wanted to feel, feel entirely, to see what more Michael’s eyes would give her.

With the little nod from Emma, Michael felt the wetness that has not been far away all night, pool between her legs. She knew what she wanted from this woman, and gods did she ever wanted it. She had an urgent need to fuck this beautiful creature not only into submission but until she could not walk for a week and Emma would beg her for even more. The thought sent a shiver down her spine, and she felt her nipples harden. She was confident that Emma only had the faintest of an idea about what she was doing to Michael physically. Yes, she could read people very well, but there were too many masks and too many walls around Michael, for Emma to learn everything about her in less than twenty-four hours.

Michael moved closer to Emma, but she did not touch the blonde. She wanted to achieve something with the blonde that Emma did not even contemplate possible. Michael would push, and she would drive hard. “Remember, this is a game. You are supposed to enjoy games. As soon as you do not, tell me to stop and I will.” She could see Emma’s discomfort. “Look at me?” The tone of Michael’s voice was soft, but there was an edge to it that demanded Emma look at the woman. “Do you understand Miss Swan? I will stop as soon as you ask me to?” Emma nodded. Michael tried to convey to her to relax and enjoy, all with a smile and a look. Emma swallowed, she leaned over to drink the whiskey next to her that has been untouched so far.

When she turned to Michael, her body language was different. “What do you need me to do Michael?” Michael touched her cheek very softly. “This is a game, Emma. Nothing more. What happens during play, stays play. Do you understand?” Emma nodded, and Michael had to run through her words of endearment, to find something that would not upset Emma. She was sure good girl or baby girl and slut was mostly out.

“Good my dear. I will not touch you with my hands. I will not have sex with you, we will not get naked. Are those things acceptable to you?” Emma looked confused, and Michael smiled. “I do promise new sensations.” Emma smiled back. “Alright.”

“Part of playing is accepting new things. So I am going to take away, one of your senses. Is that alright?” Emma answered without thinking. “Yes.” Michael smiled. “Good.” She stretched to the end of the bed, her shirt falling open at the bottom, giving Emma a clear view of the toned abdomen and her pierced belly button. Emma swallowed as she viewed deeper, she could see the sexy white lace bra Michael had on, and oh gods her ass…

The way she bent, Emma had a good view of the woman’s tight ass. Her mind started to go in all sorts of directions. “Like what you see Miss Swan?” Michael asked in that sexy low voice. Emma blushed at being caught. However, Michael’s back was still turned to her. She found the items she was looking for, and when Emma saw what it was, she became slightly nervous. Michael smiled, “It is either this…” She dangled the red silk scarf in front of Emma “or these?” She held a pair of
police issued handcuffs up to Emma. “The scarf,” Emma said uncertainly. Michael smiled mischievously. She was sure, Emma still did not understand what she chose. Most women went for the scarf, it was by far less intimidating, but with Emma, it would mean taking away the sense she depended on most, her sight.

Michael crawled over Emma’s body, making sure she did not touch her. With every move the brunette made, Emma’s heart rate increased. “Remember, it is a game, beautiful one,” Michael whispered softly against Emma’s earlobe, sending another wave of want through her body. Something that Emma did not understand.

“I am going to take away your sight Emma. I will be talking to you the entire time. When I ask a question, I want you to answer it. Do you understand?” Emma swallowed as Michael closed her eyes with the soft cloth.

“Yes, I understand Michael.”

“Good Beautiful, then we can start.” Emma inhaled sharply. All of a sudden realizing what the loss of her sight meant. It was something she depended on greatly, and if she could not see, she had to trust that Michael would keep to the terms set. It made her breathe harder. Michael understood.

“Just give it a moment beautiful, you will get used to the loss of your sight. I need you to listen to my voice. I know you would most likely not believe me, but I am going to tell you what I see, and I want you to tell me what you feel. Is that alright?” Emma’s breathing was calming, so far Michael has not laid a finger on her, Michael received a nod.

“I think you are beautiful Emma.” Michael’s voice was soft and sensual and close to Emma, she could feel her near, but she did not reach for Emma, anywhere. “This morning, when I looked up and saw you, your green eyes and that smile, you made me so wet. That was why I had to go to the ladies. I had to take care of the need you created.” Emma’s breathing was becoming rapid, and she tried with all her might to keep her hips still. The image of Michael touching herself made Emma wetter. Michael leaned in, and her lips were grazing the hair on Emma’s throat, it left a trail of goosebumps on the slender neck. “Tell me, Emma, are you wet for me?” The question sent a shock wave through Emma’s body, and she grabbed hands full of the linen, and her one leg pulled up. Michael smiled. Gods, she was so responsive. “Are you Emma?” The voice was back in her ear, and Emma learned that was one of the new sensations Michael was talking about. Her body responded in different ways to where Michael’s lips were. She reacted to the change of her tone as much as she responded to the words that were whispered to her. Her breathing was labored.

“Jesus!” Emma yelp all of a sudden when Michael nipped her hard on her neck, she was certain it would leave a mark. “You said no touching!” Michael gave a deep chuckle. “I said no touching with my hands.” She reminded Emma in a very silky voice. “I also told you that I punish if not obeyed, I asked a question. You did not answer me, Miss Swan.”

Emma calmed down a bit. The nip in her neck did not feel so ruthless now, and she understood the
game a bit better. “Yes, Michael, I am wet.” She answered with reluctance. She received another nip in the same place. “Michael?” Her voice had an angry edge to it. “What the hell?” Michael moved again, when she spoke Emma could feel her breath on her lips, all Emma had to do was push up a bit and she would be able to claim that sensual mouth.

“You did not answer my question. I asked if you are wet for me?” Oh, gods! With the repeated question asked slow and softly so close to her lips, Emma’s libido tripled. Alright, so this was the pleasure, pleasure that was turning into an ache.

“Yes, Michael,” she said nearly breathless. “I am wet for you.” Michael closed her eyes. Emma’s admission leaving her with hardened nipples and a need that was burning now.

“Good Miss Swan, you are learning. What do you feel?” Emma swallowed, her pulse point indicating her heart rate. Michael licked the hollow slowly.

“Oh, gods! That felt good!” Michael grinned.

“Good Miss Swan, that was a reward for being honest, do you understand the rules of the game better now?” Emma was trying to calm herself. “Yes, Michael, I think I do.” She was rewarded with an innocent kiss on the lips. This time she could not stop her hips from jerking up.

With the move, Michael nearly came undone herself. Gods, it has been ages! Not the playing, but having someone like Emma. Someone that was soft and so fucking responsive, someone that had a hard life and yet under Michael’s guidance and control became so vulnerable and innocent. She usually hated playing with people that did not know their limits, but somehow, with Emma, she knew what the limit was, and she knew exactly how to get this woman to the point where she wanted her.

“Does Billy make you this wet Emma?” The reply was instant. A low moan of no as Michael questioned next to her ear again. The brunette kiss-bite Emma’s jaw and she clung to the linen again. “Do you look at other women Emma?” The ragged answer came as Emma felt Michael undo her top button with her mouth. “Yes,” She gasped. Another button went. “I am going to sit back Emma. My weight will be on your thighs, is that alright?” Emma swallowed hard. “Yes, that is fine.”

“Good my dear,” Michael said and sat back. The feel of Emma beneath her was terrific. She could feel her muscles go tight as the added weight came down. Michael knew Emma needed a release. All the signs were there, and she was planning to give Emma just that, but not in any way the blonde expected.

Emma felt slight comfort in the weight on her. Billy was not a huge man, but Michael’s pressure was light and comfortable and not the least bit intrusive. She liked the way this woman talked to her, asking her permission. In the few experiences she had, no one ever asked if she was alright. Not even Billy. She felt respected, Michael respected her body and her limits. It caused a slight frown. This woman was so in tune with her body that she picked it up immediately. “What is wrong Emma?” The silky voice was gone. Michael asked in her normal voice.
“Nothing, I, I’m a little confused. You are respecting me, my body and my limits, I thought you said you like to push it?” The woman on top of her inhaled, she was asking questions, good.

“Naturally, I respect your body. I respect you. Playing does not indicate taking advantage of someone or hurting them. It is about giving them a sensual, good or new experience. It has to be something that both enjoy. Tell me, Emma, have you been enjoying the game so far?”

“Yes, but…” She trailed off. She did not know how to articulate herself. She felt Michael move her body forward. Their mouths were so close again when the brunette spoke. “Miss Swan.” Emma shivered, she was starting to like the way Michael said it. “I am going to make you more wet. I am going to push you further than any person has done before. I am going to make your body sing, and you will beg me to fuck you, and I will not because I promised you that I would not touch you. Your limit will be pushed, Miss Swan. Am I telling you the truth?”

Emma’s body was shaking lightly. There was no doubt in her mind that Michael was telling the truth. Her voice was not only seductive, but it was also open and honest. Emma never knew that she could differentiate whether or not a person was telling her the truth by listening to the change in their tone. She never realized that one could learn so much from sex. Sex? Michael made it clear that she was not planning to touch her. She felt her body go tight at the thought of not being affected. Yes, Michael was telling the truth, and she could see herself landing up begging this woman. Her voice was raspy when she answered Michael. “Yes, you are telling the truth.” Michael smiled.

“Good, so now I am going to push your limit a bit.” Emma just gasped, and the dark eyes sparkled with pleasure. Michael leaned forward, looking at where she undid the two buttons of Emma’s shirt. She could make out a smooth curve of Emma’s right breast and magnificent cleavage. She slowly and softly ran her tongue up the inviting cleavage. Emma’s response was instant. The goosebumps and an ugh, that came deep from within her throat. Michael blew lightly over the wet flesh, and Emma’s hips bucked up. With Michael’s weight on her and the little friction she felt, she wanted more. She pushed in again, but she just could not hit the spot where she needed to be stimulated. It left her frustrated and Michael very amused. You are the perfect woman, the perfect submissive.

Michael stared at her in open wonder. She wanted to touch the angel face, run her fingers softly over Emma’s jaw. Touch her lips… Michael calmed her breathing. She promised not to lay a hand on Emma, at no point did she restrict Emma in any way, no restraints, no commands. Her need was increasing; she could at any point just turn them around and take control, take what she needed. It told Michael so much about the woman. She was pleased. As fun, as it was during the play, it made her sad that Emma’s spirit got bruised enough for her to not take command of her own need. Michael was also surprised that Emma had trusted her so blindly up to this point. She moved again over the soft breast, her tongue tracing the curved line where Emma’s bra covered her nipple.

Emma dug deeper into the bed. She had no idea that such a simple move could be so sensual. Her need was aching now. She pressed her legs together to ease it a bit, Michael reacted to it
She sucked a bit of Emma’s exposed breast hard enough for Emma to part her legs again.

“Good, beautiful one. Remember, I am in control of your pleasure. I decide if and when you can cum. I decide how you will reach your climax.” The words made Emma breathe harder, she was close to begging now, but she displayed some of her fire at just that point, and Michael loved every bit of it.

“How will you accomplish this Miss Michael, if you cannot touch me?” Michael chuckled deeply. The clear sound made Emma shiver in a good way. “Cheeky, I love challenges. Just for that Miss Swan, you are going to have to beg for release before I will give it to you.” With those words, Michael moved her weight off Emma. Emma could feel that the dark woman’s legs were still on the bed, but she moved, and when Michael moved again, she had all her weight on her shoulders, her hands placed flat next to Emma’s head.

She came down on Emma with meaning and force. She pressed her thigh hard, exactly where Emma needed it most. The blonde nearly cried with relief as she felt Michael grind into her again, moving her hips in a slow circle, Emma pushed back in, setting a pace, gods she was so close and then she felt Michael move away. “Jesus fuck Michael!” Emma was pushing her need into thin air, the connection she craved was gone. She wanted to cry in frustration, yet she still did not grab Michael’s hips and guided them where she wanted them. She was panting hard. Michael watching every emotion, every movement. Gods, you are a fantastic woman. So amazing Emma. She fought hard to control her breath. Emma had created a great need for Michael’s release as well.

“Well! Fuck Michael!” She was turning her head from side to side, trying to push her legs together again, but she was certain that Michael was kneeling between her legs, Michael’s hands on the side of her head. “Yes, Miss Swan?” Michael asked as her tongue sucked one of Emma’s nipples into her mouth through the material that held it hidden.

For Emma, it felt like everything happened at the same time. Michael sucked hard on a taut nipple, the moment she felt that perfect mouth, leaving her, she grabbed onto Michael’s head to keep her mouth in place. Her hips were still looking for contact, as Michael bit the bra back and sucked the hard nipple into her mouth, playing with her tongue over it, she started begging. “Fuck, please Michael, please fuck me! Please!” Michael felt a shudder go through her. She never tired of hearing a woman beg her.

However, she was not done. She moved, Emma’s hands came down hugging Michael’s ass. Michael leaned in and when her lips touched Emma’s she could not hold her moan back. The kiss was not what Emma expected. It was soft. There was no demand, no passion, only a sweet kiss where Michael sucked Emma’s lower lip into her mouth. When Emma opened her mouth, her hand went from Michael’s ass to rake her hands into the perfect shoulder length hair. Emma felt as if she had never been kissed in her life when Michael’s soft tongue entered her mouth, it happened. The slow-burning desire of the play raged through her body and exploded with that kiss.
She pulled away from Michael, her head thrown back. Her muscles taut, her back arched. “Fuck Michael!” Her scream stretched out with the enormous wave of pleasure that rocked her body hard. When she felt all of the brunette’s weight on her, the slow movement of her pelvis, another, much-unexpected orgasm hit her. She clung to Michael. She felt the woman shake in her arms as she quietly had her release and when Michael pulled slightly up to place a kiss in her neck with a whisper of that was beautiful Miss Swan, I am so proud of you, trusting me. Emma released an aftershock that made her literary see stars.
Chapter 4

Chapter Summary

Michael is forced to stay one more day in the little town with Emma...

Chapter 4

When Emma opened her eyes, she was looking up into Michael’s beautiful smiling face. “Hey?” Michael said softly and leaned in for a kiss. A soft kiss and when Emma heard the dark woman moan into her mouth, they both became instantly aroused. Michael came up for air.

“Hmm, those lips of yours should definitely be banned. They are far too dangerous.” Emma gave her a shy smile at the comment. Michael moved up to make space for her, and she sat up. “Here.” She took the bottle of water from Michael gratefully. Her throat was dry. “You are going to be stiff tomorrow, and you need to hydrate. The water will help.” Emma gave her a luxurious blush and Michael could not help herself. She leaned in, cupped Emma’s face lightly with her hand and kissed her again. Their eyes closed at the same time, and Emma’s hand went back into Michael’s hair. The sensation was earth-shattering for both women. Emma pulled away first.

“Dear gods woman, what have you done to me?” Michael smiled. “Sorry, I could not resist you.” Emma looked at her.

“With that smirk on your face, I doubt very much that you are sorry, Miss Michael.” The dark eyes sparkled, and to Emma, Michael looked relaxed and younger. She, herself felt… What did she feel? Free, complete, liberated? It scared her more than a little, but her body was humming in a way it had never before. She tried to enjoy the moment.

“Was that alright?” Michael asked carefully, and Emma nearly choked on the water she was sipping. “Did you not hear me scream your name?” Michael got a flush that Emma concluded can pass for a slight blush. She bumped Emma playfully with her shoulder. “Not that, the entire experience?” Emma looked into the dark eyes for a moment before she made up her mind as to how to answer the question. “Yes Michael, it was good, new, scary, exciting, it was everything you promised and more. Thank you.” Michael traced her eyes all over Emma. “No need to thank me, dear, I most likely enjoyed it far more than what you did.”

Emma wanted to ask questions, but she wanted to come to terms with a few things for herself first. She knew she had been attracted to women before. She knew she did not enjoy the rough handling of men. It was one of the reasons why she was with Billy. He was gentle. However, Billy has never come close to what Michael did to her tonight. There was something more to this experience that she could not put her finger on. Something that she and Billy did not have, but she felt it with Michael.
“Do not over think this, Emma.” The green eyes looked up. She knew it was sound advice, but Michael opened up a few new things to her, and she liked all of it. It left her with some confusion. “I should go.” Emma got up. She did not want to go, she could see that Michael’s eyes were disappointed, but this was a small town, and she sincerely hoped no one heard her screams as it is. She took a moment to look at Michael, really look at her, before she opened the door and said her goodnight from the door.

“Fuck!” Unbeknown, both women, said the same curse on either side of the door as it closed. Michael leaned against the door, looking up at the ceiling. She was in so much trouble. She shook the feeling of dread from herself, poured a stiff drink and went to the bathroom for a shower.

Emma was lying in her bed, thinking of the night. That was when she realized the truth that made her shudder with something close to fear. Michael broke through all her defenses. No, not break, she did not break down, she just… She entered Emma’s life as if there were no walls, no hurt, no defense mechanisms. Emma gave her trust to a complete stranger and as to yet have not betrayed that trust. What the fuck Swan? She fell asleep with a worried frown but a completely relaxed body.

Michael was sitting upright on the bed that still smelled deliciously of sex in a favorite teal silk nightie. She was halfway through her stiff scotch, trying hard to work and not imagining the blonde in her bed across town. She bundled her hair on top of her head with a clip; she had dark framed glasses on for reading. She worked systematically through her emails and then read two books of new authors she considered publishing. She got a lot done, but her mind was never far from the green-eyed blonde that had rocked her world in a single day.

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Michael woke up with an awful unfamiliar sound around her. She opened her eyes to make out where the sound was coming from. She immediately sat up. Through the haze and sleepiness, she had no idea where she was, and for a moment she panicked. Then the memories of the previous day came flooding back, together with a throbbing headache. She eventually found the cause of the noise she just wanted to stop and thankfully it did. She looked around the room and realized that she fell asleep while working. The sound perked up again. “Oh for god’s sakes! She looked for her glasses and doubled tapped on the mouse pad of her laptop. It had shut down after fifteen minutes of no use, but it powered up promptly at six o’clock every morning. Usually, she was up by then.

She leaned her head back, not bothering to pull the laptop closer. She merely answered the Skype call. “Regina!” She heard the panicked voice of Mary Margaret. “What?” Michael answered back, and her voice sounded strange, even to her ears. “Regina, are you alright, why can’t I see you and what the hell is it I’m seeing?”

“Gods, Mary Margaret don’t you ever sleep?” The anxiety rose in her heart. “Regina, please look at me?” Regina knew that tone, and she also knew that if Mary Margaret was calling her by her given
name that she has been trying to get hold of her for some time. “Just give me five minutes, please
Mary Margaret, I will call you back?” She did not wait for the response. She made her way to the
bathroom and was instantly glad Mary Margaret did not see the state she was in.

She washed her face, combed her hair, the hair clip was still in it. She tried to make herself a bit more
presentable. She added very light eyeliner and a soft lipstick before she made her way to the kitchen
and drank nearly a liter of juice out of the box, something that she would typically frown upon as
atrocious manners in her home. She had, after thirst and a hangover, something that very rarely
happened to her. She drank too much beer, the scotch she eventually did have was not even close to
the quality she was accustom to. Regina looked at the time and realized why Mary Margaret was
upset. It was a quarter to seven. She never slept that late. She gave herself a once over, ensuring that
she was half presentable before she Skyped back. She placed her cell on charge, realizing the reason
why Mary Margaret Skyped her so early.

Mary Margaret had a worried frown as she looked at Regina over the link. “Are you alright?” She
received a smile. “Yes, dear.” She leaned back. Mary Margaret knew her far too well to believe it.
“Did you sleep alright?” Regina giggled a bit which shocked Mary Margaret to the core. At the
sound, she started tapping away on her cell phone. SOS! “Alright.” Mary Margaret let out slowly.
“I am coming to pick you up.” She demanded.

Regina laughed this time. As she did, Red walked into the office and to Mary Margaret’s desk.
Hearing their boss laughing, shocked her into a state. Her big blue eyes met with the soft green once
of Mary Margaret’s, and she mouthed, WTF? She rushed into the office as soon as she received the
SOS! message. Now she understood why. Regina Carmichael was the most high strung, uptight,
big bad boss in New York. She never smiled, never mind laugh. “Regina, Red is here, she can
handle everything, I am coming to get you!”

Regina made herself comfortable in the pink bed. “Snow honey, it is not necessary. I am sure Mark
has sent someone by now to have a look at the car.” Mary Margaret sighed. Not even the nickname
and term of endearment could calm her at this point. “That is the reason why I called in the first
place Regina.” Mary Margaret started to ramble, and Regina knew it meant she was extremely
nervous about the news she was going to give her boss. “Do you really not know what a Flux
Capacitor is?” Regina rolled her eyes, and it made the much younger brunette feel a bit better. “I
called because Mark has been phoning you and you did not answer.”

“That is because my cell is flat and I have been sleeping,” Regina answered annoyed.

Red nearly had a heart attack when she heard the comment. Regina never slept in or overslept.
When their boss acted out of the norm, they all got nervous. There were always repercussions
afterwards. Red moved in behind Mary Margaret. “Morning Michael.”

“Good morning, Miss Lucas. Why are you in so early?” Red gave her a brilliant big smile.
“Helping out Mary Margaret while you are gone.”
Regina did not believe a word. She only looked at the two worried faces. “So what is the bad news?” She asked, steering Mary Margaret back to the reason for the call.

“There is an electrical problem with your car’s onboard computer. Mark has found a part, but it is in Montana, it will take another day before they can fix your car. The Engineer will give you a ride back.” Regina thought about the information. Instead of her normal reaction, act irrationally, all she could think of was that she would have another day with Emma. She smiled. Her two employees sat stiffly in the office in New York. “Alright, I will be sending you a few emails, I read the manuscripts you sent Mary Margaret. I was impressed. You can set up a meeting with the authors for next week sometime. Miss Lucas, I approve of the covers you drafted, you can go ahead with that and please ask Miss Jones to reschedule all the meetings that I have missed?”

Mary Margaret Blanchard sat with a little frown between her eyes, her mouth half open. She rubbed her hand through the short pixy styled black hair. “Michael are you sure everything is alright?” Regina thought about the question. Under normal circumstances, she would already be in the car with the engineer, taking her back to New York while she was on the phone, calling everyone, barking instructions. What was different? She knew the answer. She just did not know why. Yes, she and Emma had a good time, but that was all it was, a good time. There was nothing life altering about the night before. However, she knew the reason why she did not mind staying one more day. It was Emma herself.

“Regina?” Mary Margaret’s voice had an urgency to it again. “I am well Miss Blanchard. One more night here will not be the end of the world.” Red and Mary Margaret looked at each other; something was very wrong with their boss. “Michael, what is it you are sitting on?” Red asked.

“Oh, you should see this, it is hideous!” She picked up her laptop and turned it around, giving the two women a tour of the room. She ended by moving the laptop camera to the bed. “Dear gods! You slept in that!” Regina heard Mary Margaret remark. “Yes, dear.” There was no trace of another woman anywhere in the room. The two employees’ concern grew. Both would have understood if it was a female distraction that kept Regina there for one night, even two, but she was alone.

“Is this room pink or what?” Regina turned the laptop around again, asking the question to the startled duo. “Anyway, I will have my phone with me, call if you need me. I will see both of you sometime tomorrow?” She ended the link without waiting for a response. She touched her lips with her slender fingertips. She had a smile on her face. She felt a sad pang in her heart for a moment but pushed it aside. Regina Carmichael could not remember the last time she felt so light. She had no idea what it was, what the blonde beauty with the sharp green eyes did to her, but for one more day, she will enjoy the feeling.

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Emma was not at all surprised to see Michael up and dressed and enter the diner as their first customer. She had the same white shirt on as the night before, with her jeans and the red silk scarf
they played with, loosely around her neck. When Emma saw the red material, she instantly felt her need and desire rise and assumed it to be the exact reason why Michael was wearing it this morning.

“Good morning, Miss Michael, what can I get for you?” Emma greeted her like she would any other customer. Michael smiled at her sweetly. Fabulous, we are already playing! “Morning, Miss Swan. Coffee, strong, black, bitter.”

Emma watched her with interest as she poured a fresh pot of filter coffee into a large cup. “Is that an indication of your mood or just the way you drink your coffee?” Michael felt a shiver run through her body at the soft question. Gods, she loved playing games. It more than impressed her that Emma chose to continue with the subtle flirting and innuendos this morning.

“Oh, my mood is quite the opposite of the way I like my coffee, and my women Miss Swan.” Emma felt the words rush over her. Dear gods! What is wrong with you Swan? She should have known better than to start playing a game with Michael, she was apparently out of her depth, but she could not help it. Emma refilled the cup before she asked if Michael would like to eat something. “Toast please, on brown bread, no butter.” Emma took the order and left Michael to herself for a while.

The woman placed her reading glasses back on, opened her laptop. In the few hours since she spoke to her office and now, the emails have flooded in. She linked up with Mary Margaret. Emma listened amused to the change in the tone of Michael’s voice depending on whom she was talking to. There was an authority in her business voice, but with Mary Margaret, there was also softness and respect. With other people, she spoke to as if she had no time for them or their requests. It fascinated Emma. The woman she met was kind and generous. Yet, here she was, inflicting a lot of crude short instructions to some staff and encouragement to others, all in a business fashion. Emma’s tummy made a turn again when she thought of the explanation Michael provided her with the night before of reward and punishment. What confused Emma, was the fact that thinking about those painful nips in her neck, turned her on as much as Michael dipping her tongue into the hollow of her pulse point. She shivered.

She literary shook the thought from her mind. She heard a slight rise in Michael’s tone as she was speaking to Mary Margaret. “What? Are you fucking kidding me, Miss Blanchard? Does that imbecile realize how much work has gone into it? If he wants it out on the due date, then he cannot change his mind on number 99!” Emma watched as the businesswoman started pacing, her laptop in her left hand, the ear and mouthpiece making her look all the more businesslike. “Fine, fine. I will see what I can do, but so help me, Miss Blanchard, if neither you nor Miss Lucas can pull this off, there will be consequences.”

She ended the call and came to sit in front of Emma again. Emma could see the brunette’s mind was racing with thought. Michael looked up all of a sudden. Her head turned slightly as she looked at Emma. “Oh no!” Emma was shaking her head with meaning.

“I have not even said anything!” Michael objected.

“You did not have to Miss Michael. I know that look, and whatever it is, the answer is no!”
Michael smiled and tapped her perfectly manicured nails in sequence on the countertop. “Do you have someone to stand in for you Miss Swan?” Emma raised an eyebrow. “Michael…” Her voice had a warning tone to it. It amused Michael endlessly. No one ever dared to say no to her. It was refreshing. “Just hear me out please Miss Swan?”

Emma waited. “I will sign a casual day contract with you. I will pay you per hour of employment for one day? I know it is double shift Friday, I assure you that my standard day contract will pay better than that. Miss Blanchard will set it up, so I will not even offer you the money.”

Emma looked at the woman. She was sure not many people ever turned Michael down, but the woman needed to realize that not everyone or everything could be bought. “Michael, this might not be glamorous, but it is a steady job. It pays my rent. Tomorrow you will be gone. I will still be here. I need this.”

Michael nodded. She understood. “I know Miss Swan, but I need your help? I will take an hour or two of your time. You can come straight back here and work if you choose to.” Emma shook her head. “What do you need me to do?” Michael was too smart to hope too soon.

“I need a cover for a book, so I need a location and a model. I will need you to take me to a place that is in surrounding nature, preferably with a dilapidated house or barn in the background, and for you to pose for the photo.” Emma stood with her arms folded in front of her while she thought about the request. She was both excited and uncertain. “Alright.”

“Yes!” Michael said with an air punch. Very uncharacteristic.

“But…” Emma interrupted her relieved moment. “I need to find a replacement before I can go.” Michael indicated her understanding. “Of course, and I will arrange with Miss Blanchard to pull up a contract?” Emma shook her head.

“No, the replacement first.” Michael conceded. She left Emma to make a few calls and then she told Bob that she would be out and Emily will be taking over her shift. He seemed non-concerned. Which irritated Michael a little more.

Emma got her bag out of her locker and folded her apron up before she joined Michael on the other side of the bar. “You do not need to draw up a contract with me. You can just pay me what I normally get for a Friday?” Michael looked at the beautiful woman in shock. She shook her head. “No Miss Swan, we will do this the correct way.” She called Mary Margaret again, this time she let the Skype call run through the laptop speakers.

Mary Margaret came into view, Emma watched her with curiosity. Her head bent over where she was working while speaking to Michael. “Miss Blanchard, I have come up with a solution, but since it is Friday, you and Miss Lucas will be working overtime. Make sure you log your hours.” Mary Margaret continued to work not looking up.

“I know how things work Michael.” She answered annoyed.

“How are you going to do this and what do you need?” Michael smiled, she waited, she wanted to
see both women’s reactions when they would meet.

“I need a standard day labor contract for a model.”

The black head, still bent over her work. She asked casually before looking up, “And where will you get a stunning blonde, this time of day….” The question remained on the lips as she eventually looked into the beautiful eyes of Emma Swan. She could not tear her eyes away from the much darker, bright green eyes. “Red?” She yelled as she looked at Emma. Michael watched in amusement as Emma tried hard to keep her smile from showing. Mary Margaret was wearing one of her top button dresses. She looked even more like a prude than usual. Michael watched amused as Red appeared behind Mary Margaret on the screen. Her mouth comically fell open. She stood back. Michael could see the usually composed woman had no idea what to do with her hands.

Emma watched the two much-contrasted woman. Mary Margaret looked sweet and innocent. The mere thought that she would be one of Michael’s toys made Emma’s eyes water. She now understood why Michael was so shocked at the question the night before. Red, on the other hand, had tattoos on every part of her body that was exposed. She had quite a look. She had a red and black outfit on with too much makeup and a red streak in the long brown wavy hair. But everything about her seemed to complement all the other parts. The tattoos were tasteful designs like Red allowed someone to use her body as a canvas, to express the intimate thoughts of the artist.

Michael watched as the three women were trying to decipher each other. No one spoke. Red closed her mouth with one hand and motioned something with the other, without trying to express anything. At least she openly understood her boss’s good mood this morning, even if the woman did not sleep over. “Snow?” Michael asked next. She took the non-verbal confirmation she received from the top designer as approval. “Hmm!” Mary Margaret got out also making a wave with her hand and nod with her head.

Michael gave them both a small smile. “Great, Miss Blanchard, can you fax the contract to this number, it is for Miss Emma Swan.” She watched with further amusement at the announcement. It clearly confused both her employees that she was not still in bed with the blonde. If it was any other woman that would be exactly where she would have been. What made Emma differently? She knew Red and Snow were asking the exact same question.

“Miss Swan, can you please give your information to Miss Blanchard, while I go and get some of my equipment. I will meet you at the store again?”

“Michael?” She turned to call the woman back, but Michael only waved and walked off into the direction of the motel.

“Gods! How do you stand that woman?” Emma asked the still very amused and confused employees. “She grows on you, over time, a very long time,” Red said without emotion in her low voice. The two women in the New York office studied the blonde again.

“Well, Miss Swan, Michael will most likely be working with you for the rest of the afternoon. That
will make it five hours of work time. Our standard rate is two hundred and eight dollars an hour, overtime is two fifty, but if you work after five that would be double overtime, so I need you to keep track of your hours please?"

Emma looked at her with an open mouth. “Two hundred and eight dollars an hour?” Red and Mary Margaret looked at each other. This time it was Red that spoke up. “Miss Swan, we realize that Michael placed you in a predicament and that you most likely had to take a vacation day to help her out, we are more than willing to pay you the two-fifty an hour and overtime.”

“Whoa.” Emma placed her hands up. “I meant that it was too much, not too little.” Mary Margaret had the little frown back on her face. It made her look adorable. “Oh.” She said without understanding. Red shook her head.

“Miss Swan, Michael asked for a standard contract. Two hundred and eight is our minimum for day labor. If you were a registered model, she would pay twice that much.” This time it was Emma’s turn to look at them with an, oh.

They finalized their business and Emma’s head was spinning after the meeting with the two women. She was getting paid more for a few hours than what she made most months. She reconsidered Michael’s offer and made up her mind that if the businesswoman addresses the matter again, she will take her up on the opportunity. Emma made her way out of the diner. Her eyes went to the motel across the road in an instant. She noticed that Michael had the same bag with her that she did the night before. She looked at the bag and remembered her words: Your most prized possession is in the bag you have with you currently. It made her wonder what was in it. It was large, Michael carried it rather than dragging it behind her as she did with the suitcase. Whatever was in there, it was meaningful to Michael.

Emma’s reward was a smile form that sensual mouth. She noticed that Michael had changed into her sneakers, the red scarf was still around her neck. Emma reminded herself to breathe. Michele left her in the car as she quickly ran into the store to get a few things.

She bought food, water, and another scotch. It was all placed in the boot. “Where to now?” Emma asked as Michael placed the bag and her laptop carefully on the back seat of the VW. “Your place, I need to get you an outfit.” Emma’s mind took a while to comprehend the words, but she started the little Bug and drove in the direction of her apartment. “Micheal, my place…” She did not know why she needed to explain. “It is nothing much.” Michael looked at her companion as she tried to hide her embarrassment. “I am sleeping in a frilly shocking pink room Emma, I am certain your place would be a refreshing reflection of yourself dear.”

It made Emma laugh. Michael spoke with much disgust in her voice of her pink room. She also knew that Michael summed the apartment up correctly, it was a place that spoke to and about Emma. It was cozy and perhaps the only real home she ever had.

Emma was looking for a reaction from Michael, but the woman did not give anything away as she
made her way into the tiny apartment. If anything surprised her or made her cringe, Micheal showed neither. She only asked Emma where her bedroom was and if it would be alright if she went through her closet. Emma showed her the way.

The bedroom was very different from the rest of the place. Almost as if the neat little place was there for show, Emma lived in her bedroom. Big open windows, soft neutral colors, warm, home. Michael felt very at ease in the room and curiously looked around. Her eyes took everything in all at once. She turned to the built-in double cupboard and opened it. She started to ask Emma questions again. Her back turned to the woman and the room. It amazed Emma that the woman could take in so much with such a light, quick look.

“The photo next to the bookcase, who took it?” It was a black and white photo of a back alley in Boston. She lived there for a week. “I did,” Emma answered uncertainly. The words made Michael turn to look at the blonde. “Really?” Emma nodded. “All the photos here are mine, except for the print.” Micheal turned back to her task. She did not need to look at the print in the frame above Emma’s bed, she knew it and who the photographer was. “You have a good eye. Do you have a portfolio?” Emma laughed. “Micheal, I do not live in your world.”

Michael stopped what she was doing. She looked at Emma for a moment. The silence between them was tense. Michael was considering to tell the blonde precisely what she was thinking, but something held her back. Emma would not respond to an admonishment about her talent, neither will she believe the praise. So Micheal shrugged her shoulders and returned to her task. She found what she was looking for at the back of Emma’s closet. She took it out and reviewed the summer dress with a critical eye. It was perfect. She already spotted something else that would be picture-perfect with it for a shoot. Micheal looked the two items over again. It will work. It had to. One of her most significant clients was not happy with his cover for his latest best-seller, it was her job to fix it.

“Alright Miss Swan, time to start working. I need you to be honest with me. I need you to trust me?” Michael’s voice was all business.

“Trust you?” Emma asked nervously. It started to sound a lot like the conversation the night before.

“Yes, Miss Swan. Normally I have a team with me to do what I require. Today it will be just you and me, so however strange my request is, you need to trust that I know what I am doing?” Emma nodded. “And the honest part is that you need to tell me if you are uncomfortable or tired? Alright?” Emma only nodded. It was an opposite approach to her first model work.

“Great, I need you to take a shower, please? I will do your hair and makeup afterwards.” The request was indeed strange, but Emma went to the bathroom. Micheal took the time to remove all of Emma’s photos out of the frames and scan it in with her phone before she reframed them and placed them back. There were nine that was out in the open, but Michael was sure Emma would have more. She also found several paintings, nothing spectacular, but Micheal took photos of those too. The few minutes that it took for Emma to shower, Micheal spent to find out everything about the
woman that she could and she was even more impressed than the night before.

When Emma came out of the shower, she took Michael’s breath away. Micheal had to swallow. Emma only had a thick bath towel wrapped around her. Her shoulders were bare, Micheal could now see the definition and muscle strength in Emma’s shoulders and arms. She had perfect feet and well-developed calves, but that was not what took Michael’s breath away, it was Emma’s raw beauty. Few women were still breathtaking after they removed their makeup, but Emma, gods, she looked even more beautiful. A few small freckles were visible on her nose. Micheal found it endearing. She opened her mouth to speak, but the words did not come. Michael could only show Emma to the seat in front of the small vanity. She picked the brushes and started to blow dry Emma’s hair.

Emma modeled for a few months in Boston when she returned to the city after high school. The work was alright, so was the money. The problem was everything that they expected of her after work. She found out too soon that it was a business where you were supposed to sleep your way up in life. The after work lifestyle of parties and drugs did not appeal to her either.

From the moment Micheal touched her, she could feel the difference from the night before. Her requests and manner were professional and all business. When she finished with Emma’s hair, she took out her own makeup bag and started to apply makeup from the neckline of where the dress would fall, over her shoulders and arms. Michael took care when she applied the light look to Emma’s eyes and face. Then she painted Emma’s finger and toenails a light, but warm shade of purple to go with the blue motifs on the white summer dress. She stood back after a while. Looking at Emma with critical eyes. Emma felt at ease. Michael was so different when she was in business-mode. Emma realized that the woman was a perfectionist and thought that the task at hand must be complicated for Michael, being out of her comfort zone. Doing the things that she would typically only instruct other people to do, yet Micheal seemed comfortable. She was silent up to that point. “Well have a look and tell me what you think Miss Swan?”

Emma turned to look at herself in the mirror. Her reflection looked back at her in surprise. The makeup was light. It only enhanced her beauty. Her hair was falling in soft locks around her face. “Wow!” Micheal smiled, satisfied.

“Wow indeed, Miss Swan, you made a tedious task much easier. You have done this before?” Emma smiled at her shyly. “I worked as a model in Boston for a few months. Work was good. It was everything after work that made me uncomfortable.” Michael nodded her head in understanding. She chose her photographers very carefully and rarely worked with a famous egocentric man, some professional male photographers expected their models to kiss their feet. Micheal hated it. In her opinion, it gave the industry a bad name. That was how she first met Red. The sassy, eccentric girl did a shoot for Micheal. Half an hour Michael watched as Red went out of her way to get the shot and make her model as comfortable as possible. Micheal loved her work and style. Before the shoot was over, Red had a contract with Carmichael Publishing House.

“Miss Swan now comes the trust part. I am going to touch you a lot, but I assure you it will only be
for the look and as professional as possible.” She swallowed. She hoped that she and Emma would survive the next ten minutes. She handed Emma underwear. Emma eyed her with a questioning look. It was not her underwear. “Don’t ask Miss Swan?” Emma’s thumb ran over the lace. Gods! She was about to put Micheal’s underwear on.

She changed in the bathroom. When Emma re-entered the bedroom, Micheal had to do everything possible not to stare. The woman was beautiful. She had a slim, toned body that was pure woman. Michael diverted her eyes and let out a breath she did not realize she was holding. She asked Emma to turn and then explained to her what she wanted. “Miss Swan please lean forward.” Emma did, without question. Micheal went behind her and adjusted the bra to sit uncomfortably tight. “Now, please readjust your breasts in the cups so that you have a heavy cleavage?” Emma smiled. She wondered how hard it was for Micheal to request that. Emma did what Michael asked. She flicked her hair back and stood up, Michael’s mouth went dry. Her mind was yelling at her not to touch this beautiful creature so close to her, but she had to.

Emma looked so soft, even though she tasted Emma’s breast curve and nipple the night before, she knew it would be very different touching the woman. She swallowed and moved her hands over Emma’s rib cage to adjust her breasts. Michael fiddled with one of the cups and then stood back. When she spoke again, Emma could hear the strain in the husky voice. It made her feel amazing and very beautiful. Knowing that she was able to affect this sophisticated woman before her so much. “Now, Miss Swan, please have a look, when I ask you to readjust your breasts, this is what I want to see.” Emma gave her a shy smile as Micheal tried to hold everything she felt in and hand Emma the summer dress.

Emma looked at the dress. “This is so not you, why is it in your closet?” Michael asked. Emma felt a bit better after Michael’s assessment. “Interview outfit.” This caused Micheal to laugh. Yeah, that’s the outfit, she thought. When Emma returned, Micheal did not mind the obvious admiration reflected in her eyes. Emma blushed slightly. Micheal closed the space between them. “You should not blush. You look stunning. This shoot is going to be a breeze because you are the woman. Do I make myself clear Miss Swan?”

“Yes, Miss Micheal,” she answered as sweetly as she could. Micheal wondered if she was going to survive the entire day in this woman’s company. Images of taking the dress off slowly already flushed through her mind.

She grabbed Emma’s red leather jacket as they made their way out of the apartment. Emma drove them north and then took a turn onto a sand road and drove for a few more miles. As the scene unfolded in front of Micheal, she knew it was the perfect spot. She smiled at Emma, who seemed to be pleased that Michael approved of the location she picked. Emma parked the car in the shade and Micheal went to work. Emma was sitting with her bare legs pulled up on the bonnet of her yellow Bug when Micheal turned to look for her after she measured the light. Their eyes connected and the next moment Micheal brought up the camera and took the shot. It surprised Emma, but then she laughed, Micheal took another one.
Her camera, that was what was in the bag she carried with her all the way from the highway to the little town where she found Emma. It was one of the best cameras on the market and very expensive. It took Emma back a moment when the mysterious bag revealed a camera. Emma’s imagination placed a lot of things in the precious suitcase, but a camera was not on the list. Now, as she watched Micheal work and her comfort behind the camera, it was less of a surprise.

Micheal picked a spot for Emma to stand. She placed a mat on the rough red ground for Emma to stand on as she directed the blond beauty as to what she expected. The background was a field and a burned down, dilapidated building that was perhaps once a house. It was perfect. In the far distance, there was a broken willow tree and a small dam. Micheal took all of this in as she started to shoot. Emma was easy to work with. She followed instruction and fed off the energy that Micheal was encouraging her with. They did it for about an hour when Micheal called it and walked back to the car, to get Emma a bottle of water. She plugged her camera into her laptop and with an expert eye scanned through the images. She frowned a few times and called Emma over.

She was amazed at the quality Michael produced. The woman looking back at her seemed like a stranger. Michael pointed out some shots, what she was looking for, and what was working and what did not, Emma nodded and after she emptied her bottle of water, Michael set the mat down in a different location. “Are you ready Miss Swan?” The blonde nodded and then asked. “You did not rest Micheal, don’t you want a break.” The brunette shook her head. “We are losing light.” Emma smiled, they started to work again.

Michael decided to approach Emma differently. What they were doing, apparently, was not working. “Tell me about the photo of the alley that you took that is on the bookcase in your apartment?” Emma frowned but complied with the request as she continued to move.

“I think I was thirteen or so when I ran away from my then current foster home. I slept in that alley for a week before social services picked me up. When I returned to Boston, I went there and took a photo. It just came out perfect. It captured the sadness and the strange isolation all in one picture.” Micheal gave her a hand signal to turn.

“What about the one of the toddler feeding the cat?”

Emma’s eyes change at the reminder of the photo. It was particularly sad. A little toddler stopped to give a stray cat a twinkie. She was just there, just at the right moment to capture the neglected cat being fed by the squatting kid in a snow-filled park. The toddler was dressed warmly and had sweet chubby cheeks, and the small skinny cat looked so in contrast to each other that Emma noticed and she took a picture. She watched as the child’s mother came closer and spoke to the child. She was also well dressed. Not the kind of woman to notice a stray cat. She surprised Emma, however. She took her scarf off and wrapped it around the cat and took the bundle in one arm while her hand reached out towards the toddler. Emma took another photo and another as the three walked away. It was such a happy ending moment.

Emma did not realize that she stopped moving, her thoughts far away on a stray cat that could find a
home while she never did. It was only when she heard Micheal softly call her name that she looked up and then around her shoulder straight to the voice. Michael clicked away, Emma fell into motion again, but Micheal knew she had the shot. Not long after that, Michael called an end to the session. She gave Emma a warm smile. She did not run to the car to look at the footage. She knew exactly what she had captured.

“I think we are done, Miss Swan.” Then she handed the expensive camera to Emma. “Wow,” Emma admired the camera. It made Michael happy. Most models would flick through the footage to see if they looked good. Emma looked at the features of the camera. “Go on.” Micheal encouraged her and Emma did not have to be invited twice.

She took the sling of the camera and placed it around her neck as she looked for something to film. Emma looked at Micheal. She was wetting the red scarf again and wiping her neck with it. She discarded her white shirt in the heat of the day and only had a camisole on. Her arms and back, even more, defined than Emma’s, her mocha tanned skin had the perfect tone against the white material and the very yellow Bug in the background. Emma waited, she knew she would only get one shot. Micheal turned her head as she rinsed her neck with the wet scarf. Her eyes closed and her mouth slightly open. Emma started shooting. Micheal opened her eyes. She saw what the blonde was doing. She got a sparkle in her dark eyes and half a smile appeared on those perfect lips, enhancing that little scar on her top lip, which made her look so much sexier. Emma wondered what it would be like to run her tongue over that top lip and suck the little scar into her mouth. The blonde looked up as Micheal came to stand in front of her.

“You know Miss Swan if you actually managed to get one of me smiling, you could sell it for a few thousand dollars to any tabloid in New York.” Emma raised an eyebrow. “Full of yourself, Miss Carmichael?” She asked casually as she made her way over to the tripod that Micheal used for a while. She placed the camera there, looking through the lens to make sure she had the angle she was looking for. Emma set the camera and made her way over to Micheal. She took the scarf from Micheal and started to damp the brunette’s face, to slide softly down the inviting cleavage. Micheal grabbed Emma’s wrist with meaning, without hurting her.

She took the scarf from the blonde with her other hand and wrapped it around Emma’s neck. Michael pulled Emma closer to her, using the scarf. Emma could pull away at any moment, but she moved towards her goal with every pull. Both women knew that what they were doing was dangerous, but neither could pull away. Emma wrapped her arms around Michael’s neck. They looked at each other. Both filled with wonder that the other woman was in her arms, then Emma pulled lightly on Micheal’s hair, she closed her mouth over the sensual lips of the brunette that had to stand up slightly to meet Emma in the kiss. Emma turned them ever so slightly. When Micheal finally pulled away from the warm kiss, their eyes met, Micheal smiled. A smile just for Emma. And it filled Emma with a joy that she did not understand.

“Let me get you home Miss Swan before I introduce you to public sex.” Emma blushed at the thought, but it also sent a rush of want through her body. They packed up everything and set off back to town. Micheal returned a few calls, she spoke to Red and Mary Margaret. She looked
exceptionally pleased. Emma was sure the two women in New York could hear it. Michael asked Emma if it would be alright to work at her apartment for a few hours if she could. Emma was glad that they would have the time.

She was looking straight ahead while driving when she blurted out. “I have never had...” Michael looked at her after she broke the comfortable silence. “You know?” Michael caught on. “Oh, you never had public sex?” She questioned. Emma swallowed. “No, I have never had sex with a woman before.” Michael was very grateful that Emma was driving, she was sure she would have crashed the car at the admission. She looked at Emma for a few seconds, opened her mouth and then promptly closed it again. “Well, that is certainly interesting to know.” She smiled at Emma, trying hard to steer her thoughts from the very lustful place it went. “And Billy?” Michael questioned again.

“Oh, I have experience, well some. But one of the reasons why I am with Billy is because he never pushes me like other boys. We fool around, but that is all. Then there was last night...” Michael rubbed her thumb through her fingers, the nervous telltale that Emma picked up. Michael was glad Emma called Billy a boy because that was all there was to him. She thought about her own needs and then she considered Emma in this godforsaken place. Her lust aside, even with the new information about Emma, there was something Michael could not put her finger on.

Yes, she wanted this woman next to her, and she wanted her in every way. It was not falling for the mysterious blonde, dear gods, she did not fall that easy any longer. It was also not only the sex or lust, but there were more to them. It left Michael a little confused. She studied the blonde for a moment. Then it became clear to her. Emma was that once in a lifetime woman. The one that will leave you spinning in your wake and you will remember every smell and every touch long after you have forgotten her name. She assigned an impression on Michael. She left it because she was so different from people that generally surrounded Michael. She thought about her offer to Emma. Will New York corrupt her? Or will she still give Regina that disapproving look as if her moral compass went astray a year from now? Will she always challenge Michael if she knew her, completely knew her? What would happen if they worked together? Will Emma even be someone that would be able to again see through the façade? And if she did, would she be able to live with the woman she had become? Regina with her fears and dark past. She felt utter dejection and regret. No, she concluded depressed. Even if Emma came with her to New York, she could never expose Emma to her past, the way Mary Margaret was exposed. She would protect the young woman, even if it meant killing the spark that Miss Emma Swan so easily ignited.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

The ladies give in to their attraction. F/F fluff

Thank you for all the support, comments and kudos!
Hope you enjoy.

Chapter 5

Michael took over Emma’s bed as they returned to the apartment. Emma had a shower while Michael spread out her laptop and camera on the double bed and as she placed the black framed glasses on her face and twisted her dark hair into a bundle onto her head with a clip, she was in a completely different mode. She took off her shoes and jeans, to make herself more comfortable.

Emma came out of the bathroom and looked at the vision on her bed in the white shirt. She watched Michael for a while and realized the woman was in a world of her own. All thought of the outside world had slipped away. She used a book from Emma’s bookshelf as a mouse pad. Her hands worked in tandem, between mouse clicks and touch screen enhancements. Every move was precise. It was like watching a DJ, bring a hall of dancing figures to life through their art. Emma smiled and went on with her tasks.

She got dressed in something comfortable, but still a tad sexy, just in case. She poured them each a glass of juice and started to make something easy to eat. When she returned to the bedroom almost an hour later, Michael’s glass was still untouched, her fingers again playing over the laptop. Emma had no intent to stop her. From the little she did see of Michael’s work ethics that morning, she knew the woman would work until the work was complete. She went to sit quietly in her small lounge and read a book while she waited for the brunette to get to a point where she would stop.

Fridays were busy days for Emma. She found the change in her schedule refreshing. Sitting in the early evening reading a book was a luxury for her. Her mind was never far away from the woman in her bedroom when she heard Michael talking, she closed her book and made her way to the kitchen.

As Emma entered her bedroom, she had to take a moment to admire the woman spread out on it. Michael changed positions, she was now resting her head in one hand while the other typed away. Her bare legs were folded together in a comfortable pose. Emma burned the image into her mind. When Michael looked up at her, she had to take a breath. Emma was confident she had never before seen anything more stunning in her life. She smiled at Michael and made her way over. Michael
was excited, as soon as Emma placed both plates of food on the bed stand, Michael pulled her towards herself and the laptop. They both smiled the moment they touched. On the other side of the Skype call, Mary Margaret and Red had to yet again hide their shock.

“Mary Margaret, tell Emma what you think?” The blonde came to sit next to Michael after the clumsy fumble that Michael initiated. She pulled her hair back and waved a friendly hello to the two women.

“Well, yes.” Mary Margaret started, very unlike her, she did not have any words. Red jumped in with a serious look and a low voice.

“Emma, these are fucking fabulous.” Michael smiled happily. Emma looked at her with a questioning frown. Michael tapped a few keys. A presentation opened up on the screen.

“I knew that no matter what I said, you would not take my word for it. When you showered this morning, I took the liberty to scan your photos in. I compiled a portfolio for you. Red just had a look at it.” Emma swallowed, her expression changed. Michael could see the anger there, she expected it. She took Emma around the waist and pulled her closer. “Just look at it?” Emma nodded. Michael started the slideshow and Emma had to admit to herself that seeing the photos in a proper presentation gave a different kind of life to them. She even felt a bit of pride in what she saw.

She opened her mouth to say something, but Michael placed a soft finger on her lips, as their eyes met, she could only stare into the dark pools that held the same pride it did the night before. “You heard what Red said. It was an unbiased opinion of a professional photographer and my lead designer. Nothing more.” Emma felt slight relief. “Now to the good stuff.” Michael made the presentation disappear and pulled up the photos she picked for her staff to review. Emma watched in silence as the five photos were presented to her one by one. Michael photoshopped it slightly, the mat under Emma’s feet was gone, the colors seemed enhanced. She looked at herself, in the setting.

In some of the photos she smiled, two she looked kind of sad, but the woman looking back was not her. How could it be? She was beautiful and mysterious. So not Emma, she thought. “You did a great job, Michael.” The dark woman looked back at her. Her eyes and face were stern.

“Emma, the lens does not lie. The images are not great photography, it is you, your calmness, your intensity, your beauty and yet another hidden talent.”

“She is correct Emma.” Emma heard Red’s voice through the laptop speakers. “I have worked with hundreds of models, I can tell you, it does not matter how beautiful or famous they are, you need a woman with style and intelligence to pull off what you have done.” Mary Margaret popped in. “With the little resources you had and the short timeframe, I am completely amazed that you pulled it off at all.” Emma looked at Michael, still not believing a word. “I pay them to be critical by the way. It is their task to tell me if I make incorrect decisions.” Emma nodded slightly. Her heart refused to hope. She has been disappointed so many times in her life with false, empty promises that her head refused to believe what three people she did not know, were telling her about her talent.

“Red and Snow picked this one.” Michael pointed to the photo where a little sadness lingered in the
normally bright green eyes. “However, they have not seen this one yet. This photo is the one I picked,” Michael revealed the photo and Emma immediately knew it was one that Michael took while they were talking about the stray cat.

It was the exact moment she looked up and around her shoulder to where Michael was standing. Her blond hair was waving in midair, the moment she swept her head around to look over her shoulder. Instead of the startled look that she expected from the sudden call from Michael, what she was looking at was a woman with mystery and sadness in her eyes. Her mouth was invitingly open above the bare shoulder, where the strap of the sundress came undone. Her red leather jacket was casually hanging from the other shoulder. She held her breath as she watched the stranger looking back with so many unanswered emotions in her eyes. “It’s beautiful.” She remarks softly without noticing that she spoke. Michael was pleased. Emma touched the screen and yelp as Mary Margaret, and Red’s faces appeared on the screen instead of her image. Michael let out a carefree laugh that none of the women had ever heard. “Sorry.” She said as she rubbed Emma’s arm to calm her. Her eyes held the laughter, even though her face was without a smile again. “It’s a touchscreen,” Michael explained, and Emma gave her an awkward smile. “Sorry, I did not think.” The smiling dark look met the sweet green eyes. Emma’s breath caught and in New York Mary Margaret, and Red watched the interaction with curious concern.

They have never seen their uptight-all-business-boss like this before. Even Mary Margaret could not recall seeing Regina either this relaxed or this happy with another person. Regina’s eyes and life had long since lost its light. Mary Margaret’s heart was beating in her chest. She had hoped. Often hoped that after Leopold, Regina would find someone, but the woman that she loved and cared for only pulled away more, to become reclusive and with it came the impenetrable wall Regina had built to keep people away, that and the façade of the hard, cold, ex-mob boss. Few people remembered that Regina was also a victim. They looked at her standing in life, her business and assumed that her wealth came from Irish mob money. Over the years, the stories took on a life of their own. Leopold was no longer the mastermind behind the money laundering and business. It was Regina. It was sad the number of people that believed the lie and instead of dismissing the myths, Regina encouraged them.

“I’m getting old and wrinkled here ladies, am I going to wait until I am grey before I see this photo?” Red asked in her low, sarcastic tone. It brought Emma and Michael out of their intimate moment and Mary Margaret out of her sad musing. She liked what she saw, but at the same time, it terrified her. She knew Regina better than anyone. She wanted her happy, but she also knew with opening herself to someone will make her vulnerable to exploitation and hurt. Regina had more than her share of pain. If nothing else, Mary Margaret would protect the woman like a fierce lioness over her cub. She might be younger than Regina by a few years, but the love she had for the brooding woman surpassed anything. There was no length to witch Mary Margaret would not go to for Regina.

Michael took Emma’s hand. The small gesture did not slip Mary Margaret sharp eyes. She sent the photo to Red, as the designer opened the file on her side, she merely looked. Red eventually turned her laptop screen for Mary Margaret to experience the full impact of the image. They looked at each other and told Michael that they would call later. Michael smiled, closed her laptop and for the first
time, that evening took a sip of the juice Emma placed by her side ages ago.

“What now?” Emma asked. Michael stretch to get the stiffness out of her body she had from sitting in the same position for too long. “Now we eat, I am famished, what did you make?” Emma gave her half a smile as she handed Michael the plate of tuna salad. “Thank you. I love salads.”

After the meal, Emma cleaned up and discarded Michael’s insistence to help. Instead, she took the time to finish Emma’s portfolio. Michael discovered the other photos Emma took on her camera and included them. She stopped when she saw herself sitting, smiling on the beat-up Bug, rinsing the heat of the day off with the red scarf. Even she had to admit it was a beautiful scene.

Michael was not vain. She knew she was beautiful. She knew her dark features lured men and woman alike. She knew how to use her looks and her husky voice to her advantage and often did. But even for her, seeing herself like this, it was strange. Few things made her excited these days, even fewer made her laugh. Here she was in a lost little town with a woman she did not know. She felt more in two days than what she most likely did the two years before combined. It was sad. Yes, she acknowledged that, but it was safe.

She scanned further and came across the other photos. She solely stared at them for a long time. The broad smile, the playfulness as she pulled Emma towards herself with the scarf. It all seemed to be another woman. Then the turn of angle. Michael was confused when she remembered Emma turned them while they were kissing. The result was something no one would ever believe. It was hard enough to get that perfect shot, but to set a camera on a tripod and a fifteen-second free clip, turn your subject matter and get the perfect shot, it was unheard of. She looked at the scene from two viewpoints, that of an artist and that of a woman. Emma got everything right, the angle, the light, compensation for motion, everything to get a still photo with balance, light, and color. Michael knew that even in black and white, this would make for a fantastic shot. The woman saw something far different. She saw her mouth pulling away from Emma’s. She saw the hunger that remained in her own eyes. Her tongue still wet, sexy, sliding back in place, but for just that instant, it still lingered on the brunette’s top lip. Creating a wanton-lust look. Emma was a mere side profile, the long blond hair waving wild in the breeze, the open shoulder and a soft hand sliding down a tanned arm, leaving their skin complexions in stark contrast. The red scarf still around her neck, Michael holding on to one tip of it.

Michael’s eyes were full. The onlooker could see the subtle longing, the surprise at the intensity of the kiss, her admiration for the blonde woman in front of her. Michael felt the tears burning in her eyes as she placed a soft touch on the screen and ran her forefinger over the image of herself as if she wanted to make sure it was real and not just a trick of her mind. Emma watched her. The emotion, the need, the sadness and the happiness was all in the photo and at that exact time, also on Michael’s face. Emma knew that the tears were the most significant compliment she had ever received in her entire life. The raw emotion on Michael’s face could not lie. Emma did not even need to know which photo Michael was looking at, she knew, she knew from the affection she saw in the dark woman’s face, that it came out perfect. She did not want to ruin the moment, but she wanted to see the final product, she wanted to see what she had created, that could stir this mature, dynamic woman
Emma quietly came to sit next to Michael. She did not touch the woman. She only looked at the image on the laptop screen. It was amazing. It came out better than what she had hoped for. Michael lingered with her eyes on it for a few seconds more when her mind caught up with her heart. She closed the laptop. She turned to Emma and not for a moment tried to hide. “Thank you.” Her voice was husky with emotion and then she smiled shyly. Emma could not help herself. She knew she was privy to something extraordinary, she leaned in and took the voluptuous lips in with her own.

The kiss was soft. No need, no urgency. Emma wanted to feel the connection. Her doubt made her believe that she was imagining a feeling of belonging, a feeling of finding a part of herself. She needed to be confident, she knew, if the kiss was filled with lust and want, Michael did not connect, that there were no pieces to put together. But Michael kissed back with intensity, soft, inquisitive, exploration. Emma could feel the other woman’s body shake lightly, an indication of her desperate need to pull Emma in and really kiss her, but she didn’t. She met Emma’s mouth softly, her tongue was exploring, with a soft moan, Michael pulled back. The moment she lifted her eyes to meet Emma’s green once, Emma knew. What they shared was not only lust, but it was also not a conquest for Michael. She was sure that neither of them knew what it was, but it was something. A deep emotion that was not going away.

Emma pulled her in. She somehow knew that this moment Michael would do nothing. There would be no play, Michael would sure as hell not initiate anything after Emma’s revelation of earlier the day. It was not about power or taking the lead. It gave Michael permission to take things further. As the toned, mocha arms encircled her waist, Emma felt more sure of this night and everything that would come with it, than anything in her life before.

Michael continued to be gentle. She raked her hand through the golden tassels. Emma molded their bodies together. Michael’s mind stopped. She was about to make love to a virgin, well a silver star virgin, that was where her mind stopped. There was a tremendous sexual need for Emma, to have Emma, to fuck Emma, and oh gods, to possess Emma completely. Her body and her needs screamed in agony as she lingered with the kiss, as she prolonged every move. She could play for hours, but once she got to this point... A point where she was wet, hungry and excited, she needed the release. Now, however, she was disciplining her body to ignore the lust and concentrate on her submissive’s needs. She closed her eyes as she pulled Emma into her. She wanted the night to last a long time, for Emma to experience every wonderful thought and feeling that came with lesbian sex, but more so, she wanted it to be a moment that the alluring blonde would always remember with wetness pooling between her legs.

Michael turned them over. Her laptop fell to the floor and with it the book she used as a mouse pad and the mouse. The bed was free of anything. She could move any way she wanted. She could roll and pull Emma anywhere she decided. She looked into the green eyes, asking the silent question one more time. Emma smiled and nodded. With that Michael’s husky, sexy voice filled the room. “Do you know how much I want you, Miss Swan?” Michael did not wait for an answer. She kissed
Emma over her jaw, left a light nip there and then proceeded to lick the length of her neck as Emma leaned back and opened herself completely to her lover. Michael did not break contact with Emma’s skin at any point in time, but she did get herself into a different position. She was kneeling between Emma’s legs. Her knee was very close to the blonde woman’s need. She pushed in lightly to test the waters, Emma responded with much more urgency than the night before. When Michael pulled away, Emma tried to get the contact back and she moaned disapprovingly impatient. She felt Michael smile on her skin where a moment before she was lavishing her with soft kisses. “Patience, dear, this will take a while.” Michael nipped the skin on Emma’s clavicle where she pulled the clean denim shirt, she had on after her shower, away. Emma felt her need escalate.

If anyone had dared to suggest to her a mere week ago that she would like a little pain with mind-blowing sex, with a woman no less, she most likely would have strangled them. There was too much pain in her life, both physical and emotional to crave it and yet, here she was, not far from begging a woman to fuck her as she dug her nails into her back. Emma tried not to analyze the thought, it was right, nothing inside of herself wanted it any other way.

Michael unbuttoned most of Emma’s shirt, exposing her delicate white skin and Michael was having a taste feast. Every woman tasted different. Their skin felt different and their essence? Oh, yeah, each woman had her own unique smell, taste, texture. Michael could not wait to explore Emma. Her mouth started to water at the thought. She had to bring herself back. She grabbed Emma’s hand and guided her over the black lace panties she had on. The moment Emma’s fingers started moving on their own, Michael let out a moan. Her eyes darkened over as she looked into Emma’s. “Do you feel Miss Swan? Do you feel my need, my want for you? This is what your kisses and attention are doing to me.” She leaned in and kissed the soft lips of the blonde. Pulling away with a soft nip. “Did you know you had this power? That you could make me so wet?” She stretched the last two words in that husky tone and Emma thought that she might just cum from listening to the sexy voice. She tried to speak, but Michael placed a finger to her lips, sealing the request. “You will get all you want Emma.” The woman hovering in anticipation promised, Emma grabbed onto her shoulders to emphasize her need, just in case Michael did not understand. She smiled at Emma’s willingness. The little scar pulled up, making Emma wonder about it again. She stopped questioning as she pulled the exact spot into her mouth and ran her tongue over it.

She felt Michael smile again. It warmed her on the inside. Then the woman bent lower, Emma waited in anticipation to explore more, but Michael only dipped her tongue into an inviting belly button. The sensation did make Emma gasp, but by the gods, she wanted so much more. Michael pulled the denim shirt off and started to kiss all of the exposed skin beneath her with much more vigor. Emma did not know Michael could turn her on even more, but every kiss, suck and nibble from Michael created more need. Her pelvis rocked off the bed a few times as she tried hard to pull Michael into her to connect their bodies and sate the demand that was ever increasing with that beautiful mouth on her skin.

Michael closed her eyes as she sucked Emma’s nipple into her mouth, through the skimpy bra that just covered the alert pink nipples. Emma moaned and raked her fingers through Michael’s hair, pulling her down. “Harder please Michael?” Her request, rewarded with a light bite at the one nipple and Michael’s fingers rolling and pinching the other. “Gods, yes!”
Michael’s body screamed for release all over again. Her need and hunger override her conscious decision to take it slow as Emma voiced her own need. The bra came off with one maneuver from Michael’s hand, her mouth relentless on the soft breasts, while her other hand undid Emma’s jean short’ zipper. The lanky blond slipped out of the shorts and her panties with no effort. Michael moaned in frustration as her eyes fell on the soft short curls, covering her intended target. She sat back on her heels, still between Emma’s legs. She wanted to take in the beauty of her. Admire the gift that Emma gave her. Her eyes soaked in all of Emma and the blonde saw Michael’s heart rate and breathing increase as she explored the body before her.

Emma reached for Michael again. Slipping her fingers through the lace that was still covering the brunette’s need. She pulled her fingers away as she heard the throaty moan escape Michael’s lips. Her fingers coated with Michael’s glistering essence. Michael watched in fascination. Wondering what the blonde was going to do. She nearly came as Emma placed her fingers into her hot mouth and licked it clean. Michael forgot to breathe as she watched the dazzling display. When Emma let out an *hmm* while closing her eyes, the walls broke. Michael dipped her head between Emma’s legs and with the last of her reserve licked the entire length of Emma’s vagina before she pulled Emma up to her mouth and dipped her tongue into Emma’s warmth with vigor and demand.

Emma gasped at the first contact. It was not what she expected. The gods only knew what she anticipated, since Billy rarely touched her there and never with his mouth. She felt sensations she never knew possible and yet, it was not what she wanted. Her hands raked into the devilish dark hair, hoping to encourage Michael. She needed more, she just did not quite know, what more a woman could offer her. Then Michael’s lips closed over her very engrossed wet, waiting bundle of nerves and at the first touch, her hips rocked off the bed. She clung to Michael’s hair tighter, once the delicate tongue played in slow circles with her desperate need, her hips started rocking against Michael’s sensual mouth. As she held Michael tighter, the dark woman’s attention to Emma’s need increase. When Emma’s started moaning and begging, Michael filled her up with her fingers, changing the playful stroking with increasing pressure to suck.

Emma’s entrance was tight, Michael moaned as she placed two fingers into the woman, careful not to go too deep, but to give Emma the feel of the attention she so desperately craved and Michael fed off her. Emma was sweet, as Michael knew she would be. Her essence was thick like honey, Michael’s mouth lapped it up. The woman tasted far different from others. Emma was soft like silk and Michael had an increasable need to fuck herself silly while bringing this absolutely gorgeous woman to a mind fucking orgasm. She swallowed and held off. She wanted to give Emma the experience of making her cum. The blonde was so close. Michael could feel her clit swelling deliciously in her mouth as Emma’s inner walls tightened around her fingers. Michael’s senses were in overdrive. She was so in tuned to Emma’s urges that she adjusted to every screaming demand Emma threw at her.

Then she felt it. That pinnacle point. Where everything stops, where your mind thinks that your body could not experience any more stimulation, while your Id pushed the stray thought away and your body clampdown in demand. The experience was wondrous to Michael. She heard Emma scream her name in her release. She felt Emma’s body buck at its own will. She tasted the massive amount of fresh fluid ascending on her taste buds. Then the stillness. She smiled. She waited a few
seconds and then sucked Emma into her mouth again, receiving the same reaction, just a little less intense.

Emma lay on the bed. Her mind tried to comprehend what happened. It could not. She had orgasms before. Hell, Michael made her cum just last night, but in body and in mind she was in no way prepared for the intensity of what she just experienced. She placed her legs together, only to feel another aftershock. Then Michael was there. Her hair tasseled, her skin gleaming with a delicious sheen of sweat. She was kissing Emma, her taste still on Michael’s lips and Emma found it strangely erotic. She kissed Michael back with vigor, wanting to taste more. Michael’s senses were screaming for release. She pulled back, before she could ask the question, Emma asked one of her own.

“What is your name?” She felt the body over her going stiff. Michael looked into the green eyes to see what Emma asked, whether she was looking for a vulnerable opening in the well-guarded armour. “Why?” The question was soft. Emma lifted her hand and touched Michael’s face for reassurance. Her voice was slightly husky from the screaming and begging, her breath still ragged. “Because I am sure that I was just made love to and as enjoyable as it was, I want you to fuck me senseless now, and when I cum for you again, I want to scream your name.” She felt Michael relax. Michael’s tummy turned at the request, she softly whispered. “Regina.” Emma awarded her with a tender kiss, when she pulled away, Regina only saw raw lust. “Now fuck me, Regina?”

When their bodies connected again, Emma felt the difference. Regina pressed her need hungrily into Emma’s thigh and did the same for Emma. It was hard, urgent and very demanding. Regina’s touches and kisses were rougher. But nothing like a man and their calloused hands and scratchy beards. Regina was still soft. Emma felt her wetness pouring over her thigh. Regina was wet, as she took her climax from Emma, she moaned, pushed in harder and Emma felt it, she was being fucked. The way Regina moved over her, into her, this was lustful sex, it was divine. Emma got rid of Regina’s shirt and her camisole somehow and now she took hold of Regina’s fuller breasts, as she pinched a nipple, she discovered something new. The motion caused Regina to come down faster and harder as she started to moan, Emma knew the exotic woman was close. She grabbed Emma tight by her hips to get more friction, more closeness and when she came, it was hard. Emma heard her name come off in screams of those sensual lips and a moment later she closed her eyes to the vision before her, dug her nails into Regina’s back and screamed her name.

They played a bit, Emma discovering all of Regina’s piercings. Her nipples were pierced and very sensitive when pulled by the small rings through them, so was her belly button, the big surprise was the stud resting on her clit, keeping it open and stimulated all of the time. Emma found out what it did to Regina when she only flicked the stud with her finger. It was mesmerizing watching the woman respond to her every touch. They made love again, Regina guided Emma’s hand to stroke her deep inside. The feel of the younger woman’s fingers inside her was stunning, Emma quickly drove Regina over the limit.

There were so many new sensations and experiences for Emma, but making Regina cum like that definitely topped the list. They fell into a deep, restful sleep in each other’s arms. Regina nuzzling
into the softness between Emma’s breast and shoulder. Her body was sated as she listened to the content breathing of Emma, she fell asleep.

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Regina woke up her usual time, just before six. At first, she was alarmed when she realized her surroundings were unfamiliar. Then she felt the softness of a woman and the events of the day and night before came back, leaving her with a smile. She moved slightly to take in the sight of the sleeping blonde. She stared openly at Emma in her nakedness. The woman was beautiful. Regina adjusted her position to still touch Emma with her body, but she was lying back on her pillow now. Thinking. She tried to remember the last time she woke up in someone’s bed. She concluded that it was with Leopold. He scared her sufficiently enough with his threats that her paranoia pretty much made her go home every night.

She felt sadness. Not only for herself and what her life had become, even with Leopold still in jail and with the complete freedom guarantee that she negotiated for herself with him. She felt sorry for Emma. She had a strength in her and curiosity that needed to be stimulated. The blonde had to get out of this place. She felt Emma stir and turned to kiss her softly on the shoulder. The woman kept on sleeping. Regina stroked her arm, watching as the goose pimples started to show. *Gods, so in tune and responsive.* Regina still thought she would make the perfect playmate. She closed her eyes. Through the entire night of fabulous sex, Regina made sure to keep Emma stay on a high. The woman pushed and begged and gods Regina was so tempted, but she knew, she knew it was not the right thing go a little further. She wanted to possess Emma. Make her submit, but what future could she give Emma? Emma needed to be loved. It made Regina feel so old. She could not remember the last time she had a lesbian virgin in her bed either. Regina felt so much in such little time. *Was she that starved of attention?* She knew the answer. She knew that with Emma, it was more. How much more she did not comprehend. She turned and snuggled up to Emma, to explore the woman, to soak in her beauty and warmth. She fell into a light slumber.

Emma’s alarm woke them both. The green eyes met the dark once, she smiled softly at Regina as she leaned in and kissed her good morning. Somewhere in her mind, she was surprised that the woman stayed. Regina deepened the kiss and pulled Emma on top of her. When she pushed her leg up, Emma let out a moan and she smiled. They made love again, Emma took charge, filling Regina up and bringing her to release. Her entire body shivered as the blonde manipulated her and touched her in just the correct way. They showered together, Regina teaching Emma a few more things. They drank coffee together after Emma got dressed for the day, Regina asked her one more time to come with her to New York.

Emma looked into the deep brown eyes and Regina had her answer as a soft hand caressed her face and then turned away. She sat in the kitchen for a while, composing herself. When she got up, she got dressed and then handed Emma a flash drive before she kissed her goodbye. “This is yours, your portfolio and I loaded a letter of recommendation on there as well. My name can open doors for you Emma, not only in New York but the entire East Coast. Use it if you need it.” She kissed Emma softly next to her mouth and then she was out the door. Emma stood there, looking at the drive in her hands, her vision obscured by tears.
Regina walked the few blocks to the garage. She already had a message from Mark stating that her car was ready. She spoke to the engineer, who reminded her, to book her vehicle in for a proper service. She thanked him for all his trouble and then she set off to the shady motel to pack the rest of her things.

After her car was loaded, she looked for the housekeeper and told her that all the items in the cupboards and fridge were there for her to take. The woman thanked Regina and blessed her when she tipped her as well. She checked everything one last time and then paid her bill. She sat in the Mercedes for a long time. Her mind told her to leave and everything else in her trying to convince her to drive over to the diner.

She pushed the car into gear and took off too fast for a little town. Emma looked up as she heard wheels screeching off only to see the black SLK disappearing and with it, so many of her dreams.
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

A whole new world for Emma

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone, like I commented, my laptop crashed, and I am rewriting the six chapters that I have lost. Hope you enjoy.

Chapter 6

Regina was angry, perhaps more angry than she had a right to be. She hated waste, waste of talent most of all. Right now, Emma pissed her life way in that derelict little town. She got to the off-ramp, turn-off and pulled over to the side of the road. She clenched the steering wheel and let her head rest on her hands. She was emotional. It scared her. She was either making the biggest mistake of her life or the best. She looked into the review mirror, to clear the tears that made their way so unsuspected over her cheek. Regina checked behind her and then made a reckless U-turn. She speeded back to the little town.

When she reached the town, she pulled the Mercedes right in front of the diner window, parking on the wrong side of the road. She did not care. She marched into the place and grabbed Emma by the arm, where she was serving a table. “Regina, what the…”

“Look, Miss Swan. Do you see my car?” She swung Emma right up to the window to look at the black vehicle. “Opportunities are few and far between, Miss Swan and I for one will not be taking this road ever again.” Her voice filled with anger, she knew her words would hurt, but at that moment, Regina did not care. “Fifteen years from now, you are going to look through that window, and you will see a similar car. You will fill your apron that night after your shift and count your coins. You will go home, to Billy and your three snot nose kids. You will cook and clean for them. Place Billy’s overall in a bucket, soaking it, knowing very well that you will never get the stains or the smell out. That night when you climb into bed, tired and old before your time, just before you close your eyes, you will see my car again in your mind, at that moment you will think to yourself, I should have got into that damn car!”

Regina turned and left with the harsh words. As she passed the table where she interrupted Emma’s service, she threw a few dollars on the table and told the couple, my treat! She needed to get out before she broke down in tears. The woman that could be cold as ice had no idea why this young woman evoked so many emotions from her. She made it to her car and sat there for a minute before she switched the engine on and got ready to pull off again. The passenger door opened and a breathless Emma jumped in. “Took you long enough Miss Swan,” Regina said without looking at
her. “I need to get a few things and arrange a move.” Regina turned to her. “Here is the deal
Emma. You come with me, now and I will take care of everything? Whatever happens in New
York will be entirely up to you. I will give you a job and a place to stay, other than that, you will
have to work for it. If it does not work out, I will bring you back. Do you understand Miss Swan?”
Emma indicated that she did. Regina just gave her an alternative, a backup plan and that was all she
could ask for right now. “Good, I will have Miss Blanchard draw up a contract.”

“I will need a few things.” Regina nodded and said Emma had ten minutes. The blonde packed the
essentials. Clothes and toiletries. She changed into skinny jeans, her boots a white tank top and
grabbed her red jacket. When she returned, Regina was all ready to go. “I need to say goodbye to
Billy.” Regina inhaled her irritation but turned the car to go to the garage.

Billy walked up to meet her. “You are leaving with her?” Emma nodded, the tears sprung to her
eyes. “Good for you Emma, I always knew this town would never be enough for you. Please
remember, that if things do not work out, you will always have a friend here?” She cried and pulled
him to her. They kissed, a not so chaste kiss and it irritated Regina even more. Emma returned to
the car and wiped the few tears that fell, off her face. “You smell like a diesel mechanic Miss Swan,
try and not get anything on my seats?” Emma smiled, Regina already sounded like she did with
most of her employees.

The moment they turned onto the freeway towards New York, Regina placed the car on cruise
control and tapped a few buttons on the steering wheel. “Michael, please tell me you are on your
way back?”

“I am on my way back, Miss Blanchard,” Regina answered in a low tone. “I take it things did not
end the way you would have liked with Miss Swan?” Mary Margaret questioned. Regina let out a
breath. “No, it did, she is currently sitting with me after I threatened her.” Mary Margaret rolled her
eyes and Regina could feel it. “You are such a beast sometimes Michael,” Regina smirked. “Only
sometimes Miss Blanchard?” Mary Margaret did not respond. “Anyway, I need you to draw up a
T4 contract with A2 benefits. Is that possible?” Mary Margaret sat with a little frown. “You know
it is, but…” She had to think about her words. “What exactly do you want Miss Swan to do?”
Regina tapped her fingers on the steering wheel. “Everything that is stipulated in a T4 Miss
Blanchard!”

“Right.” She answered. Emma sat stiffly in her seat. They were discussing her future as if she was
not in the car. “And the A2?” Regina was not used to being questioned like this, not even by Mary
Margaret. “What about it, she literally has the clothes on her back, what do you expect?” Emma
started to fidget nervously. “Now see what you did Miss Blanchard. Miss Swan is sitting here, white
was a sheet, thinking I am abducting her to become my sex slave.”

“What did you do Michael? No, no please do not answer that, I don’t want to know. I will have it
done by the time you get here. Which apartment do you want me to get ready?” Regina did not
have to think about it. “Number two.”

“Number two?” Mary Margaret repeated. “On the first floor?” Regina smiled a small smile. “Yes,
Miss Blanchard that would be the one.” At the request, Mary Margaret had a few questions, but she
knew, even if Regina did answer them, it would not be in front of Emma. “Anything else
Michael?” Regina turned her head and gave Emma an encouraging smile. “Yes please, can you
arrange for Miss Swan's household content and her car to be moved to New York? Her keys are
with Mr. Martin at the garage. They have to pack everything. I want her stuff in New York by
Monday?” Mary Margaret agreed to arrange it. After a few minutes of exchanging other information, Regina ended the call. She looked over to Emma again, who seemed to have calmed down significantly. “See, all taken care of dear.” Emma gave her a shy smile. “Regina, what will I do in New York?” Regina tapped a perfectly manicured finger on the steering wheel. “The T4 contract stipulates everything from in-house training, but I will also expect you to study while you work. Mary Margaret will discuss everything with you when she explains the contract to you.”

Regina made a few more calls while they moved closer to Emma’s dream and with it more nervousness. Emma listened to the conversations. She could already distinguish when Regina spoke to a client and when it was an employee that was behind on something. Emma asked, “Do all your staff work on a Saturday?” Regina gave a deep chuckle. “No, only the once, I expect it from and the once that still want a job come Monday.” The answer did not make sense, but Emma was sure that it would be explained later.

As Regina turned a bent, the city sprung up before Emma’s eyes. Regina watched her. The city has long since lost its magical allure for Regina, but it was refreshing to watch Emma take everything in. She sat with her hands on the window looking at everything, getting excited as she pointed out landmarks to Regina. She enjoyed the blonde’s enthusiasm and again hoped that New York would not corrupt her.

A few miles from their destination, Regina pulled into a rare open parking spot. She turned the car off and turned to look at Emma, taking her hand and holding it tight. “Welcome to New York Emma.” There was something in Regina’s voice that Emma could not place. “Things will be different here in New York. I will work a lot. You will settle in and get used to things. It might be a while before I see you again.” Her voice trailed off, and she had to look away for a moment. When she turned to Emma again, she had that look in her eyes that made Emma take a breath. “Please Emma, whatever happens here in New York, never think that the last three days meant nothing to me because it did.” Emma gave her a sad smile, she felt it too. “I am only giving you an opportunity Emma. Everything else will be up to you. You are also completely free here in New York.” She gave Emma a sad look, hoping that the woman would understand the meaning behind her words. She leaned in and caressed Emma’s cheek before she captured the soft lips with her own and immediately moaned into Emma’s mouth. The kiss was soft and unhurried as if Regina was kissing her goodbye. When they pulled apart, each woman could see the effect she had on the other. Regina closed her eyes and shook her head. “Fuck all of this. I am taking you home and making you my plaything!” Emma giggled. Regina patted her on the leg and pulled the car into traffic.

It was a few minutes later that Regina pulled into a private parking lot. She maneuvered the car to the front, to a parking spot right by the elevator, marked Carmichael. Regina got out and stretched a bit. She was slightly apprehensive. Emma helped her with their bags and they made their way inside the elevator. Regina pulled out a key card and swiped it over a panel, then placed her thumbprint on it and they started to move up. The buttons on the panel were to number nineteen, but when they stopped the floor indicated number twenty one. They stepped out together, Emma’s stomach did a little tumble. The apartment building seemed very luxurious.
Regina dropped her bags right there in the hall. Emma did the same. “This is one of the few places in New York, where you can leave your door open, but I will not recommend it. Our things will be safe right here. Most people do not even know the two top floors exist.” She pulled out her phone and pressed a speed dial button. “Where are you?” Regina nodded and indicated for Emma to follow her. “This is Miss Lucas’ home if you need anything and Miss Blanchard is not available, you can ask Red.” Emma nodded. Just then the last door on the floor opened. A tall, very good looking man made his way towards them. “Michael!” He greeted friendly. “Good afternoon Mr. Hunter.” She smiled at him and introduced Emma. “Mr. Hunter, this is Emma Swan. Emma, Graham is our head of security.” Emma held a hand out to him, which he took into a firm handshake. He was dressed in slacks, shirt and tie with a waistcoat. Emma felt very underdressed in her jeans standing between Regina and this man with the piercing brown eyes. “I guess she is the reason why I am working on a Saturday?” He had a slight accent, Belfast, Emma guessed.

“Miss Swan, please excuse Mr. Hunter’s manners. He was raised by wolves. Hunter, I pay you to work when the need arrives.” She addressed him sternly. “Did you know she has a criminal record?” He asked as Regina was about to walk past him to Red’s door. She turned, looked at him and then Emma. “Miss Swan?” Regina asked with a t’sk. “And here I thought you were as pure as the driven snow. I am so happy that Miss Blanchard will remain the sole holder of that title.” There was amusement in her eyes as she looked at Emma. When she turned to Hunter again, her face was all serious. “What were the charges?” She asked as she held her hand out for the file he had with him, assuming that it was Emma’s. “I am still digging. It is a Juvy record. Rumple is trying to get past the red tape.” Regina scanned through the file. Finding nothing in particular of interest, she slammed the folder back into his chest. “Juvenile records are sealed for a reason Mr. Hunter. Please desist your investigation into Miss Swan? And have Mr. Gold do the same?” Graham had a bad feeling about this mysterious woman from the moment Mary Margaret asked him to run a background on her. The more he dug into Emma’s past, the less he could find. It never was a good sign. “Michael, she is shady.” She turned abruptly to him, seeing Emma blush self-aware. “I am well aware of what Miss Swan is and is not. Now stop this. You will be working with her. I expect you to treat her with courtesy and respect. Am I clear Mr. Hunter?” He gave her a crude nod and left.

Regina was about to knock on the door when Emma spoke up. “Misdemeanor petty theft. I got four months in Juivy.” Regina turned to her and held her by the shoulders. “You do not need to explain Emma. I know your life was hard, but thank you for telling me.” She smiled a reassuring smile at the young woman and then knocked on the door. It flew open.

Mary Margaret stood there, her small frame and delicate features very much in contrast to her folded arms, a scold on her face. “I hope you are happy with yourself Michael! Making me worry like that.” Regina looked at her very amused. “Emma, please meet my mother.” Then the little brunette with the short raven pixy cut turned all her attention, Emma. “Oh, you!” She barked at Regina. “Emma, welcome.” She grabbed the blonde and pulled her into the apartment. “Emma, this is Red.” Red overviewed Emma with an appreciative look. She was not gay, but it did not stop her from the occasional female fling or threesome. “It is nice to finally meet you Emma, and I have to say, you are more stunning in the flesh than your photos indicated.” Her words caused Emma to blush, Red and Mary Margaret found it amusing. An entire weekend with Michael and the woman could still blush.
“Did you stop for lunch?” Mary Margaret asked Regina. “Ugh! You poor thing.” Mary Margaret directed to Emma after Regina only pulled her shoulders up. The interaction did amuse Emma, the little brunette was maybe a year or two older than Emma and definitely a number of years younger than Regina, yet she fussled over both of them as if she was indeed their mother. Regina reached out for Emma and held her hand for a few seconds. “I will leave you in the capable hands of Miss Blanchard, Miss Swan.” Her eyes smiled as she turned and left the apartment. Emma stood in the middle of the room, wondering what she would do and when the next time would be that she would see the incredible woman. The exchange between the two did not go unnoticed by Red or Mary Margaret, making the latter think again of what exactly Emma Swan was doing here.

After the three had a meal and some wine, Mary Margaret took Emma to her apartment. As she walked down the hall to number two, she explained a few things to Emma. “Michael is very strict with security. This is your key card, it will allow you access to this floor and the parking lot, please don’t lose it.” She opened the apartment door for Emma with the key after Emma picked up the two bags she had packed in haste. The place was massive. Emma stood lost in the luxury apartment with an open window with a partial view of the city. She knew that even if she placed her yellow bug in this place, she would still feel lost.

“Mary Margaret I cannot afford this!” Mary Margaret took her by the hand in a friendly manner. “Sure you can remember I drew up your contract. But the apartment is part of your perks. It is for free.” Emma turned to her, her eyes wide.

“What?” She looked like a deer caught in a car’s headlights. It made Mary Margaret feel a little better. From the moment she set foot in Red’s apartment, Mary Margaret tried to figure out what happened between her and Regina. What exactly did Regina intend to do with the beautiful blonde?

“Mary Margaret, I did not ask for this.” She indicated around her. There was a soft, reassuring smile on her face when she answered Emma.

“I know, but Michael specifically asked for a T4 contract, which is a basic in-house training contract and A2 perks, which includes the apartment, a cell phone, laptop and expense card.” Emma’s head started spinning.

“What exactly does she expect from me?”

Mary Margaret smiled at Emma, she did not have that answer. Emma already seemed nervous enough. “Everything is in your contract Emma. I will go through it with you. You are also more than welcome to discuss the conditions with a lawyer. What I can tell you is that Michael will never uproot someone without giving them a place to stay. I do not know if your living arrangement will change in the future when you can stand on your own feet, but right now this is it.” Emma looked around. Her current flat, all of it would fit into the lounge. Everything about the apartment was beautiful and luxurious. The bed, made and covered with a soft duvet was the only furniture in the house. “Your household contend should be here late tomorrow afternoon, including your car. Red and I will help you unpack.”

Emma looked at everything. “I do not know what to say.” Mary Margaret smiled at her. “Say nothing until you read your contract. The two top floors belong to Michael. We refer to it as floor one and two. A few of us live here and believe me. It is not rent free, you will pay your keep with
hard work, blood sweat, and tears. No one in the company will envy you this, Emma.”

It did make her feel a bit better. Regina already indicated that this would not be a free ride. “Now why don’t you settle in, take a shower and come back to Red’s. I will run through the contract with you?” Emma nodded, Mary Margaret, let her be.

It felt good to have the heat of the day, and Bob’s Diner washed off her body. She still felt like she was dreaming. Very few good things ever happened in Emma’s life, for most things she had to work as for the rest, she had to fight. She still could not comprehend what Regina did for her or why. She made her way back to Red’s apartment. They were joined by Graham this time. Without Regina present, he did not try to hide his distrust. He continued to ask her questions and discovered that she had a cunning ability to answer, without revealing anything.

Mary Margaret hushed him after a while. She sat with Emma, explaining the crux of her contract. Emma nodded, took a pen that was lying on the coffee table and signed it. “Why did you do that?” Mary Margaret asked. “I trusted the woman enough to quit my job and come with her to New York. I have to trust that she will keep her promise.” All three looked at her strangely, especially Hunter. She did not come across as someone that trusted all that easily, Michael must have made an impression. Mary Margaret got up and hugged her. “Welcome to the family.” She said to Emma. Red watched the entire scene. Emma signed her contract without looking at her bottom line and Red knew that with Mary Margaret’s approval, few things would stand in the way of the kid.

Emma’s furniture arrived late Sunday afternoon, as promised Red, Mary Margaret and Graham came to help her. Graham was purely there to snoop. When everything was unpacked, the apartment still looked empty as Emma expected. One of the last things she unwrapped was a print of a photograph that she had framed and hung above her bed. She would put it back in its place before she went to bed. Graham picked it up. “Did Michael see it?” She turned to him.

“Sure, she did not seem too interested in it.” It did surprise Emma at the time that Regina would look at her photos, but not at a Pulitzer Prize winner. Mary Margaret came over to have a look. It was a magnificent image.

“Do you like her work?” Mary Margaret asked casually.

“Really?” Emma asked as if anyone who did not like it was insane. She walked over to her bookcase and showed them several of her books. “This is my favorite.” It was a book on photojournalism and images through the years that changed the world, the way people look at the world. The author was the same person who took the print Emma liked so much. She wrote a history of each photo and why it changed the world. The explosion of the atom bomb, Phan Thị Kim Phúc, the Napalm girl. The last person to cross the wire before the Berlin wall was constructed, Conrad Schumann the iconic photo by Peter Leibing. The Hector Pieterson iconic image of the 1976 Soweto uprising in South Africa when a news photograph by Sam Nzima of the dying Hector being carried by another Soweto resident. Most were Life magazine covers or Pulitzer Prize winners.
The image that Graham had in his hands were of a black man. He chose to not become a child soldier in a rebel war in a central African country. The logic of the rebels was to cut off people’s right hands, to stop them from voting. Democracy finally came to his land. He cast his first vote at the age of sixty-eight. It was international news, a lot of pictures were taken that day, a lot of news coverage, but no one captured the Soul of the moment like this photo. The photographer had to get special permission to film the man the moment he cast his vote.

A stump holding his ballot paper where his right hand should be, his cross a bold mark made with his left. But there was more to it than a simple vote. The photographer took his photo the moment he looked up after casting his vote. His face slightly obscured. She captured his weathered eyes, looking at her with pride and sadness, trusting her to tell his story to the world. It was sad and miraculous at the same time. The signature in the corner was R. Mills.

Emma took the print from Graham and ran her hand over the old man’s face. The three exchanged eye contact with each other while Emma adored the photo. “You have good taste and a good eye, Emma. You will be alright.” Red complemented as she got ready to leave. Mary Margaret gave her hand a light squeeze. “Try to get some rest, Emma. Tomorrow is going to be a long day.” Graham gave her an access card to the building across the street and left.

Emmas was excited. She was expected to work a month in each section of the company to learn the ins and outs. She was starting with the print press in the morning. She had to be there at four to see the final roll of the one newspaper that Carmichael Publishing House oversaw. They did one magazine as well. The rest was all books.

The most significant thing about her contract was that Regina gave her an opportunity to study, come the fall. The only requirement was that she studied Business and Social Analytics, the rest of her curriculum she could make up herself. She fell into bed that night and just before sleep took her over, she wondered what Regina was doing.

Down the hall, Hunter was discussing Emma with Mary Margaret. Something was not sitting right with him. Despite what Michael asked him, he continued to look at her. The more he delved into Miss Emma Swan’s past, the more his concern grew. The woman was a ghost. Mary Margaret looked at the report. It was only two pages. Her last address was Boston. It seemed that it was where she had her last steady job as well. It was a concern. “What does Rumple say?” Graham shook his head. “You know him, just looked his grim self as always.” She handed him the report back. “Keep an eye on her, but nothing more. You do not want a fall out with Michael. I will speak to her.” Graham indicated his understanding. However, it still made him unhappy.
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Emma is settling in New York.

Chapter Notes

Thank you so much for all the feedback and encouragement. I hope to keep it interesting. Enjoy!

Chapter 7

The executive office of the Carmichael Publishing House spoke much of the owner. Regina’s taste was exquisite and expensive. Her team chose to work in an open plan since they were responsible for last minute decisions. It was easier to call at one another instead of walking to someone’s office. In the spirit of this, Regina’s corner office was of glass. The décor inside, mostly black and white. People would think it stark and clinical, it, however, reflected Regina perfectly. There were no photos or knickknacks, to clutter the pristine office.

The moment her staff started to file in, they knew it was a day to leave the boss alone. Regina radiated irritation and Graham had to wonder if the newest member of the staff had anything to do with it. Everyone was working on as usual. Regina expected her executive team to carry on without any supervision. Mary Margaret ran the office mostly. Regina would make decisions on a few things. She rarely made a move without Mary Margaret’s input or approval. It was the nature of their relationship.

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Emma was in her element. Everything was new and exciting. The workings of the print press fascinated her. She asked questions while she worked. All the section leaders received a memo on Emma and what was expected of everyone. The blonde turned heads everywhere she went By the end of her first week, several men had asked her out for drinks. She merely smiled politely, thanked them and declined.

Graham observed her with curiosity. She certainly worked hard and was more than willing to learn anything. There was not a task she deemed too low for her to do and when he ran into her one afternoon as she made her way back to her apartment, she had a smear of paper ink across her cheek. What was more, was that she looked happy. Much like Regina, she did not smile often. When she did, it rarely reached her eyes. She was curious and friendly but kept to herself.
Graham noticed that she never called anyone, she had her lunch alone in the cafeteria, unless someone asked to join her. Living on the top floor, she had access to a gym, an entertainment area and had to make use of it yet. Mary Margaret kept an eye on her, but it soon became apparent that Emma was not comfortable around other people. Despite his curiosity, Graham’s concern grew. Nothing about the woman made sense.

They were discussing Emma while in Red’s home, drinking up a storm. It was not unusual for the executive staff to have casual meetings at Red’s place. Between their laughter and talk of shop, they discuss their boss and the new woman. Trying to figure a way to get to know her better, on Graham’s insistence. “She does not know me. I can always ask her out on a date.” August offered, he would not mind being seen with the woman on his arm, she was stunning.

“I have watched her and spoke to a few men, she has not accepted a date so far,” Graham answered him. There was a knock on the door. They all looked at Mary Margaret.

“Come in Emma,” she called. Emma opened the door cautiously and peeped in. She could see that she interrupted something. She gave an awkward smile. “Sorry for interrupting.” Red threw everyone a glare as she got up. “No problem, welcome, can I get you a beer?” Emma smiled at her and thanked her. She turned her attention to Mary Margaret. “How did you know it was me?”

Mary Margaret smiled sweetly. David was in Washington, DC, so she mostly spent her time with Red. “Everyone else is here. So it had to be you.” God knows it would not be Regina. Mary Margaret introduced her to the other men sitting around that she did not know. Killian, Neal, and August. She took her beer from Red and sat down on an empty seat. She handed Mary Margaret a small package. “It is for Regina. I have not seen her since I arrived last week, can you please give it to her?” All seven of them looked at Emma in shock. She turned her head slightly. “Alright, what did I do?”

Killian spoke up, his blue eyes amused. “You used the R-word love,” Emma frowned. “The R-word?” She had to think a bit. “Oh, Regina? Seriously? None of you call her by her name?” They all shook their heads. “So I am supposed to call her Michael all the time or should I call her Mrs. Carmichael?” Mary Margaret opened her mouth to say something and promptly closed it again. “Dear god no! Don’t ever call her that!” Red answered in shock. “Just stick to Michael.” Graham looked at her with concern.

“How do you know her name?”

Emma shrugged her shoulders. “I asked her, she told me.” She tried very hard keeping the blush from her face, remembering what she said to Regina the first time she used her name.

“She just told you?” Graham insisted with his questioning, his accent more prominent.

“Sure,” Emma answered none concerned. The unfortunate effect was that Hunter’s suspicions grew significantly. The only one that neither seemed too shocked or concerned was Neal. There was something about him that Emma found comforting. Emma finished her beer and got up. “Thanks for the beer.”

“Emma please stay for supper?” Red asked as the blonde made her way to leave. Emma hesitated
for only a moment. She did not feel comfortable with these people. “Perhaps another time?” Killian jumped up. “Please Emma, stay? Besides, I am in desperate need of your help?” Killian gave her a look that Emma knew melted the hearts of every woman he came into contact. He was charming and good looking. His manners were gallant. He dressed immaculately. “My help?” She asked uncertainly. He guided her back to her seat and handed her another beer.

“Yes, I need a date for this family wedding I need to go to. A ghastly boring affair, but alas, my amazing self is required to attend.” Emma was about to decline as she had with everyone else when Mary Margaret spoke up. “It is quite alright Emma, Miss Jones here will show you an amazing time. Just make sure he does not run off with the best man.” Emma closed her mouth. Killian gave her a dashing smile. She returned his smile and tugged a strand of hair behind her ear, very aware that everyone was waiting for her answer. “Please Emma, a woman looking like you will keep my mother off my back for months?”

“Alright,” She answered. “As long as you do not leave me there and run off with the best man.” He smiled a full, happy smile as he took a sip of the wine he was sharing with Mary Margaret. “Oh love, he is all muscle and no brain, nice to look at, but not very interesting. You, on the other hand, I find very intriguing. Much more fun.” His words left her with a slight blush. She looked at Mary Margaret for help. “I will take you shopping before the weekend.” She offered. Emma thanked her. “Killian, are you going to the rehearsal dinner?” He almost looked devastated. “Aye, lass, but I RSVP’d for one only. Miss Swan will be off the hook for that miserable event.” She made arrangements with both Mary Margaret and Killian before she finished her beer, thanked Red again and made her way back to her apartment.

“What is in the package?” Graham asked first. Mary Margaret opened it carefully with her nails as to not damage the wrapping. She wiggled the item out. They all looked at it, frowning. “A DVD?” Red asked. Mary Margaret placed it back and wrapped the item carefully. She had no idea what Regina would make of the gift, but she would deliver it tomorrow and have a talk with the boss about Emma Swan.

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Regina was already hard at work when Mary Margaret knocked at her door. She smiled when she saw the young brunette. “Morning, Miss Blanchard.” Regina greeted her friendly and Mary Margaret rolled her eyes. “How are you?” Mary Margaret asked she knew ever since Regina got back that her temper was shorter than usual. She knew the boss was busy, they have taken on a few new clients. As winter was slowly approaching, they would get even busier. They spoke shop for a while. Mary Margaret’s, eyes looking over Regina as she started to speak of Emma. “Miss Swan seems to be settling in.” Regina looked down at the papers in front of her, seemingly none concerned. “Oh?” She said as she felt her tummy flipped, she looked up at Mary Margaret with an indifferent look.

“Yes,” Mary Margaret narrowed her eyes. “In fact, she has a date next weekend.” Regina wiped her fingers through her palm. Mary Margaret had a satisfying smile on her face. She knew all of Regina’s trades. “No worries Michael. She is going to that wedding with Killian.” Regina made a gesture that indicated she could not care, but Mary Margaret saw her relax a bit. Regina often accompanied Killian, if he was in a pinch. She knew well enough from her own experience with her mother what it was like for Killian. “I hope Miss Jones behaves.” Mary Margaret giggled. “He will Michael. By the way, Emma dropped this off for you yesterday.” She pushed the package over to Regina. “You have not told her where you live?” Regina shook her head. It made the little brunette feel a bit better. At least she took precaution.
Regina took the package, wondering what Emma would have gotten her. She tore the paper off and looked at the item in her hands. It instantly brought tears to her eyes. Mary Margaret watched the reaction with concern. Regina did not have DVD’s any longer since she got Netflix and even with that she did not watch a lot of movies, preferring to read. She opened the DVD and inside there was a note, Emma’s scribbled handwriting. We can make it a date? Regina smiled as she wiped a tear and closed the case again. She looked at Mary Margaret. “I think you were the last person to give me such a thoughtful gift. The first painting you completed at University.” Mary Margaret remembered the gift. She painted it with Regina in mind. It was far more colorful than anything Regina had, but it was still displayed in Regina’s home to this day. Mary Margaret knew what the painting meant to Regina. It surprised her that she viewed the DVD with the same affinity.

Mary Margaret finished her report and business with Regina and left the woman alone. From her desk, she watched as Regina picked up the DVD again and let her fingers slide over the cover. She smiled and placed it in her handbag. It was the Back to the Future Trilogy.

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Emma looked at the dress Mary Margaret picked for her. It was simple yet elegant. The wedding was at four and Killian said he would pick her up at three. Red offered to do her make up. Everything about it was strange to Emma. She never shared anything like this with other girls. She never went to her senior prom, since no one knew her in the last high school she attended. Mary Margaret chatted away as Emma fitted the dress. The dress cost more than Emma’s entire wardrobe put together, but Mary Margaret insisted that she buy it, assuring her that she would use it in the future. It never occurred to the brunette that Emma had never owned anything like this dress before. When she made her way out of the dressing room, Mary Margaret took a sharp breath in. “Emma!” She asked the blond to turn. “You look beautiful.” The remark made Emma blush. “Are you sure? Do you think Killian would like it? He seemed to be used to only the best.” Mary Margaret nodded but smiled. “Oh, he is. He was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. He loves to flaunt and you Emma will be the center of attention being with him. And he would be lucky. Killian is the heir to the family fortune.” She added with a smile. Emma was grateful for Mary Margaret’s help. She had no clue what to expect, but Mary Margaret filled in most of the gaps and expectations.

“Michael liked your gift.” She changed the subject as Emma entered the dressing room again. “Yes, I know, she called to thank me.” Mary Margaret did not know what to do with the information. Emma offered few things herself; Mary Margaret felt herself growing frustrated. She learned little from Emma, asking her constant questions. Emma possessed a cunning ability to steer the conversation from her, back to Mary Margaret. The only thing that she did learn was that Emma was quite aware of the cost of things, she also observed everything.

Emma exited the dressing room. The dress and four-inch heels, she picked, in her hands. The items cost a fortune, but now that she would be getting a steady income, she could afford it. She was looking forward to her date. Emma rarely went out, everyone always telling her to be young and enjoy her life, but she worked from the time she was fifteen, there were still responsibilities and rent to pay, she had no time to be young and enjoy her life.

They made their way to the teller and Emma paid with her credit card. Mary Margaret looked happy. When she studied Emma, she saw the light strain on her body, misinterpreting it as nervousness. Emma was nervous, but not because of her date. It was the price of the dress. “Miss
Jones will be the perfect gentleman Emma. There is no need to worry. He is quite fun to be with.” Emma smiled at her. Killian’s behavior was the last thing Emma was worried about. “Have you been on a date with him before?” Mary Margaret inclined a yes. “He usually takes Regina. She fits in so perfectly. I only go if David is out of town.” Her husband was still working for the FBI, Emma found out during a discussion. She did not indicate that she knew David and Rumple worked together. Her weekend with Regina was her private haven. She did not want to talk about it with any of them and the longer she did not see Regina, the more precious the memories became. The phone call they shared earlier in the week, was too short for Emma. She missed the amazing woman, not understanding why.

The thought made her sad. Mary Margaret picked up the change in her demeanor immediately. “Are you alright?” Emma smiled. “I was just thinking of Regina. How is she doing?” Mary Margaret turned her head as if to think what to answer. “Actually, now that you mention it, she has been in a foul mood this week.” Emma pretended not to be interested in the information. “How so?” Mary Margaret gave a sweet giggle. “It is not unusual for Michael to be bad-tempered, she is most of the time, but she seemed far quicker to become irritated this week. I know she has a lot on her mind and she is planning a new project.” Emma took the information in. It did not reveal anything. She decided to call her.

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Are you busy? Regina smiled as she saw who the message was from. Despite scolding herself, her tummy flipped. Always. What do you have in mind? She smiled wide as she typed the message. Graham and Mary Margaret saw the smile as Regina picked up her phone. He looked at the office manager with increased concern. Would you like to have dinner with me tonight? I’ll cook for us. Regina felt her heart beat faster. It has been three weeks since they returned to New York. She promised herself that she would let Emma be, but now the woman reached out. Regina was elated. Do you like lasagna? Regina texted back. She received a smiling Emoji as an answer. Then I will bring the food if you pick up a good red wine? On her end, Emma smiled. All of a sudden she felt lighter. It’s a date. 7? Regina smiled again. See you then. It scared her more than a little that she was so excited to see the blond, but she has waited three weeks for Emma to make a move. It’s just dinner, Regina. She thought to herself, but all of a sudden five o’clock could not come fast enough.

Mary Margaret frowned, deep when Regina left the office much earlier than usual. The boss seemed to have a lightness in her step that was not there the entire week. When she was gone, Graham made his way over to her. “What is up with Michael?” Her light green eyes met his. “I do not know.” He sat casually on Mary Margaret’s desk. “You need to look at this?” She took the familiar file from him. It was still as thin as when he started. She flipped to the last page. The information was leaving her with a little frown. “I will deal with it. We can talk to Killian after the wedding. Then I will speak to Regina about this.” She indicated to Emma’s file. Hunter folded his arms across his chest. “So this is a concern?” She exhaled deeply. “Yes Graham, this would be a concern.” Regina might be the most hellish woman to work for, between her demands and the iron fist she ruled her empire with, but they all knew her past. They all promised to protect her fiercely. Right now it seemed Regina needed protection from herself and a mysterious blonde that kept on giving them more questions than answers.

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Emma took a moment to breathe before she opened the door on the second knock. Then she was
there, standing in front of Emma. Regina still had her work clothes on, a black pencil skirt, black high heels, perfectly matching smooth stockings, a powder blue ladies shirt revealing her ample cleavage. Her makeup still perfect after a long day. Emma smiled, as she clenched a fist to keep her hand from shaking. She took the dish filled with delicious smelling lasagna from Regina, waving her in. “Welcome to my parlor?” Regina gave her a smoldering look. “Said the spider to the fly?” She walked in holding a plant that she picked up after Emma took the lasagna from her. Emma could smell the perfume lingered as Regina walked in. She closed her eyes, inhaling deeply before she closed the door. “I think we both know the answer to that question,” Emma answered over her shoulder as she made her way to the kitchen to place the dish down. When she turned back, Regina was standing close behind her. Emma looked up at the beautiful raging dark eyes. Dear god, what was I thinking? Emma felt her breath turned hard. Her mouth was dry. She could not tear her eyes away from the brown once. “A housewarming gift,” Regina said as she held out the plant. Emma took the plant. For the briefest of moments, their fingers touched around the base of the pot. It sent shivers through Emma’s body. Just like that, they fell back to where they were. Subtle flirting, soft touches. “Thank you, Regina.” Her voice was soft. Regina thought she might die hearing her name falling so easily off those full kissable lips.

Emma placed the plant on the breakfast nook. She did not know much about plants, never having a garden of her own. She made herself busy with the chilled wine. She opened to breathe a few minutes before. She did not know anything about wine, well not the kind of wine that cost more than a day’s work at Bob’s. She had to google what was considered a good wine and how to serve it adequately. Beer, yes, she knew everything there was to know about beer and she could make any shooter or cocktail in the bartenders’ repertoire, but good wine, she was a little lost.

Emma handed the gorgeous woman, her glass and as Regina took it her forefinger rubbed over Emma’s knuckles where she was holding the stem of the red wine glass. Their eyes met. Emma saw the wanton look. It took all of her will to pull away. Regina smelled the served wine not letting her eyes waver from Emma. When her perfect mouth closed around the tip of the glass for a taste, Emma stopped breathing altogether. With the sip and swallow, the dark eyes glittering over the top of the rim, her tongue licking a drop from her lips Emma felt herself aching with need. “Excellent choice Miss Swan,” Regina commented with a sly smile. She was fully aware of what her actions did to the blonde. She could smell Emma’s need, it pleased her endlessly. She turned to give Emma an opportunity to compose herself. She felt the green eyes burn into her and swayed her hips subtly but a little more to provide Emma with the full effect of her ass in the heels and tight skirt. Emma swallowed half her glass of wine as she followed the alluring sight.

As Regina sat and crossed her legs, the knee length skirt pulled up, leaving Emma a view of Regina’s thighs. Everything about the woman was beautiful and elegant. The way she moved her hands or when she placed her glass on the coffee table, leaning forward, giving Emma a view. A little taste of the curves below the blue shirt that made Regina’s skin seemed darker. It was a measured and precise movement, enticing. Regina’s eyes changed when she looked at Emma. There was a wicked glint there, accompanied by a small smile that emphasized the light scar on her upper lip. Emma had to wonder to herself if she would ever relax entirely in Regina’s company. If she would ever look at the woman without wanting to undress her. She figured that a woman like Regina was created, never meant to be anything than worshiped by all that crossed her path. Emma could think of several ways to do that. Her lips, lingering over the smooth, unblemished flesh, her hands craving her touch. Emma shook her head lightly. “Everything alright dear?” Emma swallowed the rest of her wine. She tilted her head, as the soft blonde locks tumbled to the side, Regina licked her lips. It was Emma’s turn to smile. So it was not only me that was affected?
Emma steered the conversation to a safer place, much confident that Regina would find a way to get her pulse racing soon. “What have you been doing since I last saw you?” Emma tried to keep her voice light and casual. Regina looked down for a moment. When her gaze returned, her eyes were bright. Until that moment she did not realize she missed the blonde quite as much. No one ever asked her about her day or how she felt. But Emma did. For the next hour, they talked. Emma was telling her about all the new things she was learning. Regina asked questions and told her a few things that were happening in the executive office. They spoke briefly of Hunter, Regina assuring Emma that he stopped his investigation. “You do know that I will answer any question you have about my past Regina?” Regina played with her wine glass. “I know Emma.”

They finally sat down to eat. Emma’s appetite amused Regina endlessly. She was busy with her second helping. “How do you manage to eat so much and stay so slim dear?” She asked kindly. Emma looked up. She made a salad and noticed that Regina ate more of the salad than the lasagna. “This,” Emma pointed to the pasta dish with her fork. “Is by far the best lasagna I ever had.” Regina was pleased. “In that case, we should do this more often?” Emma stopped eating. Her look serious. “I would like that Regina.”

It did not occur to Regina that Emma might be as lonely as she was. Being in a new city, not knowing anyone. Not that Emma mixed, much. Regina asked Rumple to keep an eye on the blonde. Informally telling her how Emma was doing. She knew Emma ate her lunch alone unless someone enquired to join her. She appeared to get along with everyone, but as her nature was, Emma kept her emotions and her secrets to herself. Perhaps it was the reason why Regina was so comfortable with telling Emma things of her own past that she would have never dreamed to tell a stranger. They sat lost in their own thoughts for a moment when Emma said, “I submitted my curriculum this week for my studies in the fall.” Regina smiled. “I know. I had to approve the cost of it. I was impressed with your choices.” Besides Business and Social analytics that Regina expected her to take, she added Business administration and Project Management, for fun she enlisted in an art class and photography. “Are you sure you are not taking on too much?” There was care in her voice, and Emma appreciated it. “Regina, even if I never sleep again, I will get my eighty percent marks.” It was part of the conditions in her contract. Regina would pay for Emma’s studies as long as she maintained an eighty percent average. Eighty-five percent will ensure her a guaranteed seven percent increase. Emma was shocked when she saw her salary. Mary Margaret assured her, though that it was a market value startup pay. Regina saw the passion and the promise there and merely nodded her head.

“I should get going.” She reluctantly stood and straightened the pretend creases on her skirt. Her hand automatically reached for Emma and their fingers intertwined, the most natural thing on earth. Regina looked down for a moment. “Emma…” She swallowed. “If you ever feel like company. I, I live next to you.” Regina held her breath, expecting Emma to lash out at her. She received a soft smile. “Thank you for trusting me, Regina.” Regina could see the sincerity in her eyes and no power on earth could stop her at that moment as she moved closer to Emma, not sure and yet her will could not stop herself as she leaned in and captured Emma’s lips.

It was a soft, full kiss missing the passion and intensity they both felt, but by no means was it a chaste kiss either. Emma left her lips opening slightly for Regina and then the kiss ended. Regina rubbed softly over Emma’s cheek and made her way to the door. As she entered the hallway, she turned to Emma. Her voice, far more husky than what it had been all evening. “Thank you, Emma, sleep
tight."

Emma stood with her back leaning against the door for what seemed like ages after she locked it behind Regina. Her body ached, her mind racing. She wanted to walk around to the apartment in the corner, rip Regina’s clothes off and fuck her until the sun came up. She closed her eyes as she made her way to her bedroom. Regina’s sent still lingering in her house. It gave her a little peace.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

I apologize for the long wait.
Killian and Emma go on their date.

Chapter 8

Killian knocked on Emma’s door at five minutes to three. She gave herself one last look over and went to open for him. He stood back as she opened up. His smile radiant. He made a gesture with his arm as if he did not know what to say. “You look amazing!” Emma gave him a shy smile. “As do you, Sir.” Emma had a Champaign colored cocktail dress on with the high heel open sandals. The dress was knee-high, sitting tight around her breasts and waist, flaring out a bit in the middle. It was soft lace and silk. She noticed that Killian had the same colored vest on beneath his perfectly fitting tuxedo. He noticed her look. “Ah, Mary Margaret told me what you would be wearing. I normally do not make an effort, but I am glad I did.” He smiled his boyish, charming smile again. His short beard and mustache perfectly shaping his face were trimmed, he had a rugged look to his hairstyle.

“Wow!” He said again as he took Emma’s hand in his own and turned her. “Miss Swan, I will be the envy of all tonight.” He kissed her hand and then slipped it through his arm as he escorted her away. If she did not feel like a lady already, Killian’s manner made her feel like one. He opened the door to his red sports car for her and helped her in. He started the engine and Emma felt the thrill of the powerful motor as they exited the building. They spoke briefly on a cover story and then fell into comfortable conversation about work. “Where are you from?” Killian asked casually. Emma smiled at him in a way he could not quite interpret, not knowing all that much about women and their subtle body language. She turned to him slightly. “Are you asking or is Hunter asking?” Her eyebrow lifted at the question, but her voice was calm. “Touché Miss Swan.” He turned his eyes towards her. “Graham did ask me to raise the question, but I would like to know?”

Emma sat back in her seat. “I am from Maine, but grew up in and around Boston.” He did not take his eyes off the road as she asked the next question. “What about you Killian?” His voice held concern when he answered, he was not ashamed of what he was, but he knew it made most people uncomfortable. “Upper East Side in Manhattan.” Mary Margaret did tell her Killian had money, but Upper East Side? “Nice.” She said as if it was every day you meet someone from the elite society. “What did you do before Michael discovered you in that measly little town?” Like all of them, he was up to date with the information they had of Emma, not that it concerned him all that much. He was indeed curious about the woman and the reason why Michael brought her to New York. The real reason.

“I have done a lot of things in my life Killian. What about you? Why do you work, it does not seem that you need to?” He flashed her a side smile. “No, I certainly do not need to work. I played for a long time. The problem is that I never know if people like me for my charming personality or my money.” She heard the bitterness in his voice. “With Snow and Michael, it is different. They have their own money. I enjoy real friends.” Emma thought about his words. Mary Margaret did not
seem to be a person that came from money, but then, Emma did not know her story.

“What about Hunter?”

“Oh, Mr. Hunter has the tact of a bunch of drag queens on a shopping spree, but he worked for everything in his life. He is good at his job. He has some kind of degree, and he is loyal to Michael. That is all that matters.”

“The same as Rumple?” Killian shrugged. “He is something entirely different. His commitment to Michael is very different than any of us.” Emma could hear he was uncomfortable with answering the question. She assumed that it was because Killian did not know that Emma had insight into Regina’s past and her ex-husband.

He tapped on the steering wheel. “Why did Michael bring you to New York?” Emma had a little smile on her face. That would be the question. She was too well adept at hiding to give anything away. “She said I had a talent.” Killian looked at her curiously. “And what would that talent be, exactly?” His voice implicated the meaning behind the question. Emma looked at him amused. “Because that is something I would understand. A woman looking like you, and Michael’s particular taste.”

“Oh?” Emma asked nonchalantly. “She likes woman. In fact, there is a rumor about our illustrious employer.”

“And what is that?” Emma asked. “The rumor is that she can make a woman climax without even touching her.” A rich blush crept up Emma’s neck as Killian told her. “Oh, my, god!” Killian expressed as he watched Emma’s face turn red. “You have to tell me?” He insisted. Emma cleared her throat and waved herself cool. “There is no way Miss Jones that I am telling you anything about my sex life, or lack thereof.” He became slightly animated. “Oh no Emma, you have to tell me?” She thought about it. “Fine, the reason why Regina brought me with her was that she thinks I can read people. That is why she wants me to study.” She kept quiet for a moment. “As for the rumor... It’s not so much of a rumor.”

“Nooo!” He was practically glowing at hearing this. “How does she do it?” Emma shook her head. “Killian, have you seen her, have you heard her voice? God that voice…”

“Soos? You two?” She looked at him. “Really?”

“There are other rumors too…” He pushed, Emma gave him her really look again.

After the not so willing confession, they slipped into a comfortable conversation. They spoke of the night that lay ahead, Killian tried to explain to Emma what to expect. “Whatever you do, do not speak to my Auntie Sally, that woman would sooner lit up a joint with you and make you drink an entire bottle of champagne than let you mingle.” She laughed, she was more nervous than what she led on.

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Emma stole the bride’s thunder without realizing it. The moment she and Killian made their way to the reception, everyone turned to look at them. They made a striking couple. Her blonde features with his dark look. He asked Emma to dance with him right after the bride and groom. If he was surprised at all that Emma was elegant and graceful in his arms he did not show it, he steered her across the room. She smiled up in his arms. As the first song ended, Killian looked at her and made off in another dance.
Afterwards, they made their way over to several people. Killian introduced Emma to them. “Miss Swan, this is my parents, Alice and Brennan Jones.” Alice Jones gave Emma a dashing smile as she held out her hand which Emma took. “It is so nice to meet you, Miss Swan.” Emma smiled sweetly. “And this is my younger brother Liam.” Liam looked at Emma with admiration. Seeing the two Jones brothers together like that, they reminded her of Prince’s William and Henry. The dutiful son and the younger one, with adventure in his eyes, a joy for life. “May I tear you away from Killian and show you my charms?” Liam held out his hand, Emma took it, as she turned and blew Killian a kiss. It was so unexpected that it made the charismatic man blush. “Killian?” He tore his eyes from his brother and date. “Why have we not met her sooner darling?” Killian told his mother that their relationship was new and he was giving Emma time. Their cover story. Emma knew that the best way to lie or to keep a secret was to stay as close to the truth as possible.

Emma danced with Liam, then the groom. She felt like Cinderella. Killian kept his word. He did not leave her side. He observed Emma and came to realize what it was that Michael saw in the waitress. She seemed to enchant everyone around her. She told the truth without revealing anything about herself. Killian knew she would be one hell of a poker player. Her socioeconomic status came up at one point to Killian’s utter embarrassment, but he did warn her that things like that were important to his parents, it indicated a woman’s breeding like she was a prized horse. Unfortunately, many people in his mother’s social circles thought that. Emma only smiled at the not so subtle question. She held Killian by his upper arm and looked up at him before Emma turned to Alice Jones. “My lifestyle has certainly improved since I met Killian, but I have no need or desire for his money.”

While he danced with Emma, he had to ask her, and immediately had a feeling that there was so much more than the answer she gave him. “Where did you learn to dance like this?” It was a simple enough question, but despite the fact that she liked Killian and would not mind getting to know him better, that instance, she still did not trust him. She beamed up at him. “Are you sure you would like to know Killian?” He frowned, “Of course I would.” She shook her head lightly. “I used to pole dance at a club. The girls there taught me all the moves.” He nearly cracked up with laughter. It was the truth. Emma danced in a strip club, for almost a year, but she got the job because she already knew how to dance. Not pole dancing, but ballroom and Latin. She lived with a man and his wife for close to a year and a half when she was fourteen. It was a good home. Emma started to believe that they might keep her. The three shared everything. The couple taught Emma, to dance. Something that was their passion. She learned all the Latin dances she always wanted to. It was those moves that got her the job at the strip club. It was a bit of a more exclusive club, they were not expected to strip naked, but their bodies were there for the show. It was expected to give the men something to lust after. Like any other home, her happiness was eventually destroyed when the woman died in a car accident. The man told Emma with tears in his eyes that he could not look after her alone. Instead of holding on to Emma and easing her pain of losing someone that felt like a real mother, he shunned her form his life and added a pain that Emma thought would never go away. She never got attached to a family again. As expected, her relationships in new foster homes did not last long.

“Miss Swan, I have to admit that you are one of the most intriguing women I have ever met.” Everything about Emma fascinated him. He could not help but wonder how she managed to blend in so well. He knew she was working at the press for her first month and Graham reported that the
rugged, hardworking men at the press absolutely adored her. Here she was, mingling with the elite of society, no one knowing the better.

When Killian felt that his and Emma’s torture was endured long enough for a respectable departure, he took Emma by the hand and went to greet his family. His mother had a long conversation with Emma, Emma smiled when it was appropriate. The radiance of her smile, charming them all a bit more. “He loves you, darling. I can see the way he looks at you.” Emma’s head nearly exploded. None so blind… She thought. “Just promise me you will let me cater the big day?” Emma composed herself. Answered Alice Jones friendly that it is still very early in her and Killian’s relationship to be talking about marriage. Emma’s insides cringed on Killian’s behalf.

They started to make their way out, Killian greeted a few people, as they came to the main door of the reception hall, Emma pulled Killian towards her. “Killian?” He stopped and looked at her, wondering what it was. Emma took his cheek in her hand and stood on her toes to reach him. She kissed him. It was a good kiss. She pulled away. He tried hard to hide his surprise. She wiped the lipstick off his lips and rubbed his cheek again before she grabbed his arm and walked out with him.

“What was that?” He asked the moment they were out and alone. “I do apologize darling, but everyone was watching.” She made a good impression of his mother. It made him smile. “Keeping my cover?” She looked at him sadly. “I am sorry Killian, but your parents are something else. Their denial is so deep that you will need to do this for a while longer.” His blue eyes reflected her sentiment. “That bad?” Emma rubbed his cheek with affection. “Your mother is planning the wedding. Your father asked me when he will get a grandchild?” Killian displayed his shock. “What?” His embarrassment clear. She laughed. Emma grabbed him by the arm and made her way to the car. “I promise to help you any way I can. By the way, Liam knows.” Killian stood frozen. He loved his brother, both of them gave up much to make their parents happy. Killian knew that Liam had a girlfriend that did not meet expectations, but he was also not the heir to the family legacy. Money aside, it was the Jones legacy Killian was responsible for. The Jones brothers were infamous for their parties. Both had VIP status in any club that was worth it in New York. They often went out together and then discovered what they did the next day on Facebook. It was becoming harder for Killian to keep to his scene and not be found out.

“Your Auntie Sally is something unreal,” Emma commented as they drove back. She was also the only person at the party that Emma found to be a person and not a status symbol. Emma enjoyed her company. Emma turned amused to Killian. “What do you think your mother would say if she knew I was only a waitress a month ago? Your mother asked me to join some charity organization. I did not give her a clear answer.” Killian smiled. “It is fine. I will deal with it. Other women would kill for an invitation to her charity society. As for your first question, somehow I think my mother will make the exception with you. You fitted in nicely, by tomorrow you will be on the front page of every paper.” Emma never thought about that. “Well, in that case, Hunter can start leaving me alone. He can read the paper and find everything he needs.” It did not bother her what Hunter nor the press might find out about her. It was not her story that embarrassed her, god so many other children were so much worse off, it was the fact that the man made an assumption. If he had asked her to her face, she would have told him. She did not like people prying into her life because she had learned, knowledge is power. With a lot of people, she found that any knowledge is used to hurt. She stopped counting the time's foster parents threaten her to tell a boyfriend or the school that she was just an unwanted orphan. Back then it scared her; now, she could not give a shit. After Juvy the threats got worse. So what, she stole food. They were four foster kids. Starving, neglected. It got her out of that damn abused home.
“So what are you going to tell Hunter?” Killian looked at her for a moment. “For one thing, that you are a good kisser, for another that you have the beauty and elegance of Grace of Monaco.” She shook her head at his antics. It was when he had them safe back at the apartment that he took a serious turn. “Thank you for making an utterly dull night bearable. And if I may have the pleasure of your company in the future, I would be delighted.” It made Emma blush. As he walked her to her door, he stopped in the light and asked her the question. “Emma, I do not care who you are, or why you are so apt at hiding, I like you, and I would like to get to know you better.” She looked at him. She could see that the question he wanted to ask was both important to him and very hard to ask. “It is alright Killian, ask.”

“Are you here to hurt Regina?” The name felt strange on his lips, but there was a time she was only Regina to him. Emma turned her head. “Is this what it’s all about? Hunter and his suspicions?” Killian nodded. “God, that man is even more stupid than I thought.” Emma’s voice was angry. “What does he think? That I work for Bob undercover for nearly eight months in the hope that Regina’s car would break down in that fucked up town? That I work for Leopold?” She stepped closer to Killian and poked him in the chest. “That I am so evil and devious that I could help a man that had hurt her once? So you go and tell that stupid fuck, to go fuck himself.” She turned around and opened her door and stormed in without talking to Killian. She exhaled hard on the other side of the door. Killian had his answer. He was chuffed. The next moment the door opened. “Sorry, I am not angry with you. I wanted to thank you for a wonderful evening. I enjoyed it very much.” He gave her his dashing smile. “So did I love.” He inclined his head slightly and made his way down the hall.

The moment he passed Mary Margaret’s door, Red’s open and he sighed. He lived between them. He had hoped that he would avoid the inquisition until morning. As he entered Red’s apartment he, noticed all of them were there. He rolled his eyes. Then his phone rang. It was going to be a long night. “Hello, mother?”

They all listened to the conversation. Red handed him a glass of wine. “Yes, mother, she is. No, I do not think so, she is swamped here at the print house. Yes, mom, I will keep her happy. Can you please send me some photos? I do not have any of Emma in formal dress with me. Yes. Thanks, mother.” The messages were coming in fast and furious. He gave his phone to Mary Margaret. She and Red admiring Emma as they scrolled through the photos on his phone. She was lovely. They did make a beautiful couple.

“What did you learn?” Hunter asked off the bat. “Tact, grace, subtlety, that is why we all love you, Graham.” It was no secret that the two men tolerated each other, nothing more. Killian sighed dramatically. “The groom regretted getting married the moment he danced with Emma. Half the men and woman there fell in love with her. The other half envied her or hated her. My mother is arranging our wedding. My father wants grandchildren. I think my biggest competition is my brother. She is a great dancer. She is not here to hurt Michael.”

Graham looked at him. Killian could see that Hunter was frustrated beyond anything. “Let me rephrase Miss Jones. Did you learn anything useful?” Killian gave him a charming smile. Neal watched the exchange. He loved their baiting. “As I said, she is a great dancer. She learned to dance in a strip club. She is extremely apt at avoiding questions by giving vague answers. However, it is all the truth. There is certainly something that she is hiding, but it is not about Michael.” Graham nodded. “What else?” Killian rubbed over his beard as if thinking hard. Neal watched him amused. “She was born in Maine and grew up in Boston. There was an exchanged look between Hunter and
Mary Margaret. “And she knows you are still investigating her. She asked me kindly to deliver a message to you, and I quote, go and tell that stupid fuck, to go fuck himself.” Killian kept a straight face, but Neal’s lit up his laugh lines next to his eyes and his deep dimples. “The girl has spunk, all the men at the press is also in love with her. She works damn hard. Michael is going to be unhappy with all of us.” Neal got up and waved goodbye. He thought the entire matter unnecessary, just because Graham had an itch.

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Regina stared at the paper while drinking her coffee. She knew about the wedding and expected the Jones brothers landing up in the social pages, but looking at Emma, smiling happily up at Killian in a beautiful dress, was not what she expected. It stirred something in her that she did not want to acknowledge. She folded the stunning picture closed. God, she was in so much trouble. She paced up and down her lounge. She had no idea what she was going to do. Emma Swan made her feel things she thought died with Daniel. Things that after Leopold, she thought she could never feel again, never trust that much again, and here she was, feeling jealousy towards a friend and a very gay man at that. There was nothing to be jealous about. Yet the picture in the paper made her want to rip Killian’s beating heart out of his chest and squeeze it.

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Regina was staring at her laptop screen. She was trying to calm herself. She smiled as a finger traced on the screen. Regina had the picture of Emma, smiling at her while she sat on the hood of the bug the day they did the shoot. It was her screen saver. Regina often looked at it, Emma’s smile calmed her. Mary Margaret knocked, Regina waved her in after she moved a finger over her mouse pad, dismissing the image immediately. It was for her and her only. Regina saw that the young brunette was nervous. Oh god, what now? Regina thought. It was not the kind of day that she wanted complications and decisions to deal with. “Miss Blanchard, what is the matter?” Mary Margaret started to fidget. Regina’s face went rigid.

“Why do you think something is wrong?” She tried very hard to sound indifferent, but Regina knew the girl too well. Her voice was a pitch too high. She sounded like the day she told Regina that she started to date David. Regina knew instantly that she was not going to like what was the subject of discussion. “Mary Margaret!” It was a low growl, and Mary Margaret was instantly sorry she was sitting across from her boss. “It’s Emma.” Fear gripped Regina’s heart for a moment. “What about Emma?” She covered her fear by a crude demand. “She, she…” Mary Margaret handed her the file. Regina flipped it open and sat reading through the file and looking at the photos. Her right hand was leaning on her desk, her hand in a light fist, her forefinger rubbing over her thumb. Mary Margaret cringed inside. She was dead, and then Regina was going to kill Hunter. Regina placed the file down and pressed a button to connect to Killian. “Miss Jones, can you please call Miss Swan, she is currently working at the distribution center?” Mary Margaret felt the relief. “Get hold of Hunter and call him to my office as well?” Killian tried not to smile since he knew Regina could see him.

They waited. With every minute that passed, Mary Margaret felt the anger roll off, Regina, her relief was very short lived. Hunter came rushing in. He was alarmed, but when he saw Emma’s folder on Regina’s desk, he felt a peace rush over him. So she finally decided to listen to him. Emma looked bewildered. She felt like being called into the principal’s office. Killian stood up and held the door open for Emma, giving her hand a light squeeze for encouragement. She smiled, appreciating the gesture. Emma looked flushed. Her cheeks were a lush red; she was dirty. For the first time that day, Regina felt good. Her eyes smiled at Emma and Emma returned the look. Hunter and Mary
Margaret did not realize the intensity of the exchange. “Miss Swan please sit down?” Killian
brought a chair into the office for Emma at that moment. Regina noticed several things. Hunter did
not get up to give Emma his seat, he and Killian exchanged more than their mutual dislike look,
Hunter also seemed smug, Mary Margaret caught on. She was terrified. Emma looked beautiful as
always, even with the functional jeans and a flannel shirt.

“Miss Swan we seem to have a bit of a situation. I would like to clear up the matter with you.”
Emma recognized the playful undertone immediately and relaxed. Mary Margaret and Graham did
not know the tone, neither have heard Regina being playful. She only sounded sarcastic. She
pushed the file over to Emma. “Mr. Hunter cannot find a birth certificate for you, and let’s not
forget, you do not have a paper trail.” Emma thought that she would shit herself at Regina’s tone had
it not been for Regina’s eyes sparkling with mischief. “Oh.” Was all Emma said. She frowned
profusely. “I was mostly paid in cash.” She said as if it would explain everything. Regina sat back
in her chair, her eyes intense. “That does not concern me so much as the fact that you apparently
were not born. I did think to myself that you could be Aphrodite, but Mr. Hunter apparently is going
for Athena.” Emma’s eyes when wide and then she burst with laughter. It was clear and free and
dispelled much of Regina’s anger. “So he thinks I sprung fully grown from the head of Zeus?”
Regina’s sense of humor was classic. “Personally, I like the theory,” Regina added. "I mean it is the
only logical explanation there is?” Hunter was fuming. He knew crossing Regina would have
repercussions, but this was humiliating, even for Regina.

“So Miss Swan, are you Athena?” Emma smiled. “I can honestly say that I am not Miss Michael,”
Emma answered as she looked deep into those dark pools. The term that became Emma’s term for
her stirred Regina. She felt a wave of sadness and joy and pride and Emma saw all of it in her eyes.
“That will be all Miss Swan, thank you for responding to my request so fast.” Emma nodded and
got up. “I do have a document. I will make a copy for you for the file.” Her eyes never left
Regina’s. “Thank you, Miss Swan.”

Graham could not keep his anger in any longer. “Miss Blanchard is the office manager. You should
hand a copy to her, for someone that has nothing to hide, you sure as hell keep a lot of secrets
Emma.” Emma stood frozen in the door. Regina lost her temper completely but kept out of it. She
wanted to see what Emma did. Hunter carried on. “What are you so afraid I will find? That you
were a stripper. Not a lot of things more humiliating than being a whore.” Emma blushed. Regina
wanted to stop it, to protect Emma, because she could not tell if Emma was ashamed or angry.

“I can assure you, Mr. Hunter. There are a lot of things worse than trying to stay alive and paying the
rent by stripping.” Her body language changed and Regina let her be. “Mr. Hunter if you displayed
any form of decency and asked me your questions directly instead of your underhanded conduct by
using Miss Jones and Miss Blanchard to fish for information on my private affairs. Embarrassing me
in front of Miss Michael on the first occasion meeting me, by violating my civil rights as a minor. I
might have answered you.” She turned to face him full on. “You are a coward by not confronting
me heads on. It is not my issue if you have unrequited love for Miss Michael. Or that Killian has
more charm than you with women. Most of all, it is not in my nature to judge a man by his standing
in life, but since you do feel so inadequate around your colleagues, I can tell you that you have the
brain function of an eggplant and the disposition of a bunch of drag queens on a shopping spree.”
Regina coughed to keep herself from laughing. “Thank you, Miss Swan, you are dismissed.”
“I apologize for my outburst. I will deliver that document to you tonight.” With that Emma left, when she stood up the first time, she opened the door slightly and did not close it when she ripped Graham apart. Killian mouthed a, _oh my god_ to her as she passed him. She used his line. It pleased him, she only made it sound far cooler. Her phone bleeped twice. Regina, eggplant?

*Should I have used aubergine instead?* Emma texted back. The other text was Leroy in printing. *You still have a job sister?* She smiled. *Yes, thank you, Grumpy.* She answered the gruff man by his nickname. A most suited nickname at that. He was by far the most unlike person at the press. To her surprise, Mary Margaret managed to slip in a text as well, *Graham is in love with Regina!!!!* A lot about Graham made so much sense to Mary Margaret, all of a sudden, including his insistence on finding Emma guilty of something. He must have seen the way Regina looked at Emma. If he saw her as a rival that got attention, Emma was screwed.

In the office, there was a fierce argument. Yes, Emma and Regina humiliated Graham, but he was instructed to leave the matter. He did not. He called Emma a whore and _that_, Regina could not forgive. “Do I remember incorrectly, or did I tell you that first day to let the investigation into Emma go?” Hunter shook his head. “Was I in any way unclear about my request?” He indicated no again. “And then to make matters worse, you rope in two more of the executive staff. Do you want to get fired, Graham?” He shook his head again. His mind was racing. How did Emma know? No one knew. He kept his feelings locked up. Admiring Regina from a distance. It made him think again that Emma knew things that she should not. “Michael,” his accent was thick when he spoke. He did not meet her eyes. “She knows things that she should not. She gets along with everyone, and I mean every one. Leroy, Leroy of all people had drinks with her! No one likes Leroy! It is as if she knows people and their ways even before she talks to them. She has no paper trail, no birth certificate. There is something wrong!” He finally looked at her defeated. “She has worked here for a month and truthfully Michael, she even broke through all your defenses.” Regina looked at Mary Margaret. “What do you think?” Mary Margaret did not want to get into it, but she had to. “There is more Regina. She does not call anyone. She does not e-mail anyone. She has no accounts. Not clothing accounts, Google, Facebook, Twitter, anything. She is not subscribed to a single thing. She has no electronic footprint. Her personal phone was a pay as you go. She has never had a contract. Not with a service provider, nor a cable company. Her bank deposits are infrequent, and her bank balance is horrific. That alone is a red flag that you refuse to see! I do not know why.” Regina listened to everything, the information depressing her far more than what she showed on her face. She sat in silence for a moment. Regina saw the wasted potential, a hard working girl that needed a break. She never thought about Emma’s life.

Regina knew her life was hard. She knew Emma did not trust. When Regina spoke again her voice was strained, she was trying to keep the tears from her eyes. “I asked her four times to come with me. Four times! Eventually, I left, without her. When I got to the off ramp, I turned around and told her that she would regret not getting in my car for the rest of her life. She trusts no one! I did not think she would come. But she took a chance. I have not regretted my decision, and until now, I cannot think that she regretted it.” Regina looked out of the window. Her heart was pounding, she was angry, sad and utterly discussed with herself for not keeping Emma in mind more. Her silence made both employees very nervous.

“I need you to stop what you are doing Mr. Hunter. Miss Swan is not a corporate spy, neither is she working for Leopold.”
“How do you know that Michael? How can you be so certain? She knows about Leopold, and she did not Google you! How the hell does she know that?” Regina looked at him. She was tired. “Because I told her.” At the admission, Mary Margaret and Graham looked shocked. “The next time you are in my office, for this reason, it will go down much differently. Stay away from Emma.” She dismissed them in no uncertain terms.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

All kinds of things being revealed in this chapter.

Chapter Notes

Warning, this chapter is a bit darker. Explanations of self-inflicted injuries, cutting and S/M. If this is triggers for you, please do not read. Some F/F fluff with a tad of D/S. Reference to child abuse, physical/ emotional abuse, and alcohol abuse. Please let me know if I need to change this story from Mature to Explicit?

Chapter 9

Regina made a call straight after the two left. She thought about it. Regina never thought about her lifestyle. In fact, she has been out several times to exclusive clubs that catered to her taste, since Emma came to New York. Gods only know she needed to rid herself of the lust the blonde created. But this call was different. She knew she would feel better after she went out, but for some reason, she thought about Emma and what she would think. Regina shook her head. She needed this distraction.

Emma received several strange looks as she made her way through the cafeteria. She felt deflated. Emma was numb to words, mostly, but she started to connect with people over the last month. Hunter’s words had hurt, far more than what she would admit. She could not give a shit what he thought. Killian took it in a stride, but she did not believe it was something that would go down all that well with Mary Margaret. Mostly she did not want Regina to find out the way she did.

Emma did receive a message from Regina, Stripper? With a little devil emoji. She replied, pole dancer, more flexible… She received a ROTFLMAO. It did make her feel better, but only a little bit. There were so many things in her life that Regina was not aware of. So many things they did not know about each other. “Emma?” She looked for the man who called her. It was Neal Cassidy. She smiled at him and joined him for lunch. His plate was packed, but he gulped it down, using his fork as a spoon. Emma smiled, she knew there was a reason why she liked Neal even if she did not have much contact with him. She sat down. He looked at her own stacked plate. He smiled, and they continued to eat in relative silence.

“How many homes were you in?” Emma asked out of the blue. He looked at her and shrugged his shoulders. “Eighteen.” He answered. Like her, he did not like talking about his past all that much. He watched as she finished her food in record time and then he clicked. She did not ask the question out of curiosity. She asked because she wanted to know. He sat back in his seat with his arms folded over his chest. His face creased with his unique laugh lines. “What?” Emma asked after she
swallowed a lump of food. “I all of a sudden understand.” She frowned. “What?” He laughed, she felt instantly better. His laugh was genuine and carefree. He was a real person. “Hunter and his obsessive mission.” Emma rolled her eyes. “He cannot find your paper trail because there is no paper to find?” He continued to laugh. “You have no birth certificate. Because no one knows when you were born. Probably got registered when you were eight and picked your own name. Why Swan?”

“I felt like the ugly duckling.” His brown eyes bore into hers. “And what a beautiful swan you did turn into.” She tugged her hair back behind her ears, finishing her food. “What about you? How many homes?”

“twenty-four.” She answered.

“Ouch, bad girl!” He mocked. “Where?” Emma knew she would tell him most things. It was just the way it was between foster kids. You did not have to tell another foster kid you had a shitty life, they had one too. “Boston mostly.” He nodded.

“Ever been in that home on the East End? With that woman with the funny shoes.” Emma smiled. He did not trust either. “Green cross Granny,” Emma answered, he laughed. “That’s the one, she was terrifying, never knew which eye to look at.” Emma laughed. The woman had two squint eyes. She always told the kids to look her straight in the eyes if she thought they were lying to her, which was often. They exchanged a few stories. “You know, this practically makes us brother and sister,” Neal said after Emma told him of a particular encounter she had at the home. They both had stints there, just never at the same time, but it turned out they knew a lot of the same kids. “So little sis? Is it true you got called in this morning to the Evil Queen’s office and walked out of there still having a job?”

“Evil Queen?” Emma asked. “Michael has a reputation.” He smiled.

“I was not the one in trouble, so yes, I still have my job.” Neal whistled. “So it was Snow and that idiot that was in trouble. Did she fire Hunter?” Emma pulled up her shoulders, she did not know and more importantly, she did not care.

“I live next to you, drop by some time, have a beer with me? We can trade several abuse stories! I need to get back to the press now.” Emma’s eyes lit up. “You work at the press?” He frowned a bit. “No, I maintain it.” He could see Emma’s excitement. “You worked there last month?”

“Yes, I loved it.” He nodded his head. “Fascinating machine isn’t she?” It was Emma’s turn to frown. “She, really? With that body, it is definitely a he.” They spoke a bit about his work and the machines he maintained, besides the print press, as a facility manager, all machines were his responsibility. Emma understood well as to why he related to them as if they had personalities and their own kinks. He loved his job. He would never work with anything other than machines. Machines never lied, and they never judged.

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Regina left the office early and returned home late. She was exhausted, very unlike her, she just took her clothes off and crawled under the silk sheets. She felt better. She always did after a session with Mistress Dianne. She did not seek the woman often, but when she did, she was desperate and in so much need. Dianne asked her the same questions again. Why are you here? The tears eventually ran down Regina’s face, but this time, no matter what her Mistress did, she did not answer the question. Why was it so hard? Why could she not admit, even to herself what the problem was?
She wiped fresh tears again. Her body ached. The other question as always was, why are you doing this? Dianne knew very well who her pet for the night was, despite the fact that they never spoke of it. She also knew that Regina was a player and a dominant. So why did this strong woman come to her, to be submissive every once in a while? Regina knew the answer. Her relationship with Dianne was not of a sexual nature. Sure, they had sex sometimes, but it was never the reason why Regina went there. During the time she was Mistress Dianne’s, everything else fell away. Her power, her dominance and with it board meetings, decisions, responsibilities, but most of all, for a few hours Regina did not need to think. She only had to feel, relax, give in to the pain, release her fears. It was what she needed today. So Regina was one of the few dominants that now and again seek to be submissive and the Mistress that she trusted with this, earned that trust. Regina would never go to anyone else for this type of release.

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Emma knocked on Regina’s door. When she did not answer, she slipped a copy of her official registration under the door. She thought about going home and then decided to take Neal up on his offer. He pulled her into a hug when he opened and saw her there. He had a few friends but normally went out with them. Ruby visited now and then and unbeknown to everyone, Rumple. Emma was a refreshing sight. He grabbed a beer for her while she looked around. All the apartments were the same, except for Regina’s which was bigger. But like Mary Margaret and Red, Neal’s apartment was so him. It was sparsely decorated. It would not surprise her one bit if most of his stuff were still in boxes. Gods knows, she did not unpack everything. He had a workbench in his lounge with electronic equipment and circuit boards, half assembled PC’s and what looked like a homemade drone. She made a mental note to ask him if he liked Popular Mechanics. They sat together on the only couch it made her laugh, thinking that her own home had only one couch. They spoke of work, different homes, they were in and exchanged some horror stories. It was so easy to talk to him. She also imagined that he would go to one of these fancy parties the company hosted and when he felt it was time, he would tell one of his most horrific stories only to observe the reaction of the posh people and then made his leave with a laugh. Normally it was only other foster kids that got half of the jokes or cracked themselves up at an abusive story. It was a rite of passage for them.

As he expected, Hunter came to see him the next day. Neal was beneath Hunter’s status, they might have both worked their asses off to get where they were, but Hunter thought the rough, rugged man to be unrefined. The fact that Neal was more of a man in most people’s eyes also did not help with Graham’s insecurities. “What did you and Emma talk about yesterday?” Neal stopped what he was doing and stood up to look at Graham. “I thought you almost got fired for this obsession?” Graham gave him an annoyed look. Neal shrugged. “We spoke a bit about that meeting, she was pretty angry about that, then we spoke about her work at the press, she seemed to have enjoyed it.” Hunter was waiting for more, but Neal did not offer anything. As Hunter started to walk away, Neal added. “There is something I have been thinking about. I do not know if it will help you?” Graham turned and looked at him. “It’s the modeling and dancing thing and the lack of a paper trail.” Graham looked a little more interested. Neal stood closer as if he was going to tell Hunter a huge secret. The asshole took the bait. “What if she never stopped doing either?” Hunter frowned. “What if she was still doing it, only off the books?” Hunter thought about it. It took a few seconds for him to realize what Neal was implying. “Nudes?” Neal shrugged, unconcerned. “Nudes, porn movies, stripping. Gods only know what she might have been doing those missing six years.” Graham gave him a manly slap on his back, “Thanks, Cassidy, I think this will pan out.”
Neal watched him go. He wanted to crack himself up. He messaged Emma. *Told Hunter you are a porn star.* Emma did not reply, but she joined him for lunch later. “What were you thinking?” He smiled, that sweet, deep curved boyish smile of his. “Emma he is still asking questions, even after the debacle of yesterday. So I steered him in a direction. Told him that you did not quit your dance or modeling work. You merely changed your genre.” He started to laugh, Emma caught on. Hunter would be chasing a porn star ghost for weeks. That will keep him off her back to do her work and relax a bit. She gave Neal’s hand a squeeze and shook her head. It was a great prank.

Régina and Emma had their casual dinner date that evening, Régina did not feel up to it. Her body was stiff and sore. Emma was also so observant, while none of the other staff noticed the pain that was searching through her body, she was sure that Emma would see something was amiss. She thought about canceling, but she still had that internal struggle between wanting Emma so badly and pushing her away for her protection. Régina was working on a few documents and reviewing a book as she thought about supper. Emma was cooking. Finally, she did make up her mind. Emma did help her to relax. She needed that more than anything right now.

Régina was a marvelous cook and Emma was a bit nervous, her cooking was not bad, but it was not Régina’s. She prepared everything and then waited for the woman to show up. The moment Emma opened the door, she could see that Régina was tired. She invited the brunette in and decided to forgo the wine and go straight for the scotch. She asked Mary Margaret what Régina’s preferred drink was and went to buy it, only to see the price, there was no way she would buy liquor that cost that much, so she brought a cheaper bottle of the same brand. She poured Régina a stiff glass.

“So thank you. Hmm,” Régina moaned as she took a sip. “Well, Miss Swan, your taste in Scotch has certainly improved with your arrival here.”

Emma smiled at her as she prepared to dish up for them. Régina relaxed a bit. She looked around. Emma did not add much to her household in the month that she has been in New York. “That is new.” Régina pointed to the photo print that hung framed in the lounge. Emma looked at it. She fell in love with that particular piece a long time ago. “It’s wonderful, isn’t it?” Régina merely nodded. It was another R. Mills print.

This one was part of a collection the artist did for a charity fundraiser. All the pictures in the series were of abuse. The one Emma purchased was a naked woman in a fetal position, hiding her breasts with her arms, but the mark and half-healed bruises were visible everywhere on her body. The money raised at the auction for the originals were donated to societies that needed funding for the abuse depicted. This one was for women against physical abuse. Régina wondered why Emma picked this one.

“I bought it with my first paycheck.” Emma beamed at Régina. “Why this one Miss Swan?” Emma looked at the print. She did not want to tell Régina, not yet. “I think the woman was incredibly brave, to show the world what physical abuse could be like. The bastard hit her in places that would remain hidden beneath her clothes.” Emma shook her head. “No one would ever know about this woman’s pain or suffering.” Régina watched Emma closely. She felt strongly about the matter, Régina again realized how little of Emma’s past she actually knew.

“Emma…” She tried, but Emma cut her off with a smile and suggested that they eat. During supper, they spoke of their work. “Ugh! My Evil Queen boss has me working in distribution, the paperwork is ridiculous!” Emma complained as Régina listened amused. It was refreshing seeing the company
through new eyes. Regina asked a lot of questions, then out of the blue, she asked about Hunter. Emma frowned. “That is the reason why you brought me here because I can see things?” Regina inhaled. “Yes, Emma, but do you think he is in love with me?” Emma rolled her eyes. “Regina, he loves you, most of your executive staff do, but he is also responsible for your safety. He got caught up in it. It happens.” Regina thought about it as she traced a finger over her glass. “Will it be a problem?”

“Has it been thus far?” Emma countered. “No, only this thing with you.” Emma kept quiet. Regina immediately picked up on it. “What is it, Miss Swan?” Emma contemplated whether or not to tell Regina that Hunter was still at it, but changed her mind and asked. “Why not tell him who I am?”

Regina did think about it, but this was Emma. The woman that trusted her. “It is not my story to tell Miss Swan, and you made a very accurate remark yesterday as to why you did not want to tell him.” She looked down for a bit, formulating her thoughts. “I do have to apologize to you Emma, that first day, that first encounter. I was still so high due to our time together. I should have stood up to him and reprimanded him better for treating you that way.” Emma got up and took Regina’s glass to refill it. “It does not matter. I only wish that you did not find out about my record, or my former career that way. It is something that I should have told you. Not him, that is why I am so pissed off at him.” Regina understood. In a lot of ways, she was glad that she told Emma so many things that first night while drunk. She would not have liked the blonde finding out certain things from other people.

Emma handed Regina her drink, the brunette had to stretch slightly, her face flashed a look of pain. It was only a fraction of a second, but Emma saw it. “What is wrong with your back?” Emma asked as she sat down with her beer. “Nothing, I must have pulled a muscle,” Regina answered. “Do you need a massage?” Emma asked in jest, but then she saw the fear. A moment later Regina answered in her playful manner, “If you give me a massage Miss Swan, neither of us will be able to walk in the morning.” Emma was not fooled. “Let me see?” The request was soft.

Regina sat stiffly. She almost did not hear Emma’s words. She swallowed, all the masks went up. “There is nothing to see Miss Swan. I told you, I sprained my back.” Emma sat her beer down and got up. “Show me, or by gods Regina, I will rip that shirt off you!” Her voice was stern and demanding. Regina instantly knew this was Emma, Emma pushed too far, as she knew. The soft submissive, likable woman had a polar opposite. Right now Regina was dealing with that Emma. Regina did nothing.

As Emma approached her and unbuttoned the top button to pull the shirt back, she did nothing to stop the woman. Her heart was pounding. This was a side of herself that no one knew about. Yes, there were rumors about her being dominant, but Regina the submissive? No, no one knew. It was probably not something she wanted Emma to find out, never mind see. Regina swallowed, biting back her tears. For the first time in a long time, she had no idea how the other woman would react or what would happen.

“Did you see someone yesterday?” Emma asked. Her voice was filled with anger. Regina nodded. “Go to the bedroom and take your clothes off Regina. I will be with you in a moment to tend to your back.” Regina felt bewildered. Indeed a feeling that she has been unfamiliar with lately. She gave Emma a nod, drank all of the scotch and made her way to the bedroom.

The moment Regina was out of sight, Emma allowed herself to let her emotion show. She only saw
Regina’s upper back, but it was enough. She wiped an angry tear and poured herself a scotch in the same glass Regina used. Downing all of it. She walked to the bedroom. Regina was still getting undressed, but Emma ignored her as she made her way to the bathroom. When she came out again, Regina looked at her. What are you thinking? Regina wanted to ask, but Emma’s face had no expression. She continued to mix something in a jar. Regina was laying on her stomach, very self-aware. Emma ignored that. She kept her panties on, the white lace stood out against the olive skin, covered with ugly red and purple welts. From what she could make out, Regina was hit with more than one different type of belt or whip.

“I am going to sit on your thighs,” Emma said, breaking the silence. Whatever Regina expected, that was not it. “It is not too bad, whoever you went to knows what she is doing, nowhere is the skin broken.” Alright. Regina thought. She did not expect that either. “This will be cold on your skin. Then it will turn hot. It is a combination of different herbs and oils with an extra something for the pain and stiffness. It will still be sore tomorrow, but you will feel a hell of a lot better.” Emma rubbed her hands together and dipped her fingers into the jar. It was indeed cold, but it gave instant relief to the fire Regina had been feeling on her back all day. Emma’s touch was smooth and soft. There was nothing sexual about the contact the two women shared at that moment, in fact, Regina felt very much cared for, it brought the tears of the previous day back.

Emma watched the body under her respond. She saw Regina wiping her tears. She saw her shoulder blades relax. Emma watched as the tension in Regina’s neck eased. How her breathing became more comfortable with the muscles relaxing and the pain subsiding. Emma did not massage her back, the flesh and muscles under it, far too abused for that. She made sure that she rubbed the lotion in and then left a thick layer of the gel-like cream on Regina’s back. “Don’t move. Just let it seep into your skin and muscles. Is your back numb yet?” Regina was so focused on how she was going to tell Emma about what it is and what she did that she did not even realize that her back was indeed very numb. “Yes, it is, thank you.” Emma laughed, “Don’t thank me yet, the pain will come back. Your muscles will be less stiff and sore, but trust me, the pain always comes back.” Her words made Regina frown. She wanted to ask Emma, but she was in the bathroom again, washing her hands.

When Emma returned, she had on what Regina assumed to be sleep ware. “I should go.” She tried to get up. “Regina.” The tone was a warning. “If you dare get up, we will have a problem. How do you feel?”

“Better, thank you.” Emma tossed her a flannel shirt. “Sorry, I do not have anything silk for you to sleep in.” Regina opened her mouth to protest against sleeping there. Dear gods, even with her back fucked up, she could not sleep next to Emma! Regina felt slight panic, but Emma stood her ground, daring Regina to contradict her. “Good choice,” and left the bedroom to do something in the kitchen and allow Regina to put the shirt on in privacy.

She returned with a beer for herself and a concoction for Regina. “Just drink it?” The blonde said as she saw Regina was about to question the content. It was a drink that was not in the bartender manual, the sole purpose of the drink was to numb the pain and help one sleep better. It smelled funny and tasted vile, but it worked. Regina swallowed all of the warm liquid.

“Would you like another scotch to get rid of the taste?” Regina nodded as she handed Emma the cup back. Emma complied, all the time Regina was wondering what she was going to tell Emma.
As the blonde got into bed next to Regina, she indicated for the brunette to come and lay in her arms. Regina hesitated, but only for a second. She placed her head on Emma’s shoulder, Emma’s arms immediately went around Regina’s body. It felt so good. “Emma…” Regina started carefully. Emma ignored her and started to talk. “You know you still owe me a story. You never did finish the one you told me on our first night together. I still do not know where Mary Margaret fits in and neither when she fell in love with the Chauffeur. I will give you a shit load of beer one of these nights and cheap whiskey to get you all drunk and talkative again.” Regina felt herself relax in Emma’s embrace. She realized that Emma was upset, but apparently not about what Regina did.

“Tonight I will tell you a story?” She looked down at Regina, for a moment the woman looked very fragile. Emma wiped the dark hair out of her face. “I have had several jobs in my life. The pole dancing was just one of the craziest things that I did. After the modeling did not work out, I tended a bar for a few months. The crowd loved me. Flipping bottles, making flaming Lamborghini’s, running shots from my cheek to my mouth, Charlie Baltimore style. I did everything. A crowd favorite was when I lit Sambuca in my mouth and then drank it. Got a few blisters on my pallet before I learned the trick to close my mouth before I swallowed.” Regina chuckled. She did not know what half the stuff was that Emma referred to, but she could see Emma as the star in her own Cocktail version.

“Needless to say, I learned all my tricks from a foster father. The exact kind of education a child should get. What he did for himself and his friends fascinated me at the time, he felt obliged to show me how to make every drink and cocktail possibility. He literary drank himself to death. I can telling you that is one horrible way to die.” She shook her head, remembering how he looked when the jaundice set in and his kidneys started to fail. It was slow and painful.

“I learned too much in my life Regina. I have seen too many things. Things no child should see. The drink I gave you, it is a combination of things. It is a basic glue wine recipe, with brandy and aspirin added. Not something you will find in a bartender manual. Neither the concoction on your back. It was things a girl, a few years older than me taught me.” She rubbed her hand through her hair. Regina was listening to the tale. She knew the story would take a turn for the worst. “The house we shared. There was a lot of abuse in that house. A lot of neglect, which strangely was a good thing. The man used to beat everyone, for any reason. We were three girls and his wife. We all suffered the same. He mostly hit us with his belt on our backs. Left his mark where no one would see it. Threatened us enough for all of us to keep his secret for him. That is why I like my new print. That woman was far braver than I could be at that time.” Regina was rubbing soft patterns on Emma’s arms where she held her, hoping that the other woman would find comfort there, the way she felt comfort in Emma’s arms.

“So this girl came from a similar situation, she knew this trick with rubbing oil, gel and the paste you put on baby’s gums to numb it when they are teething. The four of us would make it and treat each other. The drink came a bit later. It was to stop feeling.” She laughed. “It is effortless to stop feeling, to push all the hurt, pain and memories down. To start feeling again, not so easy. You start to feel little things, as soon as you open the door, assholes like Hunter would give you a reason to shut down again.” She felt Regina go stiff. Emma looked down at her, a soft smile on her face. “Don’t worry honey. He is not that good! Or worth the effort.” Regina calm again, her mind racing. Did Emma call me honey?

“My point is Regina that I am not a stranger to pain. Any pain. I know abuse, I know emotional pain, I know that emotional pain can be so damaging that to feel better you crave physical pain. I know that it can hurt so much that all you can do is inflict pain on others.” Emma looked down at Regina to a wipe the tear that was slowly creeping over her cheek. His voice was soft when he
spoke again. “Most of all I know how hard emotions can be, that you are so desperate to talk, but no one can understand, so you do what comes naturally to you, you inflict the pain that scares you so much on yourself and for a while, everything is alright.”

Regina sat up at the words, ignoring the jolt of discomfort that shot through her back at the sudden movement. She had questions in her eyes, Emma gave her a sad smile. She took Regina’s hand in her own and ran her fingers over her upper left thigh. After a while, Regina’s fingers moved on their own, tracing the lines she felt there. She moved Emma sleep shorts up to see. “Oh, Emma.” The tears fell freely. She looked at the numerous scars. Some long, some deep, all of them in a square on Emma’s leg. “How did I…”

Emma lifted Regina’s chin, tearing her gaze away from the scars that were far more emotional than physical. “I covered them up with makeup that weekend.” She answered Regina’s question that she never finished asking. “We all have our secrets, Regina. Some are physical. Some are emotional. Sometimes people are unlucky, they have both.” She rubbed her thumb over Regina’s cheek. “Like us.” Regina leaned into the touch. “It is not always our choice. We become products of abuse. We are what people make us.” Regina’s lip started to tremble. Emma held her arms open again, Regina fell into the embrace, sobbing. The last thing she expected after Emma discovery of her secret was acceptance and understanding. Emma held her. She said nothing, she only held her. Emma’s hand slipped past Regina’s panties. Her fingers touched one of the angry welts on her lower back, her finger softly tracing it. “Regina?” Emma whispered in her ear. “I can be this for you.” She was scared, but she carried on. “I can be the release you need?”

Regina pulled up from her comfortable place. “Emma, you have no idea what you are saying, or asking.” Regina’s voice was soft and sad. “Then teach me, Regina? Show me what you need?” Regina looked at the beautiful woman, stuck again between her muddled feelings for Emma. Her need for this woman so great, she knew she would never tire of Emma. She would fuck her every night for the rest of their lives and never tire of her body, her moans, the way Emma moved when she climaxed. In the end, there were other feelings, more, so much more, which told her Emma deserved better, that she should be treasured, protected. There was too much hurt in Regina’s past to subject this lovely woman to that life. A tear made its way down Regina’s cheek. “I cannot do that Emma.” Emma felt disappointed. She nodded her understanding, without understanding at all. She lay back against the pillows. Regina cautiously came to lay in her previous spot. Emma held her. She placed a soft kiss on Regina’s cheek and they fell asleep in each other’s warmth.

Regina woke up with a shudder. She was not in her bed. Then she felt Emma. She relaxed. As the dark head took up its place on Emma’s shoulder and her arm raked over Emma’s body, the blonde held on tighter. Regina felt utter peace. Her mind was full of wonder that she so easily could fall asleep in Emma’s bed and rest so well. She lay there, thinking of Emma’s request the night before. She would love to have Emma that way, really have her, not the soft play they did before. It was a very tempting offer. Possessing Emma, entirely having her. Regina felt the wetness pool between her legs at the thought. Great, just what I need!

Emma became aware of the movement in her bed and held on to the warm body next to her. She let out a low moan as her hands move out of their own volition over Regina. Regina closed her eyes as Emma’s hands wandered over her thigh and cupped her perfect tight ass. They both moaned, that had Emma instantly awake. The green eyes bore into the brown eyes. Regina lost it. Her mouth
came down hard on Emma. She could not resist the woman one second more.

Her mouth was demanding on Emma, her tongue seeking entrance and Emma, oh so willingly sucked her in. Emma got rid of the flannel shirt so naturally. Her warm hands cupped Regina’s breast. Regina pulled away. She was wet, horney and had a lust that burned deep inside her. Emma looked deep into her eyes, which was almost black with lust. Regina did not have to tell her what to do, Emma undressed, lay back in the bed and raked her fingers through the trelliswork of the headboard. Regina swallowed hard at the open, willing display before her.

For a moment she wondered what to do. Fuck Emma, make love to her, play, just love her? Regina’s emotions were in the same upheaval it was at before she went to see Dianne. Her breath came hard. God, she needed a release. “You are here for my pleasure. Do you understand?” Emma swallowed hard. “Yes, Miss Michael.” A chill ran up Regina’s body at the submissive display. She told Emma to come down in the bed. Regina pulled up, saddled Emma’s face. Oh god! They both thought as Regina pushed down and found Emma’s willing tongue. Emma had wondered what Regina would taste like, how she would feel. She was not disappointed. Emma’s hands came around Regina’s legs, pulling her open and down by circling her arms around the smooth thighs. Her head moved with Regina. By her breathing, Emma knew she must be doing it right. Emma licked and sucked and curled her tongue as deep as she could into Regina’s wetness. The woman above her was moaning loud, gushing out more fluid with every movement of Emma’s mouth. “Oh fuck Miss Swan! Harder, suck harder!” Emma complied with the request. The moment Regina felt the added pressure, almost painful on her center, she grabbed Emma’s head with her one hand, trying to steady herself with the other against the wall. Regina felt the orgasm burning deep inside her. She knew it was going to be hard and fast. As she moved her hips, meeting Emma’s demanding lips harder and harder, it struck. She nearly flew off Emma, but the blonde held on, flicking her tongue over the stud on Regina’s need with vigor until Regina could not take any more.

Her movements slowed down. She released herself from Emma’s mouth. She fell back on the bed, covering her eyes, wondering what the hell happened. It usually took a while, a good while before she climaxed. Here in the morning with Emma, without any real play, it took all of two minutes, if that much. She pulled her arm away and watched as Emma was stimulating herself.

“Did I give you permission to do that?” Regina asked, her voice hoarse. Emma’s breath was ragged. She was so close. “Please Miss Michael, let me come?” She asked Regina could feel the desperation there. Her eyes were dark again. She raked her nails over Emma’s exposed body and left red marks there. Emma arched her back into Regina’s touched and moaned in pleasure. Their eyes met, Emma conveyed her need. Regina shook her head, descended on to Emma’s body. She gave Emma a hard nip that would leave a mark under her right breast, where her ribs started. Emma’s reaction was to rake her hands in Regina’s hair and pull her down again. Regina complied with the silent request and bit hard into Emma’s flesh again. The blonde moaned as her hips rocked off the bed. Regina was overwhelmed by the responsiveness. She decided to sate her need with Emma, Emma needed to be fucked, hard.

Regina proceeded to do just that. Her actions were rough and hard. She bit into one of Emma’s nipples and got the same reaction. The woman wanted more. Regina gave it to her, as Emma’s moaning turned into constant begging. Regina entered her with three fingers without warning. Emma cried out at the invasion and relief. When Regina saddled her leg and push herself down in the same rhythm, Emma turned them. Facing each other, Regina lifted her brow as Emma pushed into the hand between her legs. Then Regina felt Emma give her the exact same treatment. They looked at each other, breathless, Regina thrust in hard first. Emma gasped, then returned the favor.
They fell into a comfortable rhythm. They clung to each other with their desperate needs, filling each other. Emma’s walls closed around Regina’s fingers, as she climaxed, she felt Regina was not far behind. She moved more frantic, pushing herself harder on to Regina’s fingers, while the pace of her fingers increased for the brunette. As the waves of pleasure rushed through them, a wall broke between the women. Regina clung to Emma as if she was her last lifeline and Emma could feel the tears burning in her eyes as she buried her face into Regina’s hair.

They stayed like that for a while. Both too vulnerable to pull away. Neither understanding what happened. “Did I hurt you, Emma?” Regina’s question was soft as she lightly traced her fingers over Emma’s back. “No.” The equally soft reply came. Regina’s mind was racing. Something happened, they both felt it, but she had no idea what it was. “Do you want to talk about it?” The blonde head indicated no. She held on to Regina a bit tighter.

This was not afterglow Regina realized. It was different. It scared her and yet she felt elated. She did not want to pull away. She did not want to get up. She only wanted what they had, right now. Regina felt as if the moment this contact will be broken, it will never come back, they will never have this again. The thought scared her far more than not knowing what had changed between them. They held each other until they both knew, it was time to go, that this was over. Emma pulled away from the embrace and Regina could see the same sadness and confusion she felt. She gave Regina a tender kiss before she got up without a word and went into the bathroom for a shower. Regina got up and got dressed. She thought about folding up the shirt, Emma lent her, then she smelled it. It smelled of Emma, as Regina inhaled the scent, she made up her mind to keep it. Somehow she knew, this was not going to happen again. Something changed this morning. It scared both of them far too much.
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Busy chapter, hope you all enjoy
Thank you for all the comments, feedback, and kudos! I appreciate all of the support.

Chapter 10

Emma and Neal fell into a comfortable routine of having lunch together most days and spending weekends together. He noticed a change in Emma. She laughed a little less. She hardly spent any time with anyone on the floor except him. It was as if she closed herself off from the rest the day after the Hunter incident.

It saddened Mary Margaret more than the others. She knew what the eventual career plan for Emma was and that the blonde would be working side by side with all of them, but Regina warned them. They broke Emma’s trust, she retracted. Regina was acting differently as well. She worked long hours. She found fault more often than not with their work. Summer was ending, they all knew it meant more overtime. Regina had already told them what she needed for Black Friday and the Holiday season. There was a lot of work to be done.

As Emma started college, she was almost relieved. She had no spare time. The demands of work with her studies took priority over everything else. It was nice to have sessions with new faces, learn the proper terminology for things that came so naturally to her. She was older than most night students, but they accepted her in their classes without much effort. She was confident that by the end of the first week she broke several hearts when she told them she had someone in her life. There was no question in her mind. She figured out what changed between her and Regina. Regina’s reaction or lack of action confirmed to Emma that she knew the truth as well and that was the reason why they were running in the opposite direction. Neither one could go there again. They needed space from each other.

Emma was slowly working her way up in the company after she survived a month with Graham and Rumple, she moved to the translation section. Graham was half civil with her. He started her off at the security check-in, where she looked at peoples ID’s and directed them to the floor where they were scheduled to have meetings. The next week she monitored the first and second floor. It was the most monotonous work she had done so far, watching the eight cameras on the two levels. She got through the week by trying to find the blind spot.

Graham did not ease up on his investigation. But after a while, he was sure he would go blind from all the porn he watched. He spoke to Neal again. Neal told him, he was going about it in the wrong manner. That he should be looking for Cherry Blossom or Golden Beauty, not Emma Swan. That he should ask Emma what colors she liked and animals. Everything made sense to Graham, but he was starting to think Neal was wrong about the whole porn thing when Killian accidentally,
purpose let it slip that Emma might be into the S/M scene. Killian and Neal became better friends, with Emma as the mediator between them and when the three got together, and Hunter came up, they had endless fun at the man’s expense.

Rumple surprised her. The man was courteous and polite, dressed immaculately in a suit every day, his tie matching his pocket square. Moving at his own pace, his cane always with him. His light eyes looked at Emma as if he understood everything about her. He did not ask the questions Hunter did, he did not treat Emma with anything other than respect. Somehow, Emma realized that he knew and the older man was okay with it.

Her work with Bell French was much more interesting. Belle was the section leader for publications. It included proofreading and the translations of books. The young redhead was enthusiastic about her work and very knowledgeable. Emma instantly liked her and knew from her work in security that Belle was one of the people that lived on the second floor. Emma decided that if she had a choice, she would work for Belle.

Mary Margaret came to see Emma early in October. “We have an acquisition meeting tomorrow. Michael requested that you join us?” Emma looked at the office manager in shock. “Do you know why?” Mary Margaret shook her head. She knew Regina wanted Emma to work with them, but she still had no idea what it would be that the boss required from Emma.

“Nine sharp Emma, at the boardroom on the second floor.” Emma indicated her understanding and took the thick folder Mary Margaret handed her to look over before the meeting. She returned to her desk where she was busy proofreading. For the most part, Emma could shut herself off from people, but in the open plan office, Emma could not help but hear remarks regarding the executive staff. None of it was pleasant and the exact opposite of the people she knew.

Emma read the file Mary Margaret gave her well after hours. She only realized it when Belle told her to go home. She picked up pizza for her Neal and Killian, taking the document with her. Emma asked them a few questions while they ate. Both men were surprised when Emma told them she would be at the meeting. Emma was sitting with a highlighter and post it notes working through the document, while the boys played with their new-found mutual interest. Drones and remote control helicopters. When Emma finally finished, it was after eleven. They kissed her each goodnight. She made the way to her apartment. She picked out one of her new business suits for the meeting the next day. After her stint at security, she got herself a few business pants and shirts. The time for jeans was over.

Emma was nervous and pacing in front of the boardroom. She had no idea what Regina expected from her, but that was not the reason for her nerves. It would be the first time in nearly six weeks that she would see Regina, smell Regina. Her tummy flipped at the mere thought. Mary Margaret was the first to arrive with Killian. He set up the meeting, placing folders and water at each allocated seat. Mary Margaret sat with Emma, answering a few questions. She was pleasantly surprised that Emma caught up with the entire document and had queries with real insight into the business. Neal, Red, and Regina joined them a moment later. Graham and August were escorting the guests up.
Rumple made his way in, in his quiet manner. Regina glance over Emma with an approving look. Emma had a black pantsuit on with functional heels and a light shirt. She looked very New York and Emma had a slight blush when she saw the look of pride in Regina’s eyes once more. Mary Margaret watched the interaction. It surprised her very much, the fact that Regina even noticed Emma and the blush Regina evoked from her. As far as the office manager knew, the only time the two women had contact was the meeting with herself and Graham. She missed something, she decided.

Regina introduced the members of the other company. Sidney Glass, the CEO of a self-made publishing house he established only five years ago and was now selling. The little-colored man seemed nervous to Emma, his mannerisms forced. The lawyer had a look about him that reminded Emma of a social worker. The marketing manager sat quietly. He was a big man, and he kept on fidgeting with his tie as if it was too tight.

Mr. Glass handled the presentation. Talking about his company, the reasons why he was selling, what role he expected for himself and his employees after the sale, the contribution the additional print press would bring to the Carmichael Publishing House, the additional clients. August and the other lawyer went over the legalities, how they would merge after the sale, what the costs involved would be and how long the transition would take. August and Mary Margaret have been working on the deal ever since they became aware of Mr. Glass selling a few months earlier. Emma listened and observed the men. Regina, in turn, watched Emma, her face, giving nothing away. Mary Margaret looked between the two women and the men speaking. She was definitely missing something. Red picked up on it soon enough. Killian had a little smirk as he watched Red and Mary Margaret trying to figure it out, Neal and Rumple looked relaxed as if they had it all figured out.

When August opened the meeting up for questions, Regina pulled her gaze from Emma and asked a few questions. When she was finished, Emma asked the marketing manager a direct question. He faltered a bit, but answered her. She smiled at him sweetly. Regina watched amused as Emma toyed with the man.

“For future expansion, what genre would you recommend we focus our efforts on?” The man looked at Mr. Glass as he answered, “Epic fantasy fiction.” Emma frowned.

“Surely the time of Harry Potter and Lord of the rings are over, as is the time for Stephenie Meyer’s series, what was it called again?” The man sat unmoved.

“Twilight.” Glass answered. Emma smiled her thanks.

“Surely Mr. Wait the time for expansion into new genres would be into books that are breaking new ground in the market, not things that have been done?”

“I guess you are right.” He answered flatly. Emma smiled again, “What figures are your research team giving you?” Mary Margaret responded.

“I have the new surveys here Miss Swan. You can have a look at them.” Regina wondered how hard Emma had to control the urge not to roll her eyes.

“Thank you,” Emma said politely. Regina was the only one that had seen Emma annoyed before.
She knew the blonde was extremely exasperated. The meeting carried on for a few more minutes before they all got up and Hunter escorted them out again. Emma watched the marketing manager as he left. His eyes were everywhere, his body language change drastically as they made their exit. Emma turned to look at Rumple. He was watching the man as well.

“So?” Regina asked. August went first, explaining what a good deal it was, basically telling Regina she would be crazy if she did not sign the papers. Mary Margaret spoke with much of the same enthusiasm, telling them about Mr. Glass’s experience, the role he will take up in the executive office, the extra department that they so desperately needed for market research, headed up by Mr. Wait. Graham had returned and told the boss that everything checked out, all the employees were clean, all their certificates and accolades checked out and from a security point of view, there were no red flags. Red spoke of the designers that would join them. Neal added that the press and the other equipment that he inspected was in superb condition. All of them had visited the site before this meeting. Killian was recording everything.

“In other words, I will be buying a pristine company, with much-added value, especially in the areas that we lack experience?” They all nodded. Regina sat back in her chair slightly, folding her fingers together as she thought about everything. She turned in her chair, tapped a mahogany colored nail on the cherry wood table. “Emma?” Neither women made eye contact. Mary Margaret displayed her little frown when she did not understand something.

“Miss Michael, I only read the file last night, I have not seen the site, I cannot argue against any of the findings of your executive team.” Rumple watched the exchange with interest. The women knew each other far better than what he would have guessed. Regina’s entire face changed and no one needed to guess that her temper was very short. “Then ask them!” Regina instructed angrily.

Emma swallowed and nodded. “Mr. Hunter, did Mr. Wait, ask you about our security systems?” Hunter thought about it.

“Yes, when I was there and now when he came here. He seemed interested in the keycard system.” Emma swallowed.

“Did he say or ask anything about the apartment building across the way.” Graham’s gut turned, fuck, how could he have missed it?

“Yes, he said that it must be convenient living across the street.” He shook his head and looked at Regina. “I missed that.” Regina waved him calm. She indicated for Emma to continue.

“Mr. Booth, did you tender for this or did they approach you?”

“They approached us.” August did not like where this was going. Emma shrugged her shoulders and sat in thought. Regina raised an eyebrow. “Miss Swan?”
Emma was about to become the most unpopular person in the room. “How much is the company worth?” Emma asked Mary Margaret. The office manager gave her the figure. Emma shook her head, “No, not what Miss Michael will buy it for, what it is actually worth?” Mary Margaret gave her another figure. “That is almost a third of the total value discount, why?” August answered her. “Mr. Glass said he is still making his money and now he will be doing what he loves, running the research department.” Emma shook her head.

“Sidney Glass was fired, twice, as a reporter because his research turned out to be bogus. If you look at his hands, they are smooth, as if the man has never worked in his life, but his face is very lined and weathered. That is an indication of a massive drinking problem. The lawyer seemed disinterested as for Mr. Wait, he is built like a bouncer, his interactions are crude, not the A-type personality one would expect from a marketing manager. He also lacked knowledge in his field, he should have answered Twilight instantly, he should also have known that the new markets lean’s towards Fifty Shades of Grey, not teen fantasy fiction. His hands have scars on them like he uses them for fighting, not negotiating business deals. He is also very uncomfortable in a suit. There is one other thing, Mr. Cassidy pointed out last night, that most of the machines look brand new. He wondered how their maintenance worked because they did not have the wear and tear of five years.” Regina nodded. “So what is your conclusion, Miss Swan?”

“You are not going to like it.” Regina gave her a grin.

“I am already not liking it.” Emma inhaled.

“This deal is too good to be true because it is. They are handing it to you on a platter, adding to the one section where we lack experience? A below market price, new equipment. Mr. Glass will be in charge of the department that will determine our future publications? This is not an acquisition, it is a hostile takeover, and it is being funded by someone that knows the company, its needs and the fact that Miss Michael is planning on expanding.” Regina’s eyes went to Rumple. “I have to agree with Miss Swan.” He said in his low, calm manner.

Regina got up. “Mr. Booth, will you please inform Mr. Glass that I will not be signing a deal with him. Rumple?” She called him as she left. August threw his papers down.

“You just fucked months of work!” He yelled at Emma. Mary Margaret was clearly unhappy as well. All of them had put hours into it. Strangely Graham excused himself and let Emma be for a change. Neal and Killian wanted to support her, but they both had been through the figures. They would have been able to expand into every area. Their budgets all depended on this deal. It was work that would now have to be redone.

“And what did you base your facts on? Speculation because one has smooth hands and one has scars on his hands? Do you think they would pin you as only a stripper?”

Red regretted the words the moment they were out of her mouth. A muscle in Emma’s cheek twisted, she gave Red a sad smile. She held up her hand when Red tried to apologize.
“Red, you are who you are because of how you were raised. The moment you had the freedom you went from one extreme to the next. From a super responsible, obedient young adult, to this, a free-spirited tattooed woman. That at every point try to go against the stream, just because you can. It is your silent rebellion against everything in your childhood. The strictness in which you were raised, the discipline, institutionalization. Your very first job was with the woman that raised you, not your mother, I would guess grandmother, once you started to rebel, you could not stop. But that is not what is the most significant thing about you. You, Miss Lucas, treat people the exact opposite way you felt that you were treated, that is where your softness comes from and despite your outburst, your larger than life personality, the values that your grandmother taught you are ingrained, you cannot rebel against what someone made you.”

“As for you Miss Blanchard. You hide. You hide behind Regina, behind your wallflower clothes. Everything you do is in the background. You take credit for nothing. You married the first man you felt safe with, the fact that you love each other is a bonus and despite that, you do not use his name. All your documentation is for Mrs. Nolan, but you hide behind a girl that is too scared to take a chance in life. Your fear is very different from Regina’s. Hers is practical. She is afraid for you. I do not know why. She is afraid for others too, that is why she goes to these extreme methods of security. That is the reason why you and Mr. Hunter cannot figure out why she trusts me?”

It was quiet in the room. “How did I do? From the looks of it, I got it spot on. These are not the type of things that people will know or be in your files. So how did I know, hmm? Did I spy on all of you before I went undercover to work at Bob’s waiting for Regina’s car to break down? Do I need to go on? Tell you that August is only a lawyer because he did not want to disappoint his father? That he would love to work with his hands. And yes August, I know this because you often smell of wood stain and you have calluses on your hands from woodworking tools, it is not just a hobby for you. Killian will never settle because he is still in love with his very first love, and Neal wants to be part of your community. He just does not know how. And you are all too blind to see his pain.”

She was angry, even Neal and Killian could feel it. “So I might only be the failed model, stripper, worthless waitress, but right now Hunter is looking into Sidney Glass and determining that I am right.”

She turned and walked out. The day went far different than what she expected. When she made her way to the floor, she was working on. Several people were bitching again about Regina. “Why the fuck do you even work here is she is such a horrible boss?” She asked the question in general.

“Are you kidding me?” One of the translators asked her. “She pays better than any publishing house in New York.” Emma walked over to him.

“Then I suggest Mr. Whale, that you keep that in mind the next time you are on one of you bitch sessions. I have seen your work. Personally, I would have fired you by now for incompetence.” Whale got up to meet her face on. “What are you? Her personal savior? The woman is a venomous bitch.” It took all of Emma to keep the rest of her anger.

“That woman,” Emma pointed in the direction of the executive office. “Gave me a chance when no
one else did. She believed in me when I could not even believe in myself. There is nothing I would not do for Miss Michael. If I ever hear anyone speak of her in such a derogatory fashion again, we will have a problem.” Her threat was clear to everyone on the floor. “Do you know what derogatory means Mr. Whale, or should I look it up for you?” He sneered at her and sat down at his desk again. Two women’s eyes followed Emma as she returned to her desk. She took several moments to compose herself before she started to work on the same manuscript as the day before.

After work she went to Killian and Neal’s apartments to apologize, they were both at Killian’s. When she walked in, they both hugged her.

“I’m so sorry.” She managed to get out before she burst into tears because of the stress of the day. “I did not mean to blurt out your secrets.” They both held her and soothed her.

“It is alright love, it is the truth, what you said. Perhaps hearing it from someone, will help me move on.”

“Hey, and I am socially inadequate, if it weren’t for the connection you made between us and introducing me to Killian, we would not be here.” Killian looked at them. Neal kept all of Emma secrets. It did not matter how many times Killian probed. She held on to both of them. They sat her down on the leather couch and got her a stiff drink.

“Have you ever seen her cry?” Killian asked in a whisper.

“Jones, I know her as well and as long as you do.” They looked back over their shoulders.

“Should we call Regina?” Neal frowned at him.

“Regina? What why?” Neal’s eyes went wide. “What? Are you freaking telling me that Emma is sleeping with the boss?” Killian shooed him.

“No, but there is definitely something between them.” They looked back again. Emma thought that the two were quite cute.

“I am alright boys. I am just a little stressed.” They turned together and looked at her like they had no idea what she was talking about.

Killian gave her the drink. They watched her drink half of it before she placed the glass on a coaster. Killian’s home was expensively decorated. At times he was very OCD. That was why they mostly played with their toys at Neal’s place. Neal kept it neat and tidy, but he did not mind making a mess in the process of striving for perfection.

Emma listened to them talk and plan their next big project. It made her feel comfortable. She had some normality in her life. There was a knock at the door. Killian did not try and hide his astonishment as Hunter asked to come in. He walked into the apartment he had never seen before, well aware that his visit to Killian was strange.

“Emma?” His accent was thick again. Emma sat up, looking at him. She saw everything in his brown eyes.
“So I was right? The entire thing is a setup. Let me guess, all Glass’s clients are shell companies that turned out to be owned by a larger company, which belongs to Leopold Carmichael?” Graham nodded. “Is he still in jail?” Emma asked Hunter, confirmed it. “When is his next parole hearing?”

“A few months,” Graham confirmed.

“You and Rumple need to look at that, why did he make a play now? How much time has he served?”

“Six years of a ten-year sentence.” Emma frowned.

“That is all he got?” Hunter studied her.

“You really do not know anything about the man?” She looked at him deflated.

“Hunter!” He held up his hands.

“I did not come here to accuse you, Emma. I heard about what happened after I left. I do not know how you do it, but you did the same with me, you were correct. There is no way you could know those things, any of it.” Emma rubbed her face. She was tired.

“Anyway, I thought you needed to know. You saved all of us a lot of trouble.” He greeted Killian and thanked him for letting him inside. Emma knew the relationship between the two men would never be anything, then courteous, but at least, Graham was trying.

“How did you do it?” Neal asked.

“I can read people, surely you can do the same thing?” Neal understood immediately.

“No, Emma, I know when to run and who to avoid. My social skills are that sophisticated.” Killian watched them.

“You two have a thing.” He stated. “What is it?” Emma got up and kissed Killian on the cheek. “You and I have a thing Killian, Neal and I are related.” Killian looked dumbfounded, he clicked. “Oh, my gods! Now everything makes sense. You’re an orphan!” Emma smiled at him.

“Night boys.” She said as she walked out. Killian admired her and Neal checked out her ass. His head turned for a better angle. When Killian saw him, he slapped him on the head.

“She’s like your baby sister!” He scolded. Neal smiled as he rubbed his head.

“I know. I know. But man that woman is built.”

Emma did not sleep much. She studied from the moment she woke up at four until it was time to get ready for work. Her eyes were all puffy from crying. She had to apply more makeup than usual to look half respectable. She liked getting into the office early. The coffee was still fresh. Emma could enjoy the peace for a few minutes before the office was filled with the noise of others. As people started to walk in, she was already busy. A few new faces greeted her, she assumed it was the outburst of the day before that gave her a face. It was well after nine when Whale walked in and started bitching the moment he received his draft back.

“If she has the time to point out my mistakes, she can damn well fix them!” He said as he started to
work on his translation that was highlighted in tracking mode, it looked like a Christmas tree. He was translating from British English to American English. It was not rocket science.

It was after lunch that Belle pointed out to Whale that he was behind on his scheduled due date and that he was to send his draft to her instead of to Michael. She would review his work before it goes to the boss this time. He felt like a scolded child and started spewing off again. “I swear, she has nothing better to do. She probably needs a good fuck to get that stick out of her ass.” Another man chirped in.

“Remember, it has been six years since she screwed over her husband. They and a few more men started to laugh. Whale had an audience. He was on a roll. None of them noticed Emma taking an aggressive stand behind them.

“I know the woman looks like a supermodel, but can you imagine fucking that?” Emma clenched her fist and asked in a low growling voice.

“What did you just say?” Whale was up in a flash.

“You heard me, who on earth would want to fuck that bitch?” Emma colored and Whale smirked. “Oh no, that is too good to be true. So you are her fuck whore, I hear she likes to give it to women up the ass.” Emma lost it. She pulled back and slammed her fist into the man’s jaw, hearing a satisfying crack. He laid out cold on the floor. All the men backed away from Emma. Someone called Belle. Emma nearly looked up at the camera, she knew, would have caught everything. She was waiting for Graham.

She eventually did read her contract. She knew assault of a colleague was an immediate dismissal. Graham would get his wish. He was there in a minute. Hunter looked Whale over and called an ambulance. Then he called Mary Margaret and August. He took Emma by her arm and led her to one of the smaller boardrooms where August and Mary Margaret was meeting them.

“Emma, what the hell were you thinking?” Mary Margaret was more worried than angry, but Emma did not hear it. All she was thinking, was that she disappointed Regina. Everyone was talking all at once and somewhere in between she heard August say provoke and warning. Emma looked up. “What?” Emma asked him confused. They had all calmed down since the morning meeting when Hunter and Rumple informed them that Emma was right about Glass.

“Emma,” August was kneeling on one leg before her. “If you warned them or if you were provoked, we can make a case to save your career.”

“Why would you want to do that?” Mary Margaret joined him.

“Emma, sweetie, did they provoke you, did they start this?” Emma looked at them confused. Then Belle and Lily stormed in.

Lily’s attention was on Emma. “You alright?” Emma nodded. Lily took her hand. “She needs to go to the hospital. She broke that assholes jaw, I think her hand is broken as well.” Graham looked at Emma’s hand and indicated to Mary Margaret that it was indeed.
“And I have a riot going on,” Belle added to the stress of the situation.

“Why?” Mary Margaret asked.

“Because of what they say, you know how many of the men have been reprimanded. The women are fed up. Everyone is saying Emma had no right, but she warned them all yesterday.” Graham and August nodded.

“Good, good,” August said. Then Emma handed her phone to Graham. He unlocked it and saw that she was still recording. He stopped it and played it from the start, when he got to, “I know the woman looks like a supermodel, but can you imagine fucking that?” Graham stopped the recording.

“Emma, was he talking about you?” She looked up at him, tears filling her eyes.

“No.” Her voice was so soft that Graham had to lean in. “He said that about Regina.” Mary Margaret stormed out of the meeting room, Graham and Belle on her heels. August soothed Emma and told her that everything would be alright. He asked Lily to take care of Emma. The hospital was not far away. Lily walked Emma there and stayed with her.

Mary Margaret was known as a sweet person. The buffer between everyone and Regina. But when she walked into Belle’s department, she was another woman. She could not remember the last time she was so angry.

“What happened here?” She demanded. One of the men defending Whale spoke without thinking who he was speaking to.

“That blonde bitch came in here, throwing her weight around. Just because she sleeps, with the Evil Queen does not give her carte blanch over the rest of us.” Mary Margaret started to shake with anger.

“Miss French, how many written warnings do Mr. Smee have for derogatory language?” Mary Margaret knew the answer. She only wanted it confirmed.

“Currently, two Miss Blanchard.” She fully turned her anger towards the short bearded man.

“Mr. Smee, you will receive your official notice of a disciplinary hearing today. In the meantime. Pack your shit and leave.” She turned to Graham, “Make sure he hands in all his access cards and that he is escorted out, with only his personal things.” She turned. Graham asked Belle to stay with Smee until a security team arrived, which he called for right away.

They returned to the meeting room where August was already completing the paperwork on Emma. They listened to the rest of the conversation and what they heard shocked them all.

“Are they sleeping together?” August asked.

“I have my suspicions about them, but I don’t know.” Mary Margaret said. They both looked at Graham.

“They had supper together a few times, neither one ever stayed over. That was only when I was full on investigating Miss Swan. I haven’t checked on her movements in months.” Mary Margaret conference called the rest of the team.
“You are on con call.” She whispered. “Are any of you near Michael?” They all confirmed that they were alone. “Is Emma sleeping with Michael?” She was met with dead silence. “Guys, this is not the time to keep Emma’s secrets, I need to know, now! Is she sleeping with Regina?” They could all hear the urgency in Mary Margaret’s voice. “Neal?” He cleared his throat.

“I only found out last night from Killian, that there might be something.”

“Killian?” He had no idea what to say.

“I don’t know if they are sleeping together. Emma has never said something like that. But…”

“But what Miss Jones?” Mary Margaret was irritated.

“You know that rumor we heard a year ago, about Michael, you know, with women…”

“Oh!” Red interrupted, “That she can make a woman climax without touching her, tried it, it is only a rumor.”

“Emma would disagree with you,” Killian said flatly. There was silence after that, each one trying to figure out how their boss would do that. They all asked Killian at once.

“How?” Killian looked around him.

“I don’t know. Emma would not tell me, she only said, have you seen her, have you heard that voice, gods that voice. I swear that was all she told me.” Silence.

“Mary Margaret, there was that morning Michael was so chirpy and smiling,” Red added.

“What?” It came from all the men. None of them could recall ever seeing Michael smile. Mary Margaret thought about it.

“If they did, it happened in the town when they met, most likely thinking that they would never see each other again. I am damn sure nothing happened here. One of us would have noticed them sneaking around.” They all agreed.

“What the hell is going on?” Red eventually asked.

“Emma defended Michael’s honor by punching Whale.” There was a gasp. Then all of them started talking at the same time. “People! They are both at the hospital, I now need to go and tell the boss, and that is not even the worst part!” She ended the call and looked at August. “What is the verdict?”

He smiled at her, his blue eyes filled with joy. Emma changed a lot of things for all of them between yesterday, and today, she even won Graham Hunter over. “Written warning. With what Whale said, any of us would have hit him. He will be dismissed.” Mary Margaret sighed with relief.

“Please draw up a notice for a disciplinary for William Smee?”

“Again?” August asked.

“It would be the last time August. He called Regina the Evil Queen and Emma a bitch, in front of me.” August smiled widely. He disliked the little man and the arrogant Whale even more so.

“It would be my pleasure, Miss Blanchard.”
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

Thank you, everyone, for the support and encouragement.

If you get lost, please read Chapter 3 again. Regina’s story of her past picks up from there.
Enjoy!

Chapter 11

Regina knew something was very wrong. Her gut twitched. It twitched almost as severely as it did right before Leopold would be home. It twitched the day before the meeting with Sidney Glass, which was why she invited Emma to the meeting. She was right, about Emma and her talent, as well as following her gut. She thought that the stress might have been too much for Emma, but she handled it so well. The fallout had not reached her yet. Now she was feeling something more profound. She looked around when she saw Killian whispering into his phone. Red and Snow nowhere to be seen, she knew she was right. She walked out of her office as professional as she could muster.

Killian did not see her until it was too late. He killed the call and looked up at Regina where she stood with her arms folded, her one leg stretched out to the side, her eyebrow raised. “What is it?” Her voice was low. Killian knew, now was not a moment that you lied to Regina. “Mary Margaret is on her way.” Regina tapped her foot, an indication of her annoyance. Killian opened his mouth, but nothing came out. Red chose that moment to make her appearance when she saw Regina, she promptly turned back. “Miss Lucas?” Red knew that low growl. “Yes?” She said as she looked at her boss.

“Oh, gods!” Mary Margaret thought. “What is it?” Regina directed the question at the office manager the moment she came to a stop.

“No, Regina, Emma got into a fight. She broke her hand and broke Whale’s jaw.” Mary Margaret managed to get out before Regina could kill any of them. The boss went stiff and pale.

“Is she alright?” It did not escape anyone that she asked only after Emma.

Mary Margaret spoke very fast, something she did when she was nervous. “She is in x-rays at the
moment. They cannot find a medical file for her, so no one knows if she has allergies, she fell asleep after they gave her a shot for the pain. She has been under a lot of stress from the day before the meeting.” Regina was rubbing her fingers through her palm.

“So I need to fire her?” Regina asked carefully and in a far too calm voice.

“No, there is more.” They all watched the transformation. Regina’s back went straight. Her face remained emotionless, she tilted her head slightly and indicated with her hand for Hunter and Mary Margaret to join her in the office. They walked before her,

“Miss Jones, can you please hold all my calls and cancel any meetings I have for the rest of the day.” Killian nodded and started to make the calls. He knew Regina’s calendar inside out.

Regina composed herself entirely, for what she knew would be an awful meeting by the time she took her seat behind her desk and folded her legs to the side.

“Please continue Miss Blanchard?” She was all business. They told her everything. From the moment Regina left the boardroom the day before. Emma’s outburst in her defense. Her confrontation with Whale, the apology to Neal and Killian, the revelation of the rumor, Regina stopped them there. “What the hell does that have to do with anything?” She was livid. Her private life was her own affair.

“Killian told Emma about the rumor. She blushed. She did not tell him anything, but the blush confirmed something.” Graham was as restless as Mary Margaret. “The incident has something to do with that.” He finished lamely as an explanation. Regina told them to carry on, at least Emma did not tell them, well not on purpose anyway. They decided that Mary Margaret would handle the delicate parts. She warned Regina about the content before she played the recording on Emma’s phone. Regina listened. She gripped the side of her chair as Whale’s voice insulted Emma. She heard the crack as Emma hit the man, she listened to the outcry and then the recording was stopped.

Graham explained what happened in the meeting room afterwards, what August concluded and Mary Margaret finished the tale relating what William Smee said. Regina was hardly breathing after they went quiet. She was trying so hard to keep her emotions in. They sat in silence for a while.

Regina swallowed and started to give instructions in her usual business manner. “Mr. Hunter, can you please arrange for added security for Whale, in case Miss Swan gets it in her mind to attack him again? Miss Blanchard, can you arrange with Mr. Booth to get a criminal lawyer for Miss Swan in case Whale presses charges. I want him to have counter lawsuits ready for slander and liability, emotional damage, anything that would stick? Inform Rumple of the situation and…” She did not finish as her cell rang. “Yes?” She asked in a short manner because of the interruption. She listened, a tear made its unwanted way down her cheek. “I will be right over.” She answered and killed the call.

“Emma needs an operation. She needs pins placed into her hand. I am her emergency contact.” Hunter and Mary Margaret sat frozen at the news.

“Michael, why are you her ICE? Where is her family?” It was the one thing that never crossed Graham’s mind.

“She does not have a family, Mr. Hunter.” It was another sad truth about Emma’s life that Regina never thought over. “I need to go.” She stood up and walked out. Graham fell back into his seat, without realizing it, he had started to cry. The sight shocked Mary Margaret.
“Graham, it will be okay, she will be alright.” She rubbed his back. He looked up at her with the most serious, sad face, she has ever seen.

“She’s an orphan Snow. That is why she has no birth certificate, or addresses or a credit card.” She inhaled but opened her arms for Hunter to cry a good cry. The man did have a soft heart. He knew, from the moment Emma Swan walked into his world, he judged her, the exact same way he feared to be judged.

Killian and Red were off their heads with worry. First Regina left, then Graham started to cry. They feared the worst. When the two came out of the office, Graham excused himself. Mary Margaret answered all their questions.

“Did you know Killian?” He shook his head.

“I found out last night. She and Neal have this strange bond and way to talk to each other. I finally put the pieces together last night when Emma told me she and Neal are related.” He shook his head. “I need to go and tell him.”

By the time Regina returned from the hospital, it was late. She called the home in Boston, where Emma lived. Neal gave her the detail. She found out as much as she could about Emma’s medical record. Every bit of information tore at Regina’s Soul. She knew Emma had spoken of the pain and the abuse, but to find out from a stranger that the woman she loved had to have an operation because her hand has been broken six times before and they needed to re-break it in two places to fix bones that never healed correctly. To hear that Emma would have been in constant pain and that if she were not careful, she would need reconstructive surgery on her wrist as well, because it had been broken before. Regina cursed herself. For not being there for Emma, for not seeing her pain, for the fact that it had to take a crisis for her to finally admit what she felt for Emma. She messaged all of them from the hospital. She told Lily to go home ages ago.

Lily told Regina that what Emma did was inspiring, not only that but the discovery that Glass was a fake. Lily was the only full-time researcher they had. She did not fear for her job, but working under someone was another matter. Regina understood. She knew Lily from childhood. She gave her the job as a favor to her longtime friend Mal, but Lily proofed to be an asset and Regina was never sorry for giving her a chance.

As Regina got out of the elevator, every door from number three on, opened up. She was tired. It was well after midnight. She walked over to number four. The others joined her.

“Need a drink?” Regina began to laugh; it turned into a sob. Mary Margaret took hold of her and pulled her into the apartment, the others followed. Red knew where everything was, so she poured all of them a much-needed drink. They all left Regina and Snow to be for a while, even David knew better than to interrupt.

“So is it true?” He asked. Neal looked at him.

“Which part?” They all had a bit of hysterical laughter. Regina heard it. They were all stressed out. She patted Snow on her leg and downed the expensive scotch.
“We will need a few more?”

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Regina told them all to come to the office when they were ready and to go home when they needed to. She was going to work from the hospital and let them know as soon as Emma was awake. Without her asking, Rumple already went to see Whale. His lawyer and August had made a fair deal. No charges would be pressed either by Regina or Emma. Whale will take his dismissal without a hearing. The Carmichael Publishing House would pay his medical insurance for one extra month. He will get a letter of recommendation with his full severance package. It was more than fair. Whale signed a letter of non-disclosure and a formal apology to Regina and Emma, taking full responsibility for the incident, ensuring no further lawsuits.

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Emma woke up in the late morning. She was groggy and sore. She sensed Regina before she could see her. “Regina?” Her voice was soft, and sleepy. Regina was at her side and pressed the button for the nurse. “It is alright dear. I am here, you are alright.” The nurse checked Emma’s vitals, after being satisfied and giving Emma something to drink, she left them alone. Emma started to cry. “I am so sorry Regina.” Regina took hold of her left hand.

“It is alright dear. Everything is sorted out.” Emma shook her head, “I disappointed you, I got myself fired, I am so sorry.” Regina continued to hold her hand,

“Emma, you are not being fired, you are not getting sued, everything has been taken care of.” Emma heard the words, but her mind refused to comprehend the information. She cried for a while, Regina tried to soothe her. She thought of the night they held each other, the morning when that electric spark ran through them both. Regina knew, from that moment, she knew, Emma was so much more to her. The moment they started to pull away, both knowing what happened, what they felt and what they were both too scared to admit. Regina tried to give Emma that same comfort.

She started to rub Emma’s arm, talking to her softly. “You caused quite the disturbance, Miss Swan.” Emma could hear the playful tone, she managed half a smile. “My honor is truly restored.” Emma did not miss the sad tone Regina took on as she said the words.

“I am so sorry people think and say those things, Regina. I know they are not true, that is not the woman I know.” Regina smiled, but it never reached her eyes.

“Unfortunately, Miss Swan, most of what Whale and others like him say about me is true.” Emma tried to sit up. Regina instantly got up to help her. The green eyes took in the woman before her. When Regina looked down at Emma, she saw in them the words neither of them would ever speak. She touched Emma's cheek and sat back in the chair by her bed, retaking her hand.

“That time, almost seven years ago when the FBI confronted me, I was a bit different than I am now. I was alone and scared all the time. Leopold one way or another took all the fire out of me. However, sometimes, people gain tremendous strength is they are scared and pushed too far. My father told me that if I wanted to beat Leopold, I had to be smart, not fight, but outwit him. I thought about it long and hard before I came up with a plan to get everything I wanted and get rid of Leopold in the process.” Emma listened to the husky voice. It was calming her mind. It was strange that they found and gave each hope and comfort by sharing their pain with each other.
“I called the female FBI agent who gave me her card, months after she contacted me. Agent Chu, I told her that I wanted to make a deal. We met, I asked for full immunity for Mary Margaret and me.” Emma frowned at the statement.

“Mary Margaret is your stepdaughter,” Emma said as if it was all too obvious at the time. Regina smiled a smile that was reserved for Mary Margaret alone. “I sometimes wonder who is mothering who, but yes, Snow is my daughter.” Emma realized the significance of their relationship when Regina said daughter instead of stepdaughter. It all made so much sense. The way they protected each other, their loyalty to each other. The way Mary Margaret seemed so capable in some areas and yet hid behind Regina in other aspects.

“So what was the deal?” Emma brought the brunette back to the tale. “Immunity and protection. I got us both. We were far too well known for witness protection, not that I would have wanted that kind of life for Snow anyway. I did a hell of a lot to ensure that Snow was safe, from her father and the mob. With the FBI giving us immunity from all involvement, I was set with my plan.” Regina kept quiet for a moment, contemplating what she did and what it had cost her.

It was a time in her life that she never wanted to re-live, she would never wish her fate on anyone. She knew, what she did was a betrayal in every way. Not to the Government, the Irish Mob or Leopold, she betrayed her morals, and at the time, Snow felt most hurt by all of it. Regina confessed to loving her and then ripped her world apart. It took a few years for them to mend what they had, only after Mary Margaret learned the entire truth about her father. She returned to Regina, and Regina gave her daughter what was by all rights hers, Carmichael Publishing House. They have been working together since then.

“They asked me to wear a wire and to place a bug in Leopold’s office. The one place Rumple and David did not have access to. Neither did I, actually, but now and then there would be an exception. So one day I made my play. I wore the wire for a day, setting the FBI at ease, staying away from Leopold as much as I could, the next day I waited until he was in one of his meetings. I walked in with several flash cards. The moment I entered, Leopold acted like always, scolding me for interrupting. The first flashcard said, Get out! The men looked at Leopold. He nodded. I started to purr like the good wife that I was. Telling him that it was essential and that he should be more agreeable to me since it was a discussion for a party for his friends. The card I gave him said, Play along!

He did, we spoke of catering for a party, as I came to sit in his lap, tears streaming down my face, I showed him the wire. The next card said FBI. He fell for it.” Regina shook her head.

She was one angry, pissed off, abused woman that was protecting a child. She did all but pulled a trigger on Leopold and shoot his brains out. “We spoke that evening, but by then I had planted the bug in his office. The FBI had their ears inside. I told him everything. How they approached me, threatened to make Mary Margaret and me accomplices while dragging my father into this. All the while I cried on his chest, he soothed me. Leopold made all the arrangements the next day. All of his assets were transferred into my name, everything. I was the dutiful wife that warned him, there was no reason not to trust me.” Regina shook her head again. She did not plan on ever telling anyone about what really happened, but here with Emma in the quiet of her private room, the words
continued to spill out.

‘Over the next month, I kept the FBI happy with my reports and took control of Leopold’s life. He told me where everything was. His little black book, his insurance policy that protected him from the mob. I knew all his secrets. I had the names of every informant and every dirty cop and judge. When the FBI decided they had enough evidence, they closed in on him. By then I had myself a lawyer. August and his father. Their job was simple, keep the FBI out of the house. They could do nothing. I committed no crime, I had full immunity and the house was in my name, the warrant was for Leopold’s assets. Needless to say, I was not very popular with anyone. One by one, all of Leopold’s associates came to see me. I met all of them in Leopold’s study. They all threatened me, all revealed something that placed another piece in the puzzle for the FBI. Then arrived the man I was waiting for. Robin Locksley. We met by the pool. Robin gave me a guarantee, if I get rid of half of his competition, I will have his assurance on my and Snow’s safety. I asked him for two things, he provided me with both the next day. One was photos of Leopold with the people he considered competition and I needed a legal assurance from him.” Regina laughed just then. “Not that it would help me any if I were dead. So for Robin, I gave him the information he needed to get his money out before the FBI froze the accounts and I showed him what I had on him. We agreed to protect each other. It is a fragile trust, but so far, both of us kept our end of the bargain.”

“Mary Margaret was devastated when her father was arrested. She was horrified at the accusations against him. I left her where I knew she would be safe. In a lost little town called Storybrook with a friend that tended to one of my father’s stables there, and the young FBI agent David Nolan, who up to then she knew only as James.” She looked at Emma for a while, trying to see any disgust in the green eyes. Emma gave her a weak smile. “Do not over think this Miss Michael, you are comparing your inside feelings to my outside body language. It will never be a good comparison Regina.” She sat there for a moment, thinking about Emma’s words. She wiped the stray hair from Emma’s face. “I should let you get rest, Emma.” The blonde head indicated her protest. “No, I don’t like hospitals, please do not leave me alone.” The plea nearly broke Regina’s heart. Of course, she did not like hospitals, she most likely saw her fair share of them. Regina held her hand and carried on.

“So I played all of them. Rumple wanted someone specific to go down, so I gave him what he needed to make a case, in exchange, Rumple would protect me, from everyone. Robin’s competition’s account numbers I gave to Agent Chu, together with some blackmail files Leopold had on them. That with the threats on my life was enough for arrests. I went to see all of them. I told them that I controlled all of their money, that I had more dirt on them, that Leopold trusted me with all their affairs and that if I ever felt unsafe, the rest of the records would go to the FBI and it would bury them, whether I was dead or alive. They all gave me a guarantee that I would be untouched as well as Snow, as long as they got their money. I told them that the FBI already seized one account that one will remain with me, but that I will give them the numbers for the others. We struck a deal.”

“I made the same type of deal with Leopold. I would return all his assets as soon as he signed the divorce papers and handing me full custody of Snow. All I wanted was my car, Snow’s trust fund, and the Print House. He signed the deal. The first asset I signed over was the house. Five minutes later he got a call that the feds were all over the place and confiscating everything. He looked at me with such hatred. Did you really think I would let you win after everything you did to me! My question was filled with as much venom as I could muster. I told him that I now held the insurance against the mob that I had the deals and that if he wanted to stay alive in jail and get out to his normal
life after prison, he needed to sign a few more documents. He did. He signed over his parental right. Mary Margaret was only seventeen at the time, she became my daughter, legally. He signed a restraining order I had drawn up for both of us. And an agreement that he would rebuild, anywhere except for New York.”

“I was so damn lucky. Half the time I was not even sure of what I was doing, how the play would work out, but in the end, everyone got something they wanted. Rumple received a gun with fingerprints on it, which’s bullet was a forensic match to the slug they dug out of his leg and his partner’s head. All Robin’s competition was tied up in trials with less money they had before and as time went on the FBI just received more and more information. The mob was off my back and yet protecting me at the same time. I kept my word to Robin. Snow was safe. Leopold was sent to jail for ten years. All his money was in a trust fund that would be available to him on his release. I had my company and divorce. The FBI busted several people they have been after for years.” Emma had tears in her eyes.

“Gods Regina, you must have been scared out of your mind!”

“I was, Rumple took me away. I disappeared for a while. After the trial. They wanted me to testify against Leo. I did, but on the one condition that Mary Margaret and I would be protected. I took on my mother’s maiden name, so did Snow. On paper, Regina Carmichael and Mary Margaret Carmichael do not exist any longer. They are not employed at Carmichael Publishing House, neither of them owns anything.”

“Then who are you?” Regina smiled at Emma through her tears. “I told you, dear, I am Michael.”
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

A little appetizer for chapter 13.

Chapter Notes

Thank you, everyone, for your kind word, compliments, and encouragement. My kudos are rocking, thank you to all who left one. So this week we were told that Once upon a time would be canceled. I hope that fanfiction will keep it alive for years to come, for readers and writers alike.

Chapter 12

Emma woke up in her bed the day after being released from the hospital. It took her a moment to figure out what woke her. She sat up in bed. The sudden movement caused her to feel the pain in her hand. Regina was with her in an instant. “Easy Emma.” Emma looked at her with questions. “Why are there two men in my bed?” Regina gave a throaty laugh.

“How can I get you some coffee?” Emma nodded and then decided the only way to get out of her bed would be the bottom. Regina held the duvet for her. The moment she was out, she watched amused as Neal and Killian gravitated towards each other due to her loss of warmth in the bed.

She went to the bathroom and then the kitchen. Mary Margaret was there, making coffee for all of them. Emma was clearly uncomfortable. Regina watched her as Mary Margaret moved in the kitchen, very at ease in Emma’s space.

“Get used to it,” Regina said to Emma as she took her first sip of Coffee, Mary Margaret handed her. “She will mother you whether you like it or not.” Emma took the offered cup with a thanks. It was not her mug. The cup she used for almost everything, coffee, milkshake, soda. Her mug was dripping on the drying rack. Mary Margaret did her dishes. Everything about the morning started off weird. The next moment there was a knock. Mary Margaret went to open. Emma felt like being at Grand Central, not her safe place. She looked at Regina, who was desperately trying to find the cause of Emma’s distress which was clearly rolling from her stiff body.

It was Red, followed by Graham. “Morning Emma,” They both greeted her. Red came over and placed a kiss on her cheek and took her left hand. “How are you feeling?”

“Fine,” Emma said with caution. She was definitely FINE. Fucked up, Insecure, Neurotic and Emotional. She felt like she stepped into the Twilight Zone. Neal came strolling in. “Hey,” He greeted Emma and kissed her on the cheek. He took his coffee from Mary Margaret and addressed Regina.
“I am late boss, sorry.” She did not smile or acknowledged his statement. She had told all of them to take it easy, but do their jobs. They have been rotating shifts, looking after Emma. Killian followed him a few minutes later. Emma looked at them where they were all in a discussion about several projects, it felt like a team meeting, only, it was in her home. She knew they did things like this often, but it was at Mary Margaret’s or Red’s. She heard Mary Margaret discuss the day’s schedule for Emma. Emma decided to put an end to it, even before they could continue. “Miss Blanchard, I do not need someone to look after me.”

“Nonsense,” Mary Margaret ignored her and continued.

“No, Mary Margaret, I do not need a babysitter, I can take care of myself, but thank you, all of you for the support. I will be alright for the next few days.” She was met with silence. Neal understood and made the first move.

“Call me if you need me?” Emma gave him a small smile. He kissed her and left. Graham was next. “If you have a problem, you can wave to the camera in front of your door. I will come up to help.” Emma raised an eyebrow, but received no further explanation. Killian and Red followed him after they said goodbye. Emma began to breathe easier. Regina was watching her closely.

“Emma,” Mary Margaret started, but Emma held up her hand.

“I will be alright.” The young brunette did not like it, but she smiled and said goodbye. Regina watched as Emma visibly relaxed.

“That bad?” Emma tried to smile.

“I am not used to people caring.” Regina understood. There were times she felt the same. It did not, however, overwhelm her as much as it did Emma.

“We have been taking turns, sitting with you. Neal and Killian fell asleep. I left them when I took over. Everyone has been worried about you.” Emma accepted the statement.

“Thank you for getting me out of the hospital yesterday.” Regina could see how distressed Emma was during her stay there.

“Emma,” She did not get a chance to finish. Now that she was alone with Regina, she almost seemed more nervous.

“I am fine Regina, really. I can take care of myself. It is not the first time I have broken my hand.” The statement was flat. Regina inhaled. Even at this time in the mornings she was perfectly dressed and her makeup, made her look stunning.

“How many times have you broken your hand?” She asked Emma carefully.

“Twice and one time my wrist.” Regina stayed calm.

“How may I ask?” Emma was not emotionally ready to go there.

“It just happened.” She answered evasively.

“You have broken it six times Emma, which is why you needed the reconstructive surgery,” Emma remembered the doctor and the orthopedic surgeon saying something about it, but she was too drugged up to comprehend what they were telling her. Regina carried on, “They told me you had
constant pain in your hand. Is it true?” Emma shrugged.

“I got used to it. It was only bad on cold days.” Regina did her utmost not to lose her temper. The woman was infuriating. “Miss Swan, if you do not care about your well being, I do!” It was too much for Emma, too much care, too much consideration. She had no idea what to do with the emotions. This was not her life. Her life was complications, neglect, abuse, not care and comfort.

“I have been fine before. I will be fine again, I know how to take care of myself Regina.” Regina looked as if she could kill Emma on the spot. She rubbed her palm and acted all indifferent.

“As it suits you, Miss Swan.” She walked out the door. Emma took some time to calm down. No one ever got close enough for her to shun away, now it was not only one person, there were several. She felt like hitting herself. She knew all too well what happened if she let people close. Regina already did not understand. It was one thing talking about her pain. It was another matter talking about how she got hurt. She was sure that some of her past was things that Regina would never be able to reconcile with. How a door was shut onto her hand on purpose, as a punishment when she was eight. It was the first time her hand was broken. She had broken ribs and had a skull fracture before that. She did not know that she had broken her hand six times. She had to think when the other times might have been. Once the body gets used to the pain, sooner or later things are only more or less sore than the last time.

Emma tried her best to steer clear of everyone. She would answer messages, but not the door, not even for Neal or Killian. After Killian reported this, Mary Margaret did not even try. None of them have spoken to Emma about the aftermath at the meeting. Regina took out her frustration on her staff, but not a single person dared complain. Neal tried to explain to everyone what happened, begging them to give Emma time to adjust. It was the first time that she got hurt with people around her that cared. She did not know how to deal with it, so she pushed everyone away. They accepted his explanation, not that it made any of them happy.

Emma used the three days that she was booked off to study and arrange with the college to take her exams before the Thanksgiving break aurally. They would also give her the extra time to complete her assignments. After three days, Emma returned to work. She walked into the publication department, dressed in a suit, hair, and makeup perfect. Her arm was in a sling with a brace. She had a quick word with Belle on how she would manage her work when Regina stormed into the department.

“Miss Swan! What the hell are you doing here?” Emma turned to her, clearly ready for a fight. “Last time I checked Miss Michael, I still worked here.” Regina’s eyes flared fireballs.

“You have been instructed to keep your arm immobilized, and to rest!” Various people cringed on Emma’s behalf. Emma looked down at her arm where it was strapped to her chest, resting in a sling as if that should have answered Regina’s questions. The vein in Regina’s forehead popped up. Her voice took on a tone that made everyone shiver. It was low and deadly. She stood in Emma’s face as she clenched her teeth. “Do not be coy with me, Miss Swan. You have no idea what I am capable of!”

If anyone continued to think that the two women had an affair, all thought of it evaporated with that statement. Emma did not stand back. Regina tapped against her thigh. “Please come to my office?”
Emma gave her a look. “Now! Miss Swan!” Emma watched as Regina stormed off and then followed her.

The executive office went dead quiet as the two of them walked in and headed straight for Regina’s office. All of them could see from the body language displayed that the two were about to kill each other.

“What is your problem?” Emma asked the moment the door was closed.

“My problem? Did you look in the mirror lately?” They were both standing.

“Regina, I am fine!” Regina started to pace,

“Oh, I know you are FINE!” Regina yelled, Neal, told them about the acronym.

“What the hell is THAT supposed to mean?” Regina stopped her pacing abruptly.

“It means Miss Swan that right now I do not care about how you sustained the injuries that led to this point, what I do care about you having absolutely no regard for your own health or the feelings of others that obviously care more for you than you do yourself!” Emma’s temper erupted.

“I do not need anyone! I have been taking care of myself for a long time!”

“And what a banged up job you have been doing!” Regina knew if she was not standing behind the desk that Emma would have slapped her. Emma was visibly shaking. “Emma, I’m…”

“Oh, now it is Emma? I do not need your sympathy Michael, nor you consent to return to work unless you feel the need to fire me?” Regina shook her head. Emma turned to walk out. Regina merely sat down. She was hurt, she knew she caused hurt, she knew why they were doing it to each other, why Emma was running away, but it did not make her feel any better.

No one dared to speak to Emma as she made her way out of Regina’s office. All of them could see the tears were close and looking back at Regina, they all knew that too much was said. Emma returned to her desk. She opened the manuscript that she was working on and started reading. No one spoke to her.

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Neal wondered if anything would be the same again. It took Emma two weeks before she knocked on his door one night after work with beer and a pizza. He did not ask questions or express his anger. She parked on his couch. He came to sit next to her. She held her beer for him to open, “Oh, so, you do need help?” She looked at him.

“Fuck you, just open it before I pry it open with my teeth.” He laughed at her. They ate, they drank, they watched something silly on the TV. She fell asleep on his shoulder. He rubbed her hair and looked at her for a long time. They have all discussed the situation between Emma and Regina. The conclusion of all was that something happened between the women. Not the fight. Something more meaningful that had them both in a tizzy. Neal took her keycard out of her jean pocket, placed it between his fingers before lifting Emma up, carrying her to her home. He ensured that her
medication was next to her bed and that her alarm was set for the next morning.

Emma’s first exam results were e-mailed to Mary Margaret. She looked at the e-mail for a long time before she forwarded it to Regina. Mary Margaret watched Regina as she opened the mail. Her face gave nothing away, the status quo for the last month. The office manager shook her head. She knew that Regina asked about Emma almost daily. Belle, Lily, and Neal kept her up to date. At her request, Emma’s doctor and physiotherapist informed her of Emma’s progress. Emma recluse herself again. She occasionally hanged out with Killian and Neal, far less than what she used to, she used her hand and her studies as an excuse. Mary Margaret knew Emma was working long hours to make up for the lack of speed she had to type with one hand only, but everything was different. The smiling woman they all met was gone. Everyone pushed her too far, too fast. It broke Mary Margaret’s heart, so she asked Neal to accompany her one afternoon to speak to Emma. She was busy studying. She had a pencil in her mouth and two keeping her blonde locks in place.

Neal and Mary Margaret stood back as they entered. Neither one had been at Emma’s since the morning she asked them to leave. Emma had a washing line run through her kitchen. Several pictures were hanging from it. Mary Margaret and Red gave her permission weeks before to use the darkroom on the floor below the executive office for the development of her projects. There was an easel in one corner, a half-finished canvas and more canvases standing around. She had a Work Breakdown Structure for a project laid out on one wall with Post-it notes, diagrams and sketches everywhere.

“Wow!” Mary Margaret commented. “No wonder you are doing so well at school, you are as dedicated in this as you are with your work.” Mary Margaret got a faint smile. “Thanks, I want to make up for disappointing Michael, after the whole hitting incident.” Mary Margaret and Neil shared a look.

“Emma I do not think she is disappointed in you in any way.”

“Yeah, she said that at the time, but I placed all of you in such an awful position by hitting that ass. I feel like I need to make up for it somehow.” Mary Margaret wanted to say something, but Neal held her back. He knew this was the closest Emma would get to give an apology to all of them. Words did not mean a thing. It was easy to say you were sorry, Emma was trying to show them by working as hard as what she did.

“Emma I wanted to invite you for Thanksgiving and Christmas.” Emma frowned. “Why would you do that?” Mary Margaret opened her mouth, but Neal beat her to it.

“Stop being so rude and just accept the invitation. You are allocated to bring dessert, there will be eleven of us, but Rumple, August and I always eat extra so we will need a dessert for twenty at least? Whatever you drink and a shooter.” He turned to Mary Margaret, “Do we need anything specific?” She shook her head. “And what job does Emma get?” He asked.

“Dishes or drinks?” Mary Margaret looked at her tick off the list as she answered.

“There you go Emma, dishes or drinks?” She looked at both of them as if they had lost it. Thanksgiving and Christmas were not high on her list of priorities nor holidays that she celebrated. It fell into the category of her birthday.
“Drinks,” Emma answered.

“Great, we will expect a few nice shooters, so think about it. Granny likes margaritas and Red drinks sweet martinis on Thanksgiving.” Neal added

Mary Margaret rolled her eyes. “We drink Appletini’s for Thanksgiving and Cosmopolitan’s for Christmas.” She corrected him.

“Know how to make all three, so not a problem,” Emma said.

“You do?” Mary Margaret asked. Emma shrugged. “Stripper, waitress, remember?” Mary Margaret blushed. “Okay, all set, no presents.”

Neal kissed Emma on the cheek, “You are going to love it and fit right in, we normally call it functional, fucked up, family fun.” Emma raised her eyebrows. It did sound like her kind of party.

Killian and Hunter spent the holidays with their families. Killian left explicit instructions that he expected one of every cocktail and shooter Emma made for the rest. He would need it when he got back after Thanksgiving. He dreaded spending the weekend with his family. He knew the first question would be, where is Emma? His mother did not stop asking about her since Killian introduced them. Emma promised to escort him to his mother’s New Year Eve’s ball, but only after Neal assured her that he would be alright on his own. They all took it a bit slower with Emma. Keeping hugs and kisses to themselves and letting her be if she went into her quiet space. They all learned the lesson. Slowly all of them made amends to each other. She thanked August and Mary Margaret for helping her after the assault. Graham apologized to Emma for his behavior. Then Mary Margaret invited her to Thanksgiving. Red just walked in one afternoon saying something about Snow and getting her ass to Emma. She mostly ignored Emma and went straight to the washing line in the kitchen. Emma wanted to protest and then just left it.

“You should add these to your portfolio,” Red said after a while, pointing to the three photos she clumped together at the end. “Sure, thanks,” Emma said, Red strolled out, much the same way she came in.

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Everyone cursed Emma the day after Thanksgiving. They had been working their asses off to get more than two dozen books ready for the holiday season with three bestselling authors ready for the Christmas market. When their much-needed break came with Thanksgiving, they meant to party, but with Emma’s knowledge of how to make any drink and her kickass dessert, that had gods know what in it, they were all hung over. Mary Margaret looked worse for wear on Monday. She was standing in for Regina, who normally took leave from Thanksgiving until the day after Christmas. She did it to avoid her family, working on one of her pet projects, as she called it. Red had already requested that Emma would work with her in the new year to deal with the new project. Regina did not give a hint of what it would be this time. She was too distant from everyone before her leave.

Christmas was not any better. Neal was correct when he said functional, fucked up, family fun. Red’s Granny was the most forward, pull no punches, woman, Emma had ever met, aside from Granny, Red had no one. Apart from his father Marco, August had no one. Neal had Emma and Snow had David. Lily went to her mother for Christmas, Rumple and Belle went away for a week, no one saw that coming. As Emma watched them all on Christmas Eve, she realized that she had
more in common with these friends than what she realized. They all had their pain, their secrets, their loss. Snow did not talk about her father, neither did David about his mother that died only a few years before. Their lives might not have been the same as Neal and Emma’s, but for the holiday season, they were as lost as what most orphans were. So they made a family, here with other people like them.

“You two girls take it easy on those Cosmopolitans, you remembered what happened on Thanksgiving.” Mary Margaret and Red were already giggling. Emma smiled at them. She liked Granny, but after meeting the woman, she also understood why Red rebelled so much, even though Granny assured her that Red had calmed down significantly. Neal came to stand by her as she observed everyone. He gave her a small box. “I never thought I would like the holidays, until my first year with the Nolan’s. I have been looking forward to it since then.” Emma understood what he was saying. The holidays were never happy days for foster children. It was not events to look forward to. A kid was considered lucky if you got a good meal on either holiday.

Emma opened the box. “Oh, Neal!” She got him and Killian something as well, but it was still in her apartment, wrapped for tomorrow. Neal had a five-inch Christmas tree in his flat, Emma had a stream of flickering lights in the lounge window. Very festive of them, they both laughed as they saw each other’s decorations. Neal bought Emma a plain silver necklace a round pendant on it with an engraved swan. “It is beautiful, thank you.” She kissed him on the cheek as he placed it around her neck.

The next day the two of them spent together, eating leftovers and watching scary movies. Emma bought him a year subscription to Popular Mechanics since she knew he would never spend the money on something like that for himself, but was over the moon with the gift. She also bought him a toolkit for models, it was one of those awesome things to have, but you got along if you did not have it. Emma knew it would make his life much more comfortable working with his drones.

When Killian joined them, she gave him his gift. It was a computer simulation program for their drones. Neal could build them, then Killian could scan them and pull up a 3D simulation and take it for a ride to see if it would fly, or crash it and then the diagnostics would tell you what went wrong. It was perhaps the kind of gift you got a teenage boy, but Killian got so excited that he and Neal started scanning their latest prototype immediately. She laughed with them, at them, she has never had a Christmas like this. She was very grateful for it. Killian got Emma her favorite perfume. She went home later. She planned to sleep the whole of Boxing Day and study the rest of her free time. Her midyear exams were around the corner. She wanted to continue her good marks.

Regina came home on Boxing Day. She was exhausted. She worked herself to the bone on her new project, but she was happy with what she accomplished. She saw the package in front of her door. An eyebrow went up. She knew who it was from and that amazed her. She wondered if she should call Emma to make sure it was not a bomb or arsenic. Snow gave her a gift before she went away. They had a good understanding. To buy each other the exact opposite of what they thought of first. They loved each other, but had very different tastes for things.

Regina closed her door and went to the bar and got herself a drink. She kept on looking at the neatly wrapped gift. Finally, she opened it. She had no idea what to expect, but what she found inside was probably not it. Emma got her a tight-fitting black T-shirt, with an eaten red apple on it and written in purple letters, Long live the Evil Queen! The card only said welcome home, with a smiley face.
Regina immediately pulled it on. It smelled like Emma. Regina inhaled the fragrance. “Ija de puta,” Regina swore. Emma definitely sprayed some of her perfume on the T-shirt. Regina laughed, it was a priceless gift. Emma was the only one that would get away with something like this. It made Regina wonder where they stood with each other. She took leave and worked on her project, it always helped her to put things in perspective, but she could not get Emma Swan out of her mind.

She unpacked her things quickly. She usually went to Mary Margaret’s for an update. She decided to do both, feel the water and get an update. She called Mary Margaret, “Hi, is there any leftovers?”

“Tons.” Mary Margaret confirmed.

“So call the rest. We will help you make a dent in it. Tell Emma I want one of her famous Flaming Lamborghini’s.”

“Okay.” Mary Margaret replied, then con called the others. “That was weird,” she said to David as she spoke to the rest. “Emma, are you awake?”

“Nooo, go away Snow.”

“Regina is back. She wants a drink.”

“Tell her the bar is closed.” Emma’s muffled reply came.

“Emma, she wants something I have never heard of.”

“Sex on the beach?” Emma asked hopefully.

“What? No, no sex, anywhere. Emma!” Emma could not help herself. She laughed at Mary Margaret’s expense.

“Okay, okay, I’ll make you one, do you have OJ?”

“Just get your ass here?” Mary Margaret asked.

“Ooh, I like this side of you!” Mary Margaret shook her head. They have all seen a different side of Emma. Neal knew her to be playful and fun, most of the time, but now with them, she did certain things as well. She was far more comfortable making jokes with them. Mary Margaret only hoped that for one day, she and Regina could be in the same room without electric sparks flying everywhere.

Emma was all ready to mix both Red and Mary Margaret a Sex on the beach when Regina strolled in. She slipped into yoga pants with her new T-shirt. Emma looked up when she saw her. Then continued to look down, making the drinks. Regina came to stand in front of her. She cleared her throat when Emma did not look up. “Dig the T-shirt boss.” She said as she placed the cocktails in front of the other girls.

“Yes,” Regina said, “Me as well, I think we should have a theme day at the office and give all the staff one for free?” Emma looked up, her green eyes sparkled. She leaned forward over the kitchen counter to take in Regina completely.

“Nope, that is a custom job, whoever got it for you, had it printed, and may I add, perfectly fitted.”
Everyone, around them, watched the interaction. They were flirting, testing the waters, making up and keeping their distance, all at once, but when Regina blushed at the comment, the rest all stared. The T-shirt had a low cut V-neck. When Regina moved, it pulled up just enough to reveal her tanned abs but cover the belly button ring. Emma would only need to slide her fingers ever so slightly over the perfect middle to feel the ring tugged there and Regina knew it.

Emma placed the Martini glass and a shooter glass in front of Regina, lit the cocktail, smiled sweetly and said, “Enjoy.” She knew the moment Regina threw that drink back. The T would lift enough for her to see Regina’s belly button.

Yes, Mary Margaret thought. *Sparks everywhere, whether they fought or flirt.*
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Killian takes Emma to the New Year's ball.
Regina becomes very possessive.

Chapter Notes

Warning, lots of F/F sex. Slight BDMS sex
NSFW
There are certain words in both the languages I speak which describe the female
anatomy in what I perceive as derogatory, I try to steer clear of these words. The attempt
is to make it sexy and sensual and not too smutty.

Chapter 13

Killian and Emma made an entrance when they arrived at his mother’s annual New Year Eve’s ball. Emma had an elegant long red dress on, her back was open, her cleavage perfect and the side slit stopped in the middle of her thigh. Her heels were an inch higher than the sandals she had on before. It added to everything, the way she moved, the way the dress hugged her body. Her hair was piled high on her head with a few strands tumbling down. She looked spectacular. From the moment she walked in, a pair of dark chocolate eyes fell on her.

Emma greeted their hostess with that stupid in the air kiss on each cheek. Alice Jones was beaming. “So darling, is this the year?” Killian pretended that he had no idea what his mother was talking about. “Yes, mother, this is the big year, where I turn thirty.” She gave him a scolding look. Brennan took Emma’s hand and asked for the first dance. Killian kissed her on the cheek before they strolled off.

Mary Margaret and David attended as well. When Emma’s eyes fell on the couple, she smiled at them. Mary Margaret looked amazing. She had a green dress on, that seemed to be the same color as her wedding ring, but tonight she was not the top button woman that Emma knew. She looked like a princess with David proudly by her side.

Emma felt like she danced all evening when Killian pulled her aside and ordered some drinks for them. “I could use a beer, to quench my thirst.” She whispered in his ear and to anyone looking at them, they would seem to be a young couple very much in love. As they laughed together.

As the time before Killian introduced her to a few people, people that she had only ever heard of. She still could not believe the changes that happened in her life in a few short months. Then Emma saw her, across the dance floor. Regina took Emma’s breath away. Regina took a black cutout cocktail dress on that ended above her knee, fitting like a glove. It had a high rise choker design collar. The cutout was from her pulse point to her cleavage. Their eyes met. Emma knew instantly what was about to happen. She excused herself from the company and strolled, purposefully over.
They met in the middle of the dance floor as if on cue a Tango began to play. The live band was adding to the atmosphere of the evening. Regina did not take her eyes off Emma as she initiated the dance. She knew Emma could dance, but the Tango was different. They started off with the Promenade, a few steps and Regina pulled her into the Volcada. Holding Emma close to her, swinging her out in a possessive Tango al reves, doble frente. Embracing Emma so close while they danced together, changing the pace of their possessive dance with the music. Emma swung out of the embrace, looking Regina up and down. Regina stepped around Emma, sliding her hands down Emma’s arm when she pushed herself into Emma’s back, the blonde, threw her head back, then stepped away in a series of fast fancy dance moves. Swaying her hips, the slit opening more than once. Regina demandingly brought her back into the Volcada. Their eyes burned into each other. Their breaths, heavy. She moved with Regina in a manner that suggested they had danced this dance of forbidden lovers often. They felt each other’s desires, teased and flirted as the momentum turned their dancing into fire. Emma’s side slit showing her firm long leg every time she turned or kicked out. As the music reached its crescendo, Regina held Emma and tilting her in a low swing when she pulled her back up, Emma’s bent leg was fully exposed in Regina’s hand, keeping it to her side. She could feel the smoothness of it. She saw Emma’s breasts move from the intensity of the dance and their closeness. They left each other breathless.

Liam leaned over to his brother. “Damn, that was hot. Those women are ensuring that I will leave early to go and see Blue.” Killian smiled at him happily. “And by the way Killian, Philip is here tonight.” Liam gave his brother a punch on the shoulder as he walked away.

Regina held Emma by the arm as she steered them through the crowd. They have not said a word to each other. A few people told them what a lovely dance it was. Regina acknowledged it with a friendly nod or comment. They approached an elderly couple.

“Really Regina do you always need to make a spectacle?” The pompous redheaded woman said, ignoring Emma completely. Regina approached the man first, he pulled her into a hug and gave her a warm kiss on the cheek.

“That was danced lovely, darling.” His voice was soft, as was his manner. Much in contrast to the woman next to him.

“Thank you, Daddy,” Regina said. Emma felt like she swallowed a frog. She turned to Emma. “May I introduce to you Miss Emma Swan? Miss Swan, these are my parents, Henry and Cora Bolivar.” Emma felt a headache coming on. She smiled graciously.

“Mr. and Mrs. Bolivar, it is a pleasure to meet you.” She received a nod from Cora and Henry took both her hands.

“It is lovely to meet you, Miss Swan.” She liked him.

“What will everyone say about you dancing like that with Mr. Jones’s fiancé?” Cora continued with her fake smile and pretentious, precise manners.

“I will say, when did that happen?” Regina turned to Emma, the anger from earlier was gone, there was slight mischief in her eyes again. Emma blushed. One of Regina’s eyebrows shot up.
“Mrs. Jones is very excited.” Emma gave as an explanation. Killian arrived at her side a moment later. “I hear congratulations are in order Mr. Jones?” Regina smiled at him, Killian cringed.

“Yes, well Mrs. Michael, never believe everything your parents tell you.” He smiled that charismatic smile at Cora. “Mine started a rumor apparently, about Miss Swan and myself.” Emma hooked her arm into his.

“I am certain that later this year it will not be a rumor,” Cora stated as she looked disapprovingly at Emma. The blonde’s eyes took in everything. She smiled sweetly at Cora.

“I do not know so much about that Mrs. Bolívar, your daughter keeps me very, very occupied.” The way Emma made the statement, left no room for doubt about what she implied. Regina expected something like that, “Miss Swan.” She said in that tone that Emma knew too well. It sent shivers up her spine. “I do believe my treatment of you is well within my rights according to our, hmmm agreement?” Emma turned to look at her, still holding on to Killian.

“What do you think Killian? Is Miss Michael treating me fairly?” Killian had no idea what the game was, all he knew was that they were not talking shop.

“I think my dear Emma that your trials are still to come, you are scheduled to work in the darkroom for the next month. I hear it can be very educational.”

“Hmm,” Regina smirked. “It can be, indeed.” Those perfect red wine lips pulled into a fantastic smile. Emma felt the butterflies in her stomach at the various implications. But what indeed entertained her was the sour lemon, stiff, plastered grin on Cora Bolívar’s face.

“Henry dear, we should mingle a bit?” She said to the man. Henry’s eyes twinkled. “I think your friend is lovely, dear.” He whispered to Regina as he kissed her on the cheek and walked away with his wife.

“Well, well Miss Swan, I might just give you a raise for that.” Regina ran her eyes appreciatively over Emma. “I cannot remember the last time my mother felt the urge to leave because someone made her feel uncomfortable.”

“I am sorry if I embarrassed you, Michael?” Regina felt the sting in the word again but ignored it. “Believe me, Miss Swan,” She took a step closer to Emma. “I will reward you for that little innuendo you dropped.”

“Gods!” Killian said. He stood close to them. “Why don’t the two of you just get on with it?” Regina turned to him. “Whatever are you implying Miss Jones?” He shook his head.

“Emma, I ran into an old friend…” He did not explain. He did not need to. Emma nodded and told him it would be alright for them to leave. Regina had other plans. “Killian, please be a dear and get Miss Swan and me one last drink?” He smiled and disappeared.

“Please come with me, Miss Swan?” Emma followed Regina up the staircase to the ladies restroom. They stood next to each other, touching up their makeup. Regina waited. As soon as the last woman was out, she turned to lock the door. Before Emma knew what happened, Regina had her pinned to the counter, their lips very close to each other. Her dark eyes looked deep into Emma’s. She was holding a breath. The excitement surging through her body. “Did you like dancing with all those men tonight, Miss Swan?” Emma swallowed and shook her head. “Did you like being in my arms?”
“Yes, Miss Michael.” At the words, Emma could feel the energy pouring off Regina. Regina leaned in a bit and inhaled Emma’s fragrance at the side of her neck before she kissed it painfully softly. Emma felt a jolt shoot through her. Regina pulled away. “I think it is time that I remind you who I am to you and what you are to me?” She watched the rise and fall of Emma’s breasts and bent down to lick the length of Emma’s cleavage. Emma clung to the counter, her yearning for this woman was increasing by the second.

“Are you wet for me, Kitten?” Regina purred. Emma immediately realized that Regina created the scene. If she answered, they were officially playing.

“Yes, Miss Michael.” The words came out soft, Emma could feel the difference in Regina’s body, she could see it in her movements. Tonight would not be the same as before. “Prove it!” Emma looked confused. She could see the impatience in Regina’s eyes. “Take off your panties for me Kitten?”

At the words and the thought of the implication, Emma felt herself pooling moisture between her legs. She slowly started to bend down, her eyes never leaving Regina’s. When she got to the height where her mouth was in line with Regina’s center, she licked her lips. The small movement of Regina’s hips did not go unnoticed. She pulled the red lace panties down and stepped out of them. As she rose, she ran a hand over Regina. From her ankle to her middle as she got up. She licked her lips again and held the soaked red panties by her forefinger for Regina to take. Regina took them gently as if it was a precious gift. She brought it closer to her face and inhaled Emma’s scent, her eyes never wavering. Emma felt her wetness increase and run down her leg. The stage was set for a long night of play.

“We will talk later about your behavior Kitten. Trying to seduce me will only get you in trouble, as for touching me without permission.” Regina ts’ked and wagged a finger at her. Emma cast her eyes down. The gesture made Regina’s heat increase. She had much trouble controlling her body with Emma scent all over her and the woman’s provocative display added to the submission. “Tonight will be different Emma.” She said it softly in her husky voice as she tilted Emma’s chin up to look at her. “Tonight you will be mine, in every way. All your needs will depend on me. Tonight you will do what I ask when I ask it. Do you understand Kitten?”

“Yes, Miss Michael,” she said. Regina was quite certain that Emma did not understand, but she would give her one more chance to back out tonight if this was not her scene. Regina took a step back. “Tonight I will be Mistress.” Emma nodded her understanding. “You will be my pet. There will be no boundaries. I will do as I please with you. If you do not wish for this step Emma, do not come to my home tonight. Your keycard will open my door. I will assume that I have your full consent if you use your key to enter. Do you understand?”

Emma was breathing hard. “Yes, Mistress.” The word effected Regina more than what she anticipated. “Good! Now clean yourself up! Oh, and Kitten, do not pleasure yourself in any way. If you do, I will know, and it will be your last climax of the night. I am planning a long night.” She gave Emma a radiant smile as she tilted her head. “Enjoy that.” Emma entered a unit and Regina unlocked the door and left. Emma tried to calm herself. They were going soon. She would be with Regina soon.

She made her way back to Killian, only to find Regina with him. Regina smiled at her. “You really do look lovely tonight, dear.” Regina purred. All the drying Emma did upstairs, became undone. She handed Emma the champagne Killian got for them. “Would you mind giving us a moment
“Killian?” He made a slight bow and went in search of his parents. Regina opened her hand to Emma. There were two pills there.

“What is it?” Emma asked carefully.

“This my dear is a calming tablet, with a nasty little side effect.” Regina took one and drank it with her champagne. Her eyes challenged Emma. She could see Emma’s pulse point racing. She took the little white pill and swallowed it down the same as Regina. “Good Kitten. See you later?” She flashed Emma a smile and left.

Emma walked over to Killian and his parents. He was busy explaining that they needed to leave. His eyes fell on Philip and Killian could see the same intensity in Philip’s eyes than what he felt. The Jones’s kiss Emma goodbye and they all wished each other a prosperous New Year. Emma said goodnight and well wishes to David and Mary Margaret. Then she and Killian walked out, his arm protectively around her.

Emma was quiet on their way home. “Everything all right?” Killian asked. She gave him a reassuring pat on his leg. “Everything is fine.” He shook his head. When they arrived at the apartment, Emma handed him her keycard. “What?” He asked. She could see the panic on his face. She merely looked at him, wondering if she had to explain. He knew damn well that his card was with the man in the brand new Mustang behind them.

“How the hell do you do that?” Emma laughed.

“Oh, Killian, Regina and I were more subtle than the two of you.” She realized what she said. It was her turn to look panicked.

“Your secret is safe with me love. Just…”

He had a frown. “Just what Killian?” He scratched his head.

“Be careful Emma. And please do not break each other? Physically or emotionally.” She kissed him on his cheek.

“I will, and you tell Prince Phillip if he so much as look at someone else I will kill him?” She gave Killian a sweet smile and kissed him full on the lips. “May your New Year be filled with orgasms.” She wished him. He laughed. “And yours as well love.”

Emma made her way up to their floor. As she came out of the elevator, she turned to her door. She stood there for a while. She closed her eyes and shook her head. She made her way to Regina’s door and let herself in with the keycard.

The room was dark. The curtains in the lounge were open, to allow for the city lights to stream into the room. Emma could not see Regina, but she knew the woman was there. Emma walked in a little more. “Stop.” She heard the commanding voice. “Take your shoes off Kitten.” Emma swallowed and gratefully took off her heels. “Did you enjoy tonight Kitten?”

“Yes, Mistress I did.” Emma could not place Regina. She assumed that the woman was moving. “Which part did you enjoy?” A little smile formed on Emma’s lips. “Every part when I was with my
“Mistress.” Regina swallowed. “Am I your Mistress?”

“Yes.” Emma acknowledged almost breathless. Regina smiled. “We shall find out tonight my Kitten.” With those words, Emma felt the radiant heat of her lover behind her. Regina was close, but she did not touch Emma. “I will need you to tell me what is good and what is not. Do you understand Kitten?”

“Yes Mistress,” Emma said softly. Regina’s hand reached out. She unzipped Emma’s beautiful dress. “You will use colors. Green is good, yellow is the signal for me to slow down or give you a break. Red is stop.” She slid the dress off Emma’s shoulder. Emma felt the heat on her back at every spot Regina touched.

“Yes Mistress,” Regina kissed a bare shoulder blade. “Good Kitten, what is your color at the moment?”

“Green Mistress.” Regina started to kiss the other shoulder. “Good Kitten, let me know when it changes?” Emma swallowed. She knew tonight would be different. She anticipated a change. She felt something soft gliding up her leg. It left her shivering. The touch was soft, sensual. When it stopped on the side of her thigh, Emma inhaled. Regina stepped back and flicked her wrist. It felt like a hot lick for Emma. She inhaled. Regina was there, tending soft fingers over the spot. “What is your color Kitten?”

“Green Mistress.” Regina kissed her shoulder. “It will be pleasure and pain tonight Kitten. I want to know what pain gives you pleasure?” Emma’s mind refused to work. Pain was never pleasure. For the first time that night, she stiffened a bit. Regina was so in tuned with Emma’s body that she felt it. “Remember Kitten. This is a game, games are supposed to be fun. I will not hurt you. You are my pet. I will never hurt you.” Emma breathed a bit easier.

“I am going to take your sight away now Kitten.” Emma only nodded as Regina placed the soft silk blindfold over her eyes. “Come with me, Kitten.” Regina led her away. They walked at Emma’s pace. She had her one hand on the wall, the other was secure in Regina’s. When they got to the bedroom, Regina instructed her to get on the bed and place her hands in front of her. Emma knelt on the bed and did what was asked of her. She felt Regina kneeling on the bed behind her. Her Mistress took the riding crop and ran it softly over Emma’s spine. She ended the sensation with a slight bite of the whip on Emma’s ass. Emma bucked forward with a sharp breath. “Pain.” She heard the husky voice. Then Emma felt more soft silk. It fell over her back, Regina had a piece in her hand and traced it all over Emma. It felt like a hundred butterfly kisses on her. Regina watched as the goose pimples fell over Emma’s skin. “Pleasure,” Regina whispered. Somehow she managed to get around Emma. The blonde felt her hands being bound together by the soft silk and then to the headboard. Regina made double sure that the restraints were holding, but that it would not hurt Emma in any way if she pulled on them.

“This is a special knot Kitten.” Regina placed one of the silk points in Emma’s left hand. “If you pull on this end, the knot will come undone. Your hands will be free.” Regina moved again. When she spoke, her mouth was on Emma’s. “I will trust you, that you will not pull that end. You need to trust me, that I will not give you a reason to.” Her breath was soft on Emma’s lips as she spoke. Regina watched Emma’s pulse point beating fast. Her lips touched Emma’s. Soft, unhurried, filled with love and promises for the night. Emma felt her body respond, her desire, her lust, all Regina’s. She gasped and let out a moan as Regina ended the sensual kiss with a hard bite to Emma’s lower lip. She could not stop her hips from moving. “And that Kitten, is tonight’s goal, pleasurable pain.”
She kissed the bruised lip tenderly. “Do you understand now Kitten?”

“Yes, Mistress,” Came the needy gasp. “Good, what is your color Kitten?”

“Green Mistress.”

Regina went slow. She teased Emma endlessly. She would fondle her breasts and Emma would purr with pleasure, then Regina would end it with a hard pinch to her nipple. With every touch, Emma’s need would increase. Regina would touch her burning center, merely to pull away. Emma felt like she would explode at any second. As soon as Regina’s touch was gone, she would crave it. As Regina ran a finger playfully through Emma’s wet need, the blonde tried to get more friction. She was denied. Emma protested in a long moan.

Her Mistress certainly knew what she was doing. Emma was brought to the point of ecstasy, only to be downcast in some manner by Regina. Her breathing was irregular. Her body was coated in a sheen of sweat. Regina had long since discarded her clothes and every time their bodies touched, Emma felt Regina’s body was soaked as well. Her Mistress did not utter a sound, except for words of encouragement. Emma was starting to beg. Regina had found several spots on Emma’s back where she either bit her hard or gave her a good lick with the crop, leaving Emma begging for more. Regina was turned on like never before. She knew Emma was responsive, but tonight was an entirely new level for them. Emma did not disappoint, in fact, Regina was close to losing control and just take Emma. She had to discipline her body, she slowed down several times, but with Emma’s moans and begging, everything was becoming harder.

Regina took Emma to a new high, only to pull away completely. The blonde was panting, begging with need. She was acutely aware that her Mistress was no longer on the bed. “Stay still Kitten. I will be right back.” Emma did not know if she should be worried or overjoyed. Whatever Regina was doing to her, she had no idea that her body could take so much, that she could be filled with such desire. She tried not to over think it. They were playing after all.

Emma could hear Regina opening a cupboard. Then there was silence. She felt Regina’s weight on the bed a few moments later. Regina was behind her again. She tapped Emma’s inner thighs with the whip. “Spread your legs!” The command came. Emma felt the heat rise instantly. She opened for her Mistress. Regina tapped a little harder this time, Emma opened more. “Good Kitten.” Regina turned on her back, sliding in underneath Emma. At the first touch of her silky tongue on Emma, Emma thought she would die. “Ugh, gods!” She moaned. Regina was tender, her tongue sliding over Emma. Never giving too much pressure, it was driving Emma insane. “Oh, fuck, please? Please, Mistress?”

Regina pulled the sensitive spot into her mouth and closed her eyes as her taste buds and hearing were filled with Emma. It was divine torture for Regina. Hearing this amazing woman beg for more. Knowing that she is doing this to Emma, for Emma. Her own need was pulsing. She looked at the clock on the nightstand. Almost forty minutes to go. She wondered when Emma was going to figure it out? She pulled back from Emma, leaving them both panting. She reached for something.
When Emma felt what it was, she had no idea what to do.

Regina ran a cube of ice over the spot where her mouth just lifted from. Emma bucked as the cold hit her. Then Regina’s mouth was back. The heat soothed Emma, only to be replaced with the ice a moment later. Emma was frantic. “Please Mistress, please let me cum?” They were on a hot cycle. “Patience Kitten.” Regina hummed, but Emma did not know how much more she could take before climaxing without permission. She had no idea what the consequence would be. The truth was that at that moment she did not care, she only wanted her release.

Regina slid an ice cube into Emma. “Fuck!” The sensation was different. Emma could not say it was pleasant, but neither did it hurt, it was just, cold. An intrusive cold in her extremely hot channel. She wanted anything there at the moment, except the ice. “Gods, please Mistress, please take me, please, fuck me!” She was begging all the time. Regina smiled. “Are you sure it is what you want Kitten?” The words were soft. “Yes!” Emma cried out.

She felt something between her legs. For a second her body went stiff. Regina knew it would happen, so she moved several times over Emma. “Is this alright Kitten?” Emma realized it was a strap-on that Regina let her feel. “Gods yes!” Emma sounded almost relief. Regina looked at the clock again. She would have to start slow. She did. She entered Emma slowly from behind. Her hands were on Emma’s middle as she placed the dildo inside her wet lover. Only the tip, coating it with Emma’s essence. Moving at a gentle, measured pace. Regina had no idea when last Emma was penetrated. She chose their special friend for that reason. The purple dildo was neither thick nor long. It was designed for comfort and endurance. Endurance being the operative word for tonight. Emma grabbed on to her bindings to steady herself. Regina was going too slow for her need. She wanted to enjoy this new experience between them. It was very new to Emma. But on the other hand, Regina had created a painful need that screamed to be satisfied. The slow movement and the rolling of Regina’s hips against her were prolonging the teasing. Emma begged again, trying to force herself back to add to the stimulation. She was rewarded with a slap on her backside. It made her buck more. She needed more. She told her Mistress as much.

Regina raked her manicured nails over Emma’s back, leaving red marks. Emma eased her back into the sensation. It was another thing about the evening. Regina pushed her, her needs and her boundaries like she promised, but she also exposed Emma to a range of new sensations, feelings, need. Emma could not remember a moment in her life where she craved something as much as what she craved Regina’s touch at that moment. She begged more as she felt Regina moving closer, holding her tighter, her movements, still slow. Emma pushed herself back hard, sure that it would be enough, she was so close. Nothing happened, she tried again, her breathing became very hampered. “Fuck, stop, red Regina!”

Regina stopped immediately and yanked the blindfold of Emma’s face. She was busy untying her when Emma said breathlessly. “Stop Regina.” Regina looked at her worried. “What is it, did I hurt you?” Emma could hear the panic in her voice. “No, no, you did not. Regina, I can’t climax. I have tried more than once now.” Regina gave her a sheepish, guilty grin. “Neither can I dear.” Emma clicked. “Son of a bitch! The pill, the pill is doing this? When will it stop?” Regina’s eyes soften. She touched Emma’s face. “Tonight is about new sensations. There is nothing more painful than the need to climax and you cannot.” Emma’s breathing was calming down. “But I am going to climax, tonight, before you kill me?” Regina gave a husky laugh. She turned herself around and got
one of the two bottles out of the champagne bucket. She helped Emma to drink some water. “I would hope that you will climax several times tonight. You can cum anytime you want Emma, I will not deny you a second longer than what you need.” Emma inhaled relieved.

“Alright, how long still?” Regina looked at the clock. “There is just enough time for me to bring you to a high again, then it should start to wear off.” Her smile was one of mischief. “And why do I find that hard to believe Miss Michael?” Regina leaned in and kissed her with so much passion that she felt like she could get lost in the woman’s kiss forever. “Okay?” Regina asked. Emma nodded. Regina placed the blindfold back.

“What is your color Kitten?” Regina asked as she sat back on her heels behind Emma. “Green Mistress.” Regina started again. Soft kisses on Emma’s back followed by a rake of her nails or a burning kiss from the whip. She fondled Emma’s breasts with desire, rolling her nipples hard between her fingers. It did not take too long for both of them to be filled with passion. Regina knew it would be soon. She would be able to let go and do what she had desired to do for a long time, to possess Emma fully and to fuck her senseless. Her heat was rising quick. When she entered Emma again, they both moaned. Regina slowed, rotating her hips, feeling her need climbing and Emma begging, it was delicious, she wanted to prolong it for both of them without the teasing.

She adjusted her position behind Emma. Emma felt the long even strokes. The pace did not pick up, but the strokes were getting harder. Every time Regina filled her up, she moaned. Regina circled one arm around Emma’s slender waist and steadied herself. She pushed inside of Emma, watching as the blonde’s head fell back. Her legs spread wide. Yes, they were close. With her other hand, Regina found Emma’s essence. She stroked it gently. With each of her movements inside Emma, it did not take long for the blonde to arch her back. Begging in all earnestness. Regina thrived on the noises Emma made. The begging, her screaming, it drove Regina on. She picked up the pace, slamming hard into Emma now.

The moment her climax started, she knew she was going to be loud. Regina never lost complete control of her passion when she was playing, but Emma was different. There was not a will on earth that would make her try and control her hunger for Emma and strangely, she was not afraid to let this woman know what she was doing to her. Emma’s begging was constant. When Regina moaned and gripped Emma by her hips, she felt it. It resembled nothing Emma had ever felt before. She had no frame of reference for the sensation. It felt as if a burning sensation started deep in her stomach, pushing down, settling in her center where Regina was buried inside her. It pushed down a bit more. She exploded! Her cry was hard and long. All the muscles in her arms went taut. Her back arched and behind her, she could hear Regina scream her name. It made Emma cum again in an instant. The moment seemed to last forever. The two of them drifted together somewhere between conscious thought and eternal bliss. They came down hard.

If Emma thought that her lust was sated, after two orgasms, she could not be more wrong. The moment Regina got her breath back, she turned Emma around. The way she bound her, allowed for that. Regina took the blindfold off. Emma’s need flooded her when she saw the desire in Regina’s eyes. Regina pulled her down on the bed, ensuring that Emma’s arms were stretched, it made her
more incapacitated. Regina pushed her legs up and open, and when she took Emma this time, Emma felt a flood of need. “Oh, fuck, yes, please Regina, harder, fuck me harder!” And Regina did. Over and over. Their screams and begging filled the night air. After her third orgasm, Regina untied Emma. Emma took full advantage of her freedom. She returned the assault on Regina’s body with vigor. They clung to each other, feeling as if their need for each other would never be sated. If Emma’s demands of Regina’s body surprised her, she did not show it. Emma got a few bites of her own in and while they made love, their bodies flush with each other, Emma dug her nails into Regina’s right shoulder and ripped the skin as they pushed each other over the limit again.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Emma is dealing with her physical fears while Regina is working on her emotional distance.

Chapter Notes

Okay, so this chapter has more of everything, F/F sex, BDSM, and self-inflicted injury. Not as loaded as the previous chapter. I do have a plan for them, but not too sure in which direction this story will end.

Thank you for all the comments and kudos. Hope you enjoy!

Chapter 14

Emma woke up. She had no idea what time it was. Her body was humming. Humming and stiff. She moved. No humming and sore in strange places. She decided. Regina was sprayed over her. Her one leg was over Emma, an arm was holding her protectively. The dark hair was beautifully spread over Emma’s chest. Beautiful? Emma thought. No, Regina was not beautiful. She raked her hand softly through the almost black mane. Everything about Regina was soft. Her hair was extra soft and silky. Emma watched Regina’s face. She was calm and relaxed. Emma wondered if the dark woman ever let her defenses down so much with someone before. It was not only the afterglow of their passion, it was… Emma stopped her thoughts.

She did not know love, she sure as hell did not understand it. Her heart told her this was more than lust and play. Her head said her that women like Regina did not fall in love with women like Emma. She felt the body move over her. A ripple of desire ran up her spine. How in gods could I be turned on again after the night before? Her thoughts trailed off. Was she a lesbian, did it matter? Did she need a label? Was she a submissive, masochist?

“Gods Emma, don’t you sleep? I can hear you think!” Regina’s raspy voice startled her. “Sorry, I did not mean to wake you.” Regina sighed and cuddled into Emma a bit more. “Your breathing changed.” She stated. Emma was confused.

“My breathing changed?” Regina spread herself moreover Emma, feeling the delicious body under her, she let out a content sigh.

“You started to breathe harder. Your heart rate increased,” Regina answered. She turned and stretched out like a lazy cat. “Hmm.” She purred as Emma watched her in fascination. “Damn woman, what did you do to me?” Regina had the same stiff soreness. Emma looked taken aback. Regina pulled herself up onto her hands and knees and swayed over to Emma. She had the look of a
predator. Her one knee was between Emma’s legs. Her hands were on either side. The dark hair was falling around her face. Emma could only look on in wonder. No Regina was certainly not beautiful. She was perfection. Emma touched Regina’s cheek softly as the older woman leaned in for a kiss. Unhurried and caring. Emma’s tummy turned.

“Are you hungry? I am starving!” Regina said as she jumped off the bed and ran butt naked to the kitchen. Emma followed with a frown. She knew Regina had a playful side, but this morning, she seemed practically giddy. Emma joined her in the kitchen. When Regina pulled strawberries, champagne, and cream from the fridge, Emma shook her head. “Oh no! I need to work tomorrow.”

“I know.” Regina said as if it was a big surprise to her, “And you will be working with the Evil Queen.” Regina had a smirk on her face. “I have body chocolate as well, what would you like to try first?”

They played the entire day, not a scene, just play. Regina seemed in a good space and Emma soon followed. It was impossible not to. They did silly things. Regina sprayed a heart on Emma’s toned abs and placed a strawberry in her navel, then presided to lick up all the cream and eat the berry. They laughed and made love slowly, the sparkle in Regina’s eyes never leaving. For a day, Emma could forget the questions, her uncertainties. For today, she and Regina were two lovers enjoying the first day of a new year.

Emma was told to wear old clothes to the office, but when she looked at Red and Regina as she made her way to the seventh floor of the Carmichael Publishing House, she wondered what their definition of old was. They both had designer jeans and shirts on that looked new. Emma had on a torn jeans with a T-shirt. The smile that Regina gave her behind Red’s back was far from professional. Emma felt a slight blush. She was grateful that Red’s attention was on a reel of film. Red was wound tight, Emma thought it was because Regina was working with them, but they seemed to work well together. No, it was something else, Emma just did not know what.

The two worked systematically through reel after reel. What confused Emma was that they were working with film and not digital. The two women took turns to look at the negatives through a photographic loupe off the viewing proof sheets. There were a few discussions on light, dimension, balance. Emma was familiar with most of the terminology from her studies, but the way Red and Regina spoke made Emma realize how much she still needed to learn, so that was what she did. She watched and listened. She learned more before lunch than what she did in a semester.

After lunch, Red instructed Emma to take a few slides, in a negative case and to go up to her smaller darkroom and develop it. Regina raised an eyebrow in question. “She did her own work. I have seen it. She will be fine.” Regina did not comment. Emma went to the lab. She used for her projects. Red’s private studio a floor beneath the executive office. She flicked the red studio light on, a sign for anyone to stay out. Emma loved the silence and solitude of the studio. She looked at the negatives through the loupe for a few minutes, making calculations in her head and then checking them on the computer. She was slightly out. She did not compensate for the increased size of the photo. Hers were 4 x 6” size. These would be 8 x 10”.
Emma placed the safety gear on for the chemicals she would be working with. She took the stopwatch that was on the desk and got everything ready. The photo paper, the chemicals, the drying racks. She picked a negative of a boy and a dog. From the moment she saw it, she wanted to know the story, and see the result. The picture was dark. As Emma placed the negative in the enlarger and completed the adjustments, she made sure of her calculations. She placed the high gloss paper down, then double check the chemicals. Everything was ready. She started the watch the moment she turned the light on to burn the image.

Emma picked the paper up with the tongs and placed it in the developer, checking the time, gently rocking the tray. The image took on life. The stop bath came next, and the fixer solution that dissolved the unexposed crystals while leaving the developed image on the paper. She rinsed it in the water solution, then the archival rinse and final wash. She could already see that the contrast was too much as she placed the photo on the drying rack.

Emma recalculated everything. She adjusted the tone mapping on the computer and worked with the new result. She burned the image again. This time it was perfect when she placed it in the drying rack. Red gave her twenty-five negatives. She worked through them systematically. Her phone rang at one point, but she was in the middle of rinsing, she let it ring. She did another photo when it rang again. She finished that photo and decided to call whoever back. It was Regina. “Are you still in the darkroom Miss Swan?”

“Yes, why?” She was annoyed. “It is after seven, Emma, come home, I cooked.” Regina thought. “Yeah, okay, be right over.” Emma looked around the room. She only did ten photos. She called Red. “Hi, I only completed ten.”

“What? Emma, are you still in the darkroom, fuck, this over time is not in my budget. Go home, Emma. You can carry on tomorrow.” Emma was a bit taken aback, but said alright and ended the call. She sealed the negatives in the dark case and covered all the chemicals with their lids. She felt good, tired but good. The moment she took off her protective gear, turned the darkroom lights off, and stepped out, she realized that she was tired. Her body was still sore and stiff. This turned out to be a long day. She smelled herself. She would need to clean up before she could go to Regina for supper. She still had a million questions.

Regina made lasagna. Emma could not get enough. “Gods Miss Swan, you eat like a child!”

“Sorry,” Emma replied with her mouth full and a bright smile on her face. “Did you enjoy today?” Regina asked. Emma looked at her strangely for a moment, Regina was cautious. “Very much, I have learned a lot. Who took the photos?” Regina tilted her head slightly as she looked down. “Did Red not tell you?” She avoided the question. “Which photo did you like?” She asked before Emma could pry again.

“There is this one taken in a back alley of a boy sleeping spooned with his dog on cardboard, they both have Santa clause hats on. It is sad and sweet at the same time.” Regina nodded, she liked it as well. It was taken in New York. It was freezing that day. The boy and the dog were clinging to each other, holding on to the heat they created.

“What were you thinking about yesterday morning?” Regina asked all of a sudden. Emma shrugged her shoulders. Regina waited. Emma rolled her eyes eventually. “I have questions.” Regina
nodded, not expecting Emma to elaborate. “About your sexuality?”

“For one,” Emma answered.

“Does it matter?” Emma thought about the question.

“I suppose not.” Then she added, “Is it an issue with you?” Regina let out a sigh.

“Only where my mother is concerned. She cannot comprehend that a married woman can become a lesbian. And yes, she still refers to me as married.” Emma opened her mouth and then closed it again. As an orphan, out of the system she never thought much about the demands parents could have on their children, their influence or approval, even when their children were grown up. She felt incredibly sorry for Killian. It was not something she understood since she pretty much did what she pleased all her life.

“Does the passion for pain, confuse you?” Regina asked after a while, Emma deep in her thoughts.

“No,” Emma stated. “It became clear what the difference was after that first strike on my back. You kept your word. You did not hurt me.” Regina smiled, it pleased her endlessly.

“Emma, what is bothering you then?” The question was soft, Regina wanted to reach out to her, but she restrained herself, she did not want to add to the confusion at the moment.

“What is this, this thing between us?” Regina swallowed. It was a question she had asked herself. She got up. “Would you like the rest for lunch tomorrow?” Emma said yes and thanked her.

They stood together in the kitchen. Regina did the washing and Emma dried. She left the dishes on the cupboard, she knew Regina would pack it away later. Regina poured herself a stiff drink and handed Emma another beer as she indicated for them to sit down in the lounge. Regina looked at Emma for a long time. The silence they shared was not uncomfortable. “Emma, my lifestyle, is it too much for you?” There was considerable concern in Regina’s voice.

“Yes and no,” Emma admitted, then she asked. “Is that all we have? Playing?”

Regina looked down. “No Emma, I don’t think so.” Emma frowned. It never occurred to her that Regina might be as clueless as she was. “I do not know how to love very well Miss Swan.” She swiped a hand through the light curls that were in her eyes. “You have met my mother. The woman is a stone. So that leaves my father and Mary Margaret. Other than them, I only loved Daniel. That feels like several lifetimes ago.” Emma nodded. That much she understood.

“I have only said it once in my life. To one of my early foster mothers. She turned to me and said, you love your dog too. I did not understand at the time. Neither did I understand why I was taken back to the orphan home a few days later.” Regina had tears in her eyes.

“I am so sorry Emma.” Emma drank her beer and got up to get another.

“Think we should ask Snow?” Emma questioned from the kitchen. Regina laughed.

“If we do that, we need to explain to her why we want to know. She will never leave us alone again.” Emma smiled to herself at Regina’s remark. That much was true. Perhaps the question was not whether or not they loved each other. It was, what did they want from each other? Emma decided to go with that.
“What do you want Regina? Do you want love or do you just want a lover?” Regina thought about it. She knew the answer, she knew the truth, but it was too frightening to go there. “Honestly Emma, I like what we have. But only if it is what you want as well?” Emma looked out the window.

A mere eight months ago, all she wanted was a better job, preferably in New York. She had that and then some. A relationship, even with Billy was never a priority. She was scared shitless. She knew how destructive it could be to open yourself up that much to another person. She was not ready for it. She turned to look at Regina. “May I ask one question, before I answer?” Regina indicated with her hand for Emma to go ahead. “Will we be exclusive or will you still go to your club?” Regina did not know what to do with the information. It took her by surprise, it made her angry and then she remembered it was Emma. The woman that could see what other people could not even hear. She calmed down.

“Emma, I do not have any wish, to hurt you in any way. My lifestyle can be far more intense than anything we have experimented with. Would you be willing to try more?” Emma let out a breath. “Yes.” Regina gave her a sad smile. “Then yes, we can be exclusive.”

Regina was laying in her bed alone that night, wondering why she did not tell Emma. When Emma got hurt, her reaction and care told her one thing. She loved Emma Swan. There was more, she knew. Emma did things to her body that Regina never would have thought possible. *Is it because I am fucking the woman I love?* She closed her eyes. The thought alone turned her on. She knew, that Emma would be all she would ever need again. The sex was fabulous. Their teasing sweet, they could play together and Emma had proven that at the height of her lust she could even take command and inflict her own pain. *Gods, this was too good to be true.* Regina thought. *She is sexy, she can dance, she is smart.* Emma was perfect. That scared Regina, because life taught her, that nothing good ever lasts. Emma knew that lesson all too well herself. Regina grabbed her phone and sent a message.

In her room, Emma read, *So do we just fuck each other’s brains out until the bubble burst?* Emma read the SMS more than once. She had the exact same thought earlier. Emma knew it was not what she wanted. It was the dilemma of her life, she could tell you exactly what she did not want. Telling you what she did want? Whole different story. *Yeah, guess so.* She replied to Regina. The communication saddened them both.

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In the week to follow, Red was getting on Emma’s nerves and she sought the solitude of the darkroom more often than not. Red did not answer any of her questions regarding the artist or the circumstances around the pictures. What added to Emma’s stress was that the one photo was sadder than the next. She felt as if someone took snapshots of her life. The general theme was street kids.

Emma and Red were working together, Red burned the photos and Emma took it through the chemical process. She placed the print into the developer and watched the image come to life. She froze as she saw the picture. It was a blond girl with a dirty face, sitting huddled next to a fire made in a paint can, trying to keep warm. Her measly possessions in a bag next to her, a ragged teddy bear peeking out at the top. It was all upsetting to Emma, but what stunned her, was the fact that it was in her alley. The one in Boston, where she stayed for a week. The girl could have been her. *The girl*
Red noticed that Emma was not doing her job. She freaked out, yelled at Emma and told her to fuck off. She would do everything herself. Red did not see the pictures. For this project, all she could see was quality or not. Regina would pick the pictures for their insight. She was responsible for making them perfect. As soon as she was done, she spoke to Mary Margaret about Emma. She could not continue to work with her if she was going to delay or compromise the project. They had a timeline. Mary Margaret did not take the news well or Red’s reaction. She asked to see the photo. Red gave it to her. She had to burn the image again because Emma had it in the developer too long. Mary Margaret looked at it. There was something familiar about the photo, but she could not place it. She decided to ask Regina, but the boss had already left. That concerned Mary Margaret even more.

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Emma hardly heard what Red said to her. As always, it was water off a duck’s back. The photo, however, was burned into her mind. She did not think, she reacted. Instinct took over. By the time she arrived at her apartment, she was in full flight mode. It was not panic. It was a pure cardinal reaction to a situation where she felt unsafe. She walked into her bathroom with a clear intent of what she needed to do. She took out the small bag that was stashed in the back of the cupboard under the basin. She zipped it open and took out the exceptional blade. It was thin and extremely sharp. She took her jeans off and sat on the built-in bath. With a slight flick of her wrist, an opening appeared. The blood ran out. Emma felt immediate relief. She was about to cut herself again when she thought about Regina. She looked at the cut and then got up and cleaned it. She went to the bedroom where she tossed her phone. She sent Regina, an emoji of a cat. Seconds later a question mark came back as a reply. Emma typed yes. Regina replied. *First cupboard in the walk in wardrobe, pick what you feel comfortable with.* Emma inhaled. She could feel herself relax a bit. The image was still there. *No questions, I need to forget.* Regina read the last message more than once. She had no idea if she should be concerned or excited. She trod on the side of care. *Are you sure?*

*Everything is green tonight.* Emma replied. Regina decided to give her a few minutes, then she followed. She told Killian to take messages for her and that she was not to be disturbed for the rest of the afternoon. Killian did not think much of it. Regina did things like that now and again. When Mary Margaret asked, he only said that Michael took the rest of the day off. She tried to call Emma, but the cell only rang. Regina’s went to voice mail. She called Neal. He told her that he had not seen Emma since lunch. Mary Margaret shook her head. She was silly. Emma would shake off Red’s remarks and be back in the studio in the morning.

Regina closed the door behind her and locked it. She strolled to the bedroom. Emma was kneeling on the bed, naked, her hands in front of her. She did not move as she felt Regina close to her. The scene had Regina dripping wet in an instance. She looked at the items Emma took out. There was enough of the silk rope to tie Emma up any way she wished. The blindfold and riding crop was there. But Emma added two more items. A gag ball and the flogger. Regina wanted to ask what brought it on, but she knew, in this scene, Emma created the play and it was requested, no questions. Regina made her way to her en-suite. She changed into something, befitting the Evil Queen, Mistress that she was. Tight black leathers.
Emma’s eyes looked at her Mistress in wonder as she kneeled on the bed before her. Their eyes met and whatever words needed to be spoken were communicated in one look. Regina placed the ball in Emma’s mouth and secured it with the strap at the back. She encouraged Emma the entire time. She could see Emma relax under her touch, but what was more, she started to relax. Up to that point, Regina had no idea how stressed she was. She tested the waters when Emma was tied up and ultimately spread open for her Mistress. Regina’s excitement was pulsating through her body. As the first lick of the whip landed in a spot on Emma’s back that Regina knew was sensitive and the blonde arched into it, Regina knew, this night, this woman would be all hers, and if they made it through this night, there would be so much more to come.

Regina laid on her back. An exhausted Emma was sprayed over her. Regina caringly raked her hand, though Emma’s blonde mane as the other hand held her. Regina tried to recall if she had ever felt like this. She played a lot in her life. She even had a few regulars. They indulged in casual sex sometimes, but it was nothing like the night she and Emma shared. Emma did not indicate for Regina to stop at any point. With every lash, Regina could feel herself release the tension in her body. She could see that the pain was doing the same for Emma. She did not tense up as Regina increased the level of pain, or when she changed from the crop to the flogger. She learned where Emma’s limit was. It was however what happened after their play. Emma went to the cupboard again and came back with a dual dildo. For the rest of the night, they literary fucked each other senseless. Their need and desire for each other did not ease as one after the other orgasm took them over. They turned into different positions, Regina let Emma take the lead a few times. Nothing about the night was a disappointment. Emma was everything Regina could hope for in a lover. The submissive, the obedient Kitten Regina played with, the demanding aggressor, the sensual lover. Regina let out a breath.

They could talk, they laughed together. They shared their sadness, their fears. Emma already knew so much of Regina’s darkness and she was still here, in her bed, curling up to her lover. It was certainly not close to anything she would have ever imagined for herself or from Emma. Yes she desired the woman for the moment she laid eyes on her, but dreaming of fucking someone in a certain way and doing it, then exceed that, it was totally unheard of. Regina pulled Emma up to her. Their bodies melted together and as Regina covered them both, they fell into a warm sleep.

Emma was awake before Regina. It was four in the morning. Her usual time to get up to study. She made her way to the kitchen to make coffee and took stock of her body. She was sore. But for the first time in her life, she felt different after a beating. Regina was careful, she did not break the skin anywhere on Emma. Emma’s mind was empty, not only during their night of amazing passion, but now. She felt free. All the question of their time before was gone as well. It did not matter to her. She understood now why Regina did it. Emma felt better than what she normally would after cutting herself. She was in a different kind of pain. It did not matter, she felt at ease with the world.

She made the coffee and took the mugs to bed. She placed Regina’s next to her and the brunette stirred as she felt the warmth of Emma’s body return to her. She smiled. Not only did she not stay over if she was in another woman’s bed, she always slept alone. The few times she had woken up with Emma next to her, she enjoyed it more than what she would admit. Her arm reached out for Emma and the soft body closed the gap between them. “How do you feel my love?” Emma took
the word for what it was. She had her own smile. She leaned into Regina and kissed her gently on the cheek.

“Wonderful. Thank you, Mistress.” Regina opened her eyes, expecting to see Emma’s mocking grin. Her eyes were serious though. Regina turned to lean on one elbow as she teased a finger over Emma’s breasts, her nipples went hard in an instant. Emma’s responsiveness to her touch still took Regina’s breath away.

“Would you like to talk about it now?” Emma gave her a yeah right smirk.

“Drink your coffee.” Emma said as she took a sip of her own. Regina sat up and took her coffee from the nightstand.

“Is this the way it will be between us?” Regina asked.

“You seemed to have enjoyed the sex as much as what I did.” Emma countered. Regina looked at her.

“That is not what I meant Miss Swan. I was referring to us. I, I want more.” Emma looked at her confused.

“Miss Michael, if you fuck me more than what you did last night, I might lose total control of my legs and the ability to walk straight.” Regina shook her head. A little smile adorned her sensual lips.

“No Miss Swan, I meant talking. Is this the way it will be. You have your issues. I have mine. Do we fuck it out of each other, without discussing it?”

Emma looked amused. Regina rarely cursed. When she did, it was in her father’s home tongue. Emma often wondered if Henry taught her more Spanish than only swear words. Emma was never around to hear Spanish from those seductive lips. She could imagine it though. Husky Spanish from kissable lips. It did not amaze her too much that she was already wet again.

“I asked you before, what do you want?” Emma thought about it. “So is this a relationship? I need to warn you I have little experience in that department. I am a love and run girl. Break up with them before they can break up with you.” Regina smiled at Emma and touched her face gently. It would be so easy to love you. Regina thought. Instead of making her anxious, she felt a warmth spread through her body.

“Emma, I care enough for you to want to know why you are hurting.” The words were spoken softly. Emma went stiff. Regina touched her reassuringly. Emma got out of the bed and paced up and down in the bedroom. Regina saw her back and looked worryingly at it. Regina gave her a full work over. Emma stopped suddenly.

“I do not know. Do I want to tell you about yesterday? No. Do I want to tell you about certain things that happened in my life, no I don’t.” Regina kept her eyes focused on the green once.

“It is understandable, I have told you some things about my past, but yes, there are other things that I do not wish in particular to tell you.” Emma raised an eyebrow. “But?”

Regina inhaled again. “But, there is a lot I do not know about you, that I want to know.” Emma
frowned. Her life was not that interesting. “Like what?”

Regina gave her a full smile. “Where did you learn to dance the Tango?”

Jesus! Emma thought. One of those again. A simple question with such a complicated answer. “Strip club.” Emma answered. Regina looked at her. For a moment she did not know what to do. “Emma, the least you can do, is to be honest with me. If you do not want to tell me, then say so, but I am not Killian, do not lie to me?”

She should have known better, Emma thought. Half-truths and some truths, would be detected by Regina. Regina pushed on. “I would say that you learned it in Argentina.” Emma tilted her head. “I did, in La Boca.” Regina gave her a sincere smile. She knew Emma would not elaborate, that there was much more to the story. “Thank you.” Regina answered and leaned back against the pillows. “Are you going to treat your Mistress to a morning O Kitten?” Emma grinned. “I would love to.”
Chapter 15

Red did not bother with apologies to Emma. This was work. If Emma could not handle it, it was her problem. They worked together as the day before. Emma had shut her mind off from the images she saw. It was only when they took a break for lunch that she allowed herself to feel. Regina was waiting for them as they secured the darkroom. “I need to speak to both of you,” Regina said, turned and walked off. She expected them to follow her.

Mary Margaret informed her of the tiff between Red and Emma the day before. She also gave Regina the photograph that Emma had in the developer too long. “Shit!” Regina said as she saw it. She told Mary Margaret that she would deal with it. Now the two were sitting in her office. “How is it going on the project?”

Red’s tone was factual. “We have printed more than half of the photos that were selected. So we are slightly ahead of schedule. Emma and I will finish it up by the weekend so that you can make the final decision in the new week. Neal is ready to print it. He said he would do it himself.” Regina’s fingers played. Not the normal, sweep of her palm, this was another gesture, a feminine way to point with her forefinger, her thumb on it. It was elegant and intimidating at the same time.

“Anything else I need to know about?” Red gave Emma a nasty look. “I had a fall out with Emma yesterday. She had a photo in the developer too long.” Emma looked at her as if she had no idea what Red was referring to. Then she remembered the photo of the girl in the alley. She looked down. “Miss Swan?” Regina asked in that business voice of hers. “Miss Lucas is correct. I lost concentration and had the print in the developer too long, I ruined it, Red had to redo it.” Regina frowned. “What did Miss Lucas say to you?”

Emma thought about it. “I cannot recall.” It was Red’s turn to frown. Surely Emma remembered that she told her to fuck off?

“Am I correct if I say that it was not Miss Lucas’s reprimand that upset you, but the photo?” Emma looked at her. She had no idea if the anger or the tears would come first.

“I told you, Michael, I do not wish to discuss it.” Emma could see Red tense beside her. Dear gods, did no one ever stand their ground with Regina?

“Indeed, you did Miss Swan. Miss Lucas, can you excuse us, please?” Red instantly felt the need to say something before Regina killed Emma. “Michael, on a scale from one to ten Emma gets a 9.9. In comparison with other people I have worked with in the lab, she is precise and efficient. So far there had only been three mishaps.” Regina smiled at her.

“Thank you, Red.”
As the door closed, Regina looked down. Emma did not look at her at all. “I am sorry Emma. I did not think about the emotional impact this project would have on you. I only thought that you would enjoy working on it.” Emma swallowed, she had calmed down enough. “I do. The photos are incredible. They remind me a lot of R. Mills’ work.” Regina rubbed her palm and Emma noticed. “Perhaps, because it is R. Mills’ work, Emma.

Emma looked at her boss as if she heard incorrectly. “What?” Regina gave her a small smile. “We did not tell you in case it made you too nervous. This is the new R. Mills collection. Twelve photos will be auctioned off at Alice Jones’s Spring Charity Fundraiser. Twenty-five smaller photos will be sold to galleries.”

Emma had no idea what to answer. “Can I meet her?” She asked. The question took Regina by surprise. She forgot that Emma did not know who R. Mills was. Regina thought for a moment. She should tell Emma, but she had no idea how Emma would react, with or without the information. *Gods, this was becoming complicated.*

“Let’s get the collection out and then we can see about that?” Regina suggested. Emma beamed at her. “About the photo Emma.” Her mood sobered a bit.

“It’s the same alley in Boston.” Regina swallowed.

“I know.” It was the reason why she took the photograph. The girl, the alley, it could have been Emma. She never thought what impact it might have on the woman, seeing the past so clearly.

“If you want to work on something else…”

“Are you kidding me? Miss this opportunity? Hell no!” Regina accepted it.

“Emma, is that why you came to me last night?” Regina asked carefully. Emma looked at her intensely. “Or we could have played and fucked each other’s brains out.” Regina bit her lips together, and Emma thought it was adorable.

Red asked Emma about her explanation to Regina. “Red, I screwed up, I had no idea who this was for. I only understand now why you are so stressed, and yes, I cannot remember what you said to me. It did not matter. I also did not tell Michael.”

“She told you?” Red asked carefully.

“Yes, she told me this is the new R. Mills collection. I did not even know she was a client.” Red nodded. *So Michael did not tell you everything.*

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Regina looked at the collection that was in front of her. She adjusted the glasses and Emma thought she looked very sexy. Regina had a good idea, from the start on what she wanted. As she looked now, the pictures fell into place. She shook her head. *What the hell are you doing?* It was not the first time she asked herself the question while working on this project. She tried to understand Emma. The whole damn collection was about Emma. She saw firsthand how and where Emma lived. She spoke to Neal about it. He had seen the collection the day before. It was a revelation to
him, not that either Regina or Emma would admit to their feelings. Neal had seen Emma’s photos and her artwork. They both had each other on the mind when they expressed themselves creatively.

Neal told Regina one simple truth about Emma. She lived by a plain ingrained encryption. *Don’t feel, don’t speak, don’t trust.* If Regina made a crack in any of those, she was on the right path. “Just one thing Michael. Tell her the truth, sooner, rather than later. If you break her trust, she will run. It is what she knows.” Regina took the warning to heart.

Mary Margaret and Red watched as she picked out the photos. They were telling a story. Regina, as always, interviewed every person she took a photo from. Some of the kids were not too happy to talk to her, but she got their story after they were handed twenty bucks. It broke her heart that, it was all it took to hear a tale she did not understand. They discussed the photos at length. Mary Margaret was responsible for the copy that would accompany each photo. They were all tired by the time Regina called it a night.

Regina sat on the deck chair on her balcony looking at nothing specific. The weather was warming up. She enjoyed the openness of the deck. She thought about Emma and her new collection. She had no idea how she was going to tell Emma. She thought about other aspects of their lives as well. Their hurt, though different was part of them now and they were both scared to move forward. Regina wondered if she would ever be free from Leopold, from the fear he created in her. She remembered what Emma told her, *It is not always our choice, we become products of abuse. We are what people make us.* Was this their fate? That they would withhold the truth from each other, deny their feelings? Runaway? Regina felt the tears. She loved Emma, she was certain of it. She wanted to wake up with the woman every morning. Why was she unable to tell her? Was this her? This emotionless dark, brooding woman, was this what she had become? Emma saw past that, Emma made her feel, she made Regina laugh.

She thought about the new collection again. The emotions that came with some of the photos. Regina knew that no artist could capture what she did if, she did not feel. She shook her head. The emotion was from Emma, chasing her story. Trying to understand. There was such a chasm between their childhoods, their lives in general. Regina pulled her legs up and rested her head on her arms. Was that the problem? This time she did not try to stop the tears. Emma Swan was everything she had ever wanted. *Why was this so hard?*

Emma was working in the executive office aside Mary Margaret and Red. Mary Margaret was fascinated with the insight Emma gave on all the photos. All except the one of the blond girl in the alley. Mary Margaret knew it was the photo that caused Red’s outburst, and now Emma had a different reaction again. When the office manager asked her opinion, she shrugged her shoulders. “Just a girl in a back alley.” *What was she supposed to say?* It was cold. It smelled of sewerage. That she had never felt so alone in her life, but that it was seven days in her young life where she was safe? Red saw the tears first. She wanted to comfort Emma when Emma’s features changed from sadness to anger. She looked at the women standing next to her. Her eyes were accusing. She grabbed the photo off the table where the collection was laid out with color frames and half written copies. “Emma!” Mary Margaret yelled as she crumpled the photo in her hand. Red was about to explode again when they saw Emma making her way to Regina’s office. Killian intuitively knew what happened. He tried to stop Emma. She pushed him out of the way. Regina looked up when
her office door opened. As her eyes met Emma’s, she knew. She stood up. “Emma.”

Emma held her hand up and slammed the photo down on Regina’s desk. There were tears on her cheeks, but anger in her eyes. Regina sat, her legs did not want to hold her up. She knew, in that instance that she had fucked it up. She should have told Emma, not only that she loved her, but that she was R. Mills. Regina was too late. Whatever she had with Emma, it was no longer. “Emma please?”

“Please what Regina?” She screamed at her. “Did you pay her?” Regina looked confused. ”Did you pay this kid to pose for you?” Emma saw the truth in Regina’s eyes. Emma shook her head. ”Why?” Regina looked down for a moment.

“I wanted to understand better Emma. To understand you, to see how you grew up. It is also for a charity fundraiser. All the auction money will go to homes for children.”

Emma’s anger blazed, more. “And what will you tell your rich friends at the auction? That I was your first charity project?”

“Emma, you know it is not like that!”

“Do I?” She ran a hand through her hair and sat down, far more tired than what she should be. “You pick me up, gave me a job, a home. You gave me the opportunity to study. Is that not charity? Or am I paying my way by being your fuck whore?” The venom with which Emma asked the question hit Regina like a physical blow. Regina was shaking. A fear took her over, fear very different from anything she had ever experienced before.

“Emma, please? It is not like that. You mean more to me. I…” Emma shook her head. “No, don’t you dare say that. Do you think I will ever believe you?” Regina felt her heartbreaking slowly in her chest. It was an incredible pain. “I will hand in my resignation and clear my stuff out by the weekend,” Emma announced as she turned and walked out.

She walked past the three stunned people. They did not know what was said, but Emma was screaming at Michael, that much was clear, and now their formidable boss was sitting behind her desk, crying into her hands. Mary Margaret was the first to go in. She held Regina and shooed her until she calmed down enough to tell her daughter what happened. She had never seen Regina this upset. She called Red and Killian in. She gave them the gist of the conversation and then left.

Emma did not answer the door. She did not care who it was. She did not want to speak to anyone. Mary Margaret called Graham, and he opened Emma’s door for her. The little brunette made her way to the bedroom where she found a weeping Emma. It was her nature to mother. Seeing Emma in this state, all she could do was to climb on the bed to hold Emma. The cries ripped through Emma’s body. Mary Margaret was sure that Emma Swan did not often cry, hell Regina did not cry at all, yet here she was, consoling one after the other. Emma clung to her. Gods, she has been in pain before, both physical and emotional. Nothing before in her life has hurt like this.

Emma finally fell asleep from exhaustion. She was sleeping on Mary Margaret’s lap. The woman stroked the blonde mane in the hopes that it would calm her. She spoke to Red quietly on her cell phone. Regina was next door in much the same state. Mary Margaret shook her head. She still did not know what happened. One moment they were working on the collection and the next moment, Emma confronted Regina in her office. The office manager had learned much about Emma in the
months she has been with them. Regina tried to explain it to her. What Emma’s gift was, but it was near impossible to describe. Seeing it in action, was a different matter.

Regina told them all what she wanted to do when she left to do her first shoot. They all knew who R. Mills was from the beginning, yet Emma figured it out on her own. Mary Margaret could think of more than a dozen journalists that have tried to deduce out the identity of the prize-winning photographer. Whatever it was that Emma had, it was priceless.

When Emma woke, she had a headache. Her eyes were swollen. Mary Margaret was still sitting with her. She did not bother to ask Emma how she felt. She handed the young woman some water and had a drink ready for her. She knew Emma did not regularly drink hard liquor, but Emma took the glass gratefully and swallowed all of it. She sat back on her bed and closed her eyes with her arm. Mary Margaret curled up next to her and started to talk.

“My mom died when I was ten. I loved my father very much, but he was always so busy. The times that we spent together was wonderful, but it was few and far between. When he brought Regina to our home, I was overwhelmed. She was young, a student at one of the most esteemed universities in the state. She was beautiful and sophisticated. She was everything I wanted to be. I looked up to her, all I wanted to do with my life was to be just like Regina.” Emma still had her eyes closed. Mary Margaret hoped that she was listening.

“That she loved Daniel?” Emma asked. Mary Margaret was relieved. She was listening, and Regina told her about Daniel. If she told her about Daniel, then Emma knew more.

“She never talks about him anymore. She loved him, yes. She never loved my father. It was like a damn arranged marriage. Cora, that heartless bitch!” Mary Margaret shook her head. Emma took her arm away.

“Did you just swear?” Mary Margaret blushed. “I would like to call her other things.” Emma closed her eyes again.

“Yeah, so can I and I have been in her company for ten minutes.” Mary Margaret snorted. “With Cora, that is all it takes to hate her. She virtually sold Regina to my father. She was the only one that got anything out of that marriage.” Emma heard the anger and sadness there.

“Why are you telling me this Mary Margaret?”

The light green eyes met the darker green. “Two reasons. So listen Miss Swan?” Emma nodded, and Mary Margaret carried on. “I am sure that Cora was well aware of who and what my father was. And she still let her only child marry him.” A tear made its way down her cheek. “Regina kept the truth from me. In her mind, it was the only way to protect me. The truth was that I did not want to know. You were correct when you said I hide behind Regina. I feel safe with her and David, between them, they have helped me to come to terms with where I come from.” Emma looked at her in question. Mary Margaret gave her a sad smile. “My clothes, home, education, everything I had was bought with blood money Emma.” Emma thought about it. For someone as
kind and as soft as Mary Margaret, yes, it must have been difficult.

“What about the publishing house?” Emma asked. Mary Margaret turned her head. “Emma I am surprised at the things Regina told you, she never opens to people about me, Daniel or the company. Yes, she gave me the company. I did not want it. We discussed it, eventually, I signed the contract. Forty-nine percent of the company is mine. Regina is the majority shareholder and therefore the boss. I am more than happy with it. Over the years, she changed the company, even though my father’s name is still on the building, this company is unblemished by his greed.” She looked Emma over and changed the subject.

“Do you love my mother?” The tears were instantly in Emma’s eyes. The words still refused to come out. She only inclined her head with a yes. Mary Margaret took her hand. “For the longest time I wanted her to find love, the kind of love she had for Daniel, but there were too much hurt and betrayal in her life. She trusted no one. When she finally cleared the Publishing House from all the money laundering and corruption, she had us, her executive team. She handpicked all of us. The same as she did you. In the beginning, I did not understand. However, seeing you in action a few times now and knowing that you are studying Social Analytics for the first time, I understand why Regina picked you. You must have made a damn good impression.” Emma thought back to that first night they spent together. “I also saw Regina the day you two did the shoot. She was smiling. I have not seen her smile like that for a long, long time. There is something magic about you Emma.”

Emma laughed. “And you are a dreamer. Do you know what Regina and I have most in common?” Mary Margaret gave her a small smile. “Pain.” Mary Margaret took her hand and looked deep into Emma’s eyes. “You have both been hurt, more than once, betrayed by people that should have protected you. It would be difficult for both of you to say if your physical or emotional damage is what is causing more pain. After Regina secured a future for both of us and the trial was over, she took some time off. I was with David in this little town Regina sent me to keep me safe. She had my name changed, hers as well.”

“Regina Mills?” Emma asked. “Yes. It kept us safe for a long time. I think it is only Robin Locksley that know who we are. It was necessary at the time. My father had a lot of influence. As you have seen, he even managed to get Sidney Glass in here, while he was still in prison. Rumple cannot even figure it out. All of Leopold’s money is tied up.” She shook her head.

“Regina has always been strong. She had to learn to be strong and aggressive, growing up with that witch! After the trial, she broke down. She carried tremendous stress for a long time, on her own. She had no support. She did things that placed enormous strain on her morals and internal resources. She told me that half the time she did not even know what she was doing or if her gambles and deceit would pay off. She was scared all the time. She was scared living with my father all the time as well. It changed her Emma. After Daniel’s death, she showed fewer emotions, but by the time my father was locked up, it was as if she did not feel at all. Rumple, took her away for a month to a place that no one would ever look for her.”

“Africa?” Emma asked Mary Margaret smiled. “She loved it. She always said it was an experience of a lifetime. That the continent is so much different from anything, she knew. That was where she took the Pulitzer Prize photo, the one here.” She pointed to the photo above Emma’s bed. “She also
wrote her first book while she was there. When she returned, she was the Regina we all know now.” She sighed with sadness. “Lately, she has changed.”

“Changed how?” Emma asked.

Mary Margaret raised her eyebrows. Then she realized that Emma only knew this different Regina. “She smiles more. She angers faster.” Mary Margaret giggled. “In other words, she is showing more emotion. This new collection, Emma it is phenomenal. Her work is usually good. She captures emotion, but this one. Gods! The emotion is raw and real. This collection is going to sell for millions. It is all because of you Emma. You changed her somehow. I still do not know what happened or is happening between you, but you are changing her. She is becoming the woman I met when I was eleven.” The matter seemed to be essential to Mary Margaret. Emma understood that with their relationship of mother and daughter, they would always want the best for each other.

She knew how Regina felt about it. In the first few months of her arrival, Mary Margaret supported Graham in his endeavor to find out who she was. Emma understood. They protected each other.

“Emma.” There was a new seriousness in the brunette’s voice. “Regina needs you, even if she does not know it or acknowledge it. You need her and the rest of us as well. Emma that wall of yours, it may keep out the pain. But it also may keep out love.” Emma felt her anger boil. “Emma, you have a family here. This is not just a job any longer. This is also your home.” The tears started again.

Emma was so trapped in the betrayal of her trust that she did not stop to think what more she will lose if she quits. She would lose Neal, her brother, and Killian, her friend. She was accepted here. It no longer mattered to the rest where she came from, Hunter especially was always there to encourage her. They all protected her when she stood up for Regina. She placed everything on the line only because someone said something about Regina that she did not like. And now she was leaving her, leaving this all behind? She started to cry more.

Mary Margaret was running out of options. She explained to Emma why Regina was so secretive, how Emma was changing her. What she would lose. “Emma, she does this collection once a year, she has only taken on things that have meaning to her. I would guess that this year, because of you, she did a shoot on runaways and street kids.” Emma nodded. “The photo?” Mary Margaret asked softly. Emma pointed to the bookcase in the corner of her room. Mary Margaret got up and walked over. As she approached, she saw the photo and realized the reason why the alley seemed so familiar. She put two and two together. “The girl in the photo, it could have been you? That was why you were so upset when you saw it first. And today, you told Regina about this alley?” Emma sat in a miserable heap. She understood everything. She has already mapped out the complete tale between the information she had from Regina and what Mary Margaret told her. The other pieces fell into place slowly. Cora, Regina’s BDMS lifestyle. There was a reason for everything. She got up and took a picture out of her drawer. She gave it to Mary Margaret. It was the one of Regina sitting on her Bug in the heat of the day smiling as Emma took the photo.

The soft green eyes looked at the photo for a very long time. She cried as she ran her fingers over the image. She said nothing. She thought back to the day she messaged Red, they both stood shocked when they heard Regina laughed. It was the same day, she realized. She handed the photo back to Emma. The blonde gave her the other one of Regina. The one where Regina smiled at her, for her, that moment after the kiss. Mary Margaret inhaled deeply when she saw it. There, in Regina’s eyes and the smile was the answer. Mary Margaret looked at Emma in amazement.

“Please Emma, do not leave?” Emma nodded. Mary Margaret felt a flood of gratefulness wash over
her. Emma took the photo and placed it on the stand next to her bed. She wanted it there from the beginning, but she never knew how she would explain it. She went to the bathroom to wash her face. “What will you do now?” Mary Margaret asked a little nervously.

“I need to speak to her.” Mary Margaret nodded and let Emma be. They made their way out to the hallway. Mary Margaret hugged her and turned to her apartment. Red came out of Regina’s and joined her friend. Emma took in a deep breath when she opened the door with her keycard. She walked to the bedroom and found Regina laying there in a bundle, her body shaking with sorrow. Emma walked around the bed and crawled in under the duvet and snaked her arms around the familiar body. Regina assumed it would be Snow, but when she felt her lover’s arms around her, she cried harder. Emma held her and placed soft kisses on her neck. It calmed Regina down significantly. After a while, Emma asked, “So do we talk about this or do we just fuck each other’s brains out?” Regina erupted with laughter. Only a few hours ago, she thought she would never laugh again, but she did. Here, safe in Emma’s arms.
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Just had to do this. Don't hate me?

Chapter 16

Regina turned to look at her. The tears were there. Emma leaned in, wiping Regina’s beautiful face. “Emma, I…” Emma placed a soft finger on her full lips. “Shhh.” Regina looked into the green eyes. She understood Emma was not ready to talk about it. She leaned in and captured the blonde’s mouth. The kiss was soft and hesitant. Emma pulled her in and deepened the kiss. As their bodies merged, their hands raked into each other’s hair, clothes coming off slowly.

Emma was shaking as Regina placed her naked body on top of her. Regina knew that this was the language they both understood. The language that did not lie. She made love to Emma. They have taken it slowly before, but Emma could feel the difference in her lover’s touch. Her hands lingered longer, the intensity of her movement as she pressed into Emma, it filled them both. Emma could feel the tears well up again, when she kissed Regina, her lips were quivering. It moved Regina in a way she never thought possible.

She knew at that moment that she never wanted to let Emma go. This woman was her future, her life. She held Emma close as they made love. She felt her heart burst when Emma climaxed, she followed right after. They held each other tight as their breathing settled. Regina kissed Emma’s cheeks, the tears salty on her tongue. Her mind and her body were in sync now. She lifted her head, her hair falling forward. The curves of her breast showing as she pulled up. Emma took a breath. She had never in her life seen anything so exquisite. She swallowed hard, the way Regina looked at her, she knew what was coming next. Their passion surpassed anything they have felt before. That moment when your Soul, heart, and body merge in a way you never believed possible. Emma held on to Regina. Her nails were digging into the mocha shoulders as her body arched off the bed.

They laid spooned for a long time, soaking in the feel of their bodies together in this safe haven they have created for themselves. “What are you thinking?” Regina asked the question softly. She did not want to break this safe place they had, but she knew when Emma was reveling in happy thoughts and when it was serious. Emma turned in her arms. She swept the wet hair out of Regina’s eyes. The words were on her tongue, in her eyes, that soft touch on Regina’s face. She looked deep into the dark eyes. Regina smiled at her. Emma felt her heart skip a beat. She smiled back. “Have you ever thought about your life? That question, if you could change one thing? What would it be?”

Regina thought about it a moment. Her mind was too practical to think about things like that. It was superfluous since you would not be able to do it. “No, I have not.” Emma turned on her back. Regina turned on her side, her head leaning on her elbow, her other hand lingered on Emma’s body. Tracing soft fingers over the gorgeous flesh.

“I have not thought about it in a long time. Accepting my fate. Then you walk into my life and turn everything to shit.” She giggled. “All my well-constructed walls. Tumbling down. You did tell me that I will regret it if I do not get into your car. It is the same thing. You look back at your life. You
find that one moment in space and time, where you know if I made a different choice at that point…
Gods, I would have spared myself a lifetime of pain.” Regina looked at her for a moment and then
slowly turned her cheek in order to look into Emma’s eyes.

“No, I would have spared myself a lifetime of pain.” Emma smiled sadly at her. “I do.”

“What would happen if you could change that moment?” Emma reached out and touched Regina’s
face. “I will never meet you.”

 Regina’s mind was occupied with Emma’s question and revelation. Perhaps if she were honest with
herself, the one thing she would change in her life, would be, never to meet Leopold. She will marry
Daniel. One by one the consequences of that fell into place.

She would never meet Mary Margaret. She would not have the publishing house. She might have
children, but what else? No Emma. They have not said the words yet. Regina, however, knew what
she felt. She could lie to herself about many things, but she could not demy her feelings for Emma.
She would not deny that she could see a future for them or the happiness that came when she was in
Emma’s arms. Would she make a different choice to spare herself all that pain living with Leopold
and miss out on this happiness?

She thought about Emma. What was Emma’s moment and what would be her choice? Regina also
knew that the way things turned out made her stronger. It was not only the business that she would
never have, but it would also be her art. The photos that brought so much meaning to her and other’s
lives. Would she have ever been content being nothing more than Daniel’s wife? Gods, even
Leopold knew she needed more, that was why he allowed her to work at the publishing house.

“Gods, Emma, as if life is not complicated enough, you have to think about shit like this?” She
mused aloud. Perhaps it was understandable? Would foster children not always wish for something
better?

Red knocked on her office door. She waved her in. “I have all the shots for your final approval.”
Regina smiled. “I will be right there.” Red closed the door again. Regina did not move. The
money from the auction should make a difference in a lot of children’s lives, but will they sit with the
same regret Emma did? Was it regret? She knew there was more to the simple statement that Emma
made. A story, her story. She looked at the open floor where Emma was in a conversation with
Mary Marriet. This was their lives, and it could be good. Not realizing that a smile formed on her
lips as she looked at the two, Emma tucked her hair behind her ear and looked up and turned. A
smile, for Regina and her alone.

 Regina could not keep her eyes from Emma. She sat saddled on Regina’s, her body upright and
sweaty as she pushed deeper into Regina with the strap-on they used tonight. It was different.
Regina could feel the emotions, Emma was filling her with. They were not having sex. It was more.
Every touch and push filled Regina deep. All of Emma’s movements were slow and beautiful. She
was touching her own breasts. The display in front of her was exquisite. She was so turned on, but
Emma kept her on that edge for as long as she could. It more than once surprised Regina that this
was Emma’s first same-sex relationship, she was so in tuned to Regina’s needs and body. It has
been a few months now that they agreed on an exclusive relationship. Regina has not felt the need to
seek out someone other than Emma. She has never had this. She closed her eyes as she felt Emma
pushed harder. Emma…
Emma was looking out of the window as she and Killian made their way to Alice’s Spring Fundraiser. Regina was attending with Philip. It was fucked up. Same-sex marriages where legal in most states now, and there they were, four of them pretending that everything was normal, in order for their families to be happy. Of the four, Emma felt the most uncomfortable. This was not her people. She did not understand their lives. More so, Emma pretended too much in her life. She was the good girl, the rebel, the happy girl, the grateful one. She tried her entire life to fit in, only to realize she never would. She thought about Mary Margaret and Christmas. Yeah, this family was where she belonged. She almost lost it when she was so angry at Regina. She fitted in with a family that really did not fit in anywhere else, but together. She smiled at the irony of it. So raise your glass if you are wrong, In all the right ways! Emma smiled as she thought about the song. Was it enough? She asked herself. There was still so much that frightened her about opening up, allowing people to come in, to love.

Killian noticed her mood. He understood better than what Emma knew. He hated the pretense as well. He wanted to dance in Philip’s arms the entire night, look into his brown eyes. He smiled at Emma as he helped her out of the car. Regina and Philip were already there. Mary Margaret and Red had set up the night with Alice and the caterers. Everything was perfect.

Killian guided Emma through the collection. She knew all the photos off by heart. Seeing them this large, framed and perfectly displayed, did bring something new to it. Killian watched her. He kept her very close in case the emotions were too much for her. She looked at several of them like she saw them for the first time. She had a brightness of pride in her eyes. She was a small part of this creation. Emma did not see the photo of the alley immediately when she did. It took her breath away. It was the centerpiece display.

“Would you like me to buy it for you?” Killian asked as he observed her. “Don’t you dare Mr. Jones!” She answered him with a smile. Regina and Phillip joined them. “Do you like this piece Miss Swan?” Phillip asked kindly. Regina and Killian went stiff. Emma gave him a kind smile. “I do Mr. Morris, in another life that could have been me.” He nodded. “Truth be told Miss Swan, this could have been all of us and only a few people here will ever realize it.” His reward was that smile again. His eyes beamed up at Killian though. “Would you like a drink?” Phillip asked Regina, always the gentleman. “Some champagne please?” He left with Killian.

“It looks fabulous Regina,” Emma said, never taking her eyes off the photo. They were joined by very unpleasant company. “So it is Regina now?” Cora Bolívar asked besides Emma. Emma smiled her most charming smile. “Good evening Mrs. Bolívar.” Cora turned to her with that same fake plastered smile. “All of this must be very familiar to you Emma.” Emma did not know the tone of her voice, but Regina did. “Mother…” Her voice was warning. Emma defused her anger with a small touch on her arm. “It is alright.” She said to Regina. “Would you like me to give you the tour Mrs. Bolívar?” Cora was taken aback but followed Emma.

Emma read all the interviews and read all the copies. “Have you read the stories of these children?” They kept up the fake courtesy. “Yes, dear. Can you read?” Emma gave a light laugh. It left no doubt in Emma’s mind that Cora investigated her and knew all the events of her past. Emma stopped at one of the exhibitions. It was about a boy with ripped clothes and a few old scars on his arm. The story explained that he started to live on the street after his last beating. “Do you know what the
difference is between this boy and you?” Emma asked casually. She took a glass of champagne from a waiter on their way over to the photo. Holding it by the stem, she drank slowly.

“All the difference in the world,” Cora answered crude. Emma turned to her, looking every so elegant in her black evening dress.

“Four miles actually.” Cora frowned. “This picture,” Emma pointed. “It was taken four miles from your current mansion.” She walked on without asking Cora to join her. “This one was taken a block from your law firm,” Emma said as Cora came to stand next to her. She guided Cora to the next one. “This one is particularly close to you. The boy’s name is Ricardo Bolivar. As you know, it is the name of a small Basque village. Bolu meaning mill and ibar meaning meadow. The surname evolved with time to Bolívar, Simón Bolívar specifically, your forefather. The nobleman that became a soldier and is responsible for the independence of many South American countries.” Cora looked at the picture. The boy was small and looked underfed. “The difference between you and this boy is merely the spelling of your name.” Emma walked off. Cora caught up to her quickly.

“And that one?” She indicated to the one of the blonde girl in the alley.

“No, that one has nothing to do with you.” Cora pushed. “I saw the way Regina looked at it.

“Oh, that!” Emma said so enthusiastic it took Cora by surprise. “That is me.” Her tone was cold when she said it, her face serious. “So yes Cora, I am very familiar with it!” She turned and left a stunned woman behind. No one ever took Cora on. No one would ever dare to fight back, defend themselves. Why did this woman?

“Miss Swan.” She acknowledged Emma this time. Emma looked at her. “Right now I can see that you are good for Regina. What will you do if that changed?” Emma turned to the woman she detested. It was hard to hide that fact from the eyes.

“I would leave. She has too much pain in her life to deserve more. If I am making her unhappy or hurting her in some way, I will leave.”

“You are hurting her reputation.” Emma turned her head. The fucking woman was serious. If it surprised Emma, she hid it damn well.

“Really?” Emma turned back to look at the photo. “And here I thought nothing could be worse than having the reputation of the biggest bitch in New York.” Regina had no idea what to do turned to Emma with an open mouth. “I Googled it, you were correct, your photo came up,” Emma said every word factually, without a hint of a smile, when Regina realized what Emma was talking about, her laughter rang through the room. Cora was shocked to the core. She had never heard her child laugh like that. Several photographers were there to capture the bizarre moment. Mrs. Carmichael, not only smiled, she laughed!

In a quiet corner, Henry Bolívar smiled to himself and made a silent toast to Emma and Regina.

The auction went exceptionally well. Mary Margaret was over the moon. The bids started at reasonable prices, but the tally raked up with every raised hand. Henry Bolívar bought the main item for over a million dollars. Emma gave him a happy smile, for him that alone made it worthwhile. He bought it for his study if only to piss off Cora since Regina told him the story. Cora, however, bought the photo of Ricardo Bolivar, Emma gave it meaning for her. Regina smiled with pride as Mary Margaret came to hug her. They shared that intimate look that Cora often wished she could share with Regina, but it never happened. Snow was not even her birth daughter, but they shared it.
After the auction, the floor was cleared, the champagne flowed freely, couples danced. Security was more relaxed as the exhibition was boxed and moved. No one noticed the properly dressed man entered. He walked in casually, took some champagne from a waiter and drank it as he looked at the dancing couples. A few of them drew his attention. He watched Killian and a beautiful blonde, their eyes not on each other, but another couple. Regina and Phillip. It did not take a genius to figure that one out. His hard eyes fell on Mary Margaret and David. His mouth formed a sneer. He would deal with David at the appropriate time. He walked over to the bar, waiting for the dance to end and see where the couples would settle.

As he expected the four joined each other. The two women were standing next to each other. He finished his drink and made his way over to them. He had to be quick. Regina looked away for a moment. He reached into his jacket pocket. The setting was perfect. He was walking towards the door. There was a car waiting for him. No one noticed him, no one except Emma.

She did not know everyone there, but the man approaching them, she had not seen all night. She watched his hand as it moved into his pocket. When she saw what he pulled out, she breathed in. Everything slowed down. She knew who he was, knew what he was about to do. Regina felt Emma tense beside her, and as Regina looked up, she yelled. Everyone moved at the same time. Leopold lifted the pistol, Graham came running from the side. Leopold turned his head slightly to observe the man as he pulled off two shots. Their lives changed in 0.2 seconds.
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

Okay, so the next chapter will be better. There has to be a little suspense! Thank you for being kind with the previous chapter.

All the comments and kudos are appreciated

Chapter Notes

All the italic writing are memories.

Chapter 17

“You look back at your life. You find that one moment in space and time, where you know if I made a different choice at that point... Gods, I would have spared myself a lifetime of pain.” Regina looked at her for a moment and then slowly turned her cheek in order to look into Emma’s eyes.

“Do you have such a moment?” Emma smiled sadly at her. “I do.”

“What would happen if you could change that moment?” Emma reached out and touched Regina’s face. “I will never meet you.”

Emma thought about that moment. She was four and a happy little girl. For the longest time, in the foster system, she wished for that moment. She would imagine what her life would be like. It would still have its pain, but gods, anything would have been easier and less traumatic than the life she had.

She heard screams. Emma turned to look around after the shooting. Graham was beating the crap out of Leopold. Several people were on their phones. A few women cried. “Regina?” Emma pulled herself up. “Emma!”

In those 0.2 seconds, Emma pushed Regina out of the way. Leopold did not see it. He was distracted for that fraction of a second by Graham's approach.

Regina moved over to Emma. The photographers were snapping away. A big story just became a front-page saga. Regina’s lips fell on Emma’s. Snap. Regina did not care. She placed her hand on Emma’s chest as she moved away from the kiss with a smile. Her mind was telling her something,
but the adrenaline made everything fuzzy. Her hand was warm and wet. She pulled it from Emma’s chest and looked at it, not understanding at all. Her hand was full of blood. She was not shot, she was sure of it. She looked at Emma as her mind registered. “Emma?” She asked in a strained husky voice, her deep brown eyes full of concern. Emma gave her half a smile. “I love you, Regina.” She said before she fell back. Regina could now see the blood pooling around Emma.

“David!” Regina yelled in a panicked voice as she placed both her hands on Emma’s chest to try and stop the bleeding. David looked up from where he and Graham were apprehending Leopold. Regina’s call made him realize it was serious. He rushed over to her. When he saw the blood pouring through her hands, he moved again. “Alice where are those first aiders?” Alice made sure there was always someone on standby at her parties. She had already called all of them. Besides her security, she also had two police officers and two paramedics.

The officers cuffed Leopold and had to keep Graham contained. The paramedics came with their red bags and went to work in a second on Emma. One removed Regina’s hands, kindly saying to her, that he would take over. His partner, a woman, cringed when she had to cut through Emma’s dress to see where the wound was and how bad it was. The beautiful dress fell away. “Two gunshots. One looks liked it nicked her lung. We need a needle decompression before that lung collapses.”

She inserted a large bore needle between Emma’s ribs to allow the air to escape. Her partner was placing an oxygen mask on her face, to assist with her breathing. He easily managed to slip a needle in her arm for the IVs. Knowing that the given painkillers and fluids would keep Emma’s blood pressure up. They could hear sirens in the distance. “Is she allergic to anything?” One of them asked. Regina stepped forward. “No, she is not.”

Graham took Regina in his arms. Killian was holding Mary Margaret, Phillip’s hand discreetly on his shoulder. The ambulance, police cars and media all arrived so fast. However, it felt like a lifetime to Regina, but they responded in only a few minutes. It was one of the benefits of having half the board members, and private contributors to the New York-Presbyterian Hospitals at a fundraiser.

Emma opened her eyes. “She is conscious. Good girl, can you tell me your name honey?” The woman working on Emma asked.

“Regina?” The Paramedic nodded. “Alright Regina, we are trying to stop the bleeding.”

Emma looked at her confused. She did not realize that her call was very soft. “No, Regina.” The paramedic could see the panic in her green eyes, she turned. “Regina?” She called out, hoping that the woman would hear her. The brunette came forward. Regina moved as fast as she could and was by Emma’s side and holding her hand on the opposite side of the wound.

“I am here Emma, hold on, please?” Emma gave her that small smile. “I love you.” She repeated. Regina had held the emotions in until that point.

“No, you don’t get to say that!” The tears were streaming down her face. “You tell me that when you can look me in the eyes! Do you hear me, Miss Swan?” Emma gave her a small nod. She drifted off. Regina sat there. Holing her hand. Rubbing her cheek against Emma’s lifeless knuckles. Kissing her hand. Talking to her, pleading for the blonde to hang in there, to come back to her. “Okay, let’s move!” The paramedics called as the two who came with the ambulance pulled in
a gurney. They lifted Emma on The gurney and ran off. Regina stood there, looking, covered in blood.

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Sirens. She remembered the sirens. They were far off. Emma thought that she should go and see, but it was too hard to walk. Her head hurt, her arm was sore. Her dress was torn. She could not go out with a torn dress. She was looking for her mother. She was just here. Emma looked around. There were houses, but none of them were her house. Emma walked as far as she could, looking for her mother. She collapsed. All she remembered after the fall was the kind eyes of a black woman helping her up and carrying her in her strong arms. It was the last time she felt safe as a child.

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Emma was in surgery. One bullet went straight through her shoulder, not causing much damage, the other one needed to be taken out. It had hit her lung. That was all they knew. Regina was pacing up and down. It made everyone nervous, but no one dared to stop her. No one knew exactly what was between Emma and Regina. They still kept such a low profile regarding their personal lives, not even Cora or Mary Margaret. They always knew everything. When August, Graham, and Rumple came into the waiting area, Regina looked at them. They knew what was coming. Her voice was low and husky. They knew what it meant. Regina was beyond angry. “When did he get out?”

“Two days ago,” August answered. It felt like the three of them had been at the police station for ages. August, pressing more charges against Leopold. He broke two restraining orders. He spoke at length with the DA. The other charges included possession of an unregistered firearm, firing a gun in public, attempted murder, parole violation. August only hoped that it would stay attempted murder.

Regina turned to Graham and Rumple. “You told me that his parole hearing was a mess that he would not get out” Her voice chilled the men to the bone. There was little emotion in the words. “I will find out what happened,” Rumple said and turned. He and Graham had already discussed it. There was only one person that had enough influence to help Leopold. He was off to see a man.

Regina could feel her arms and back aching. She was keeping herself restrained. It took enormous effort. She wanted to lash out. Anyone would do at this point. It was the reason why they all kept their distance. Her eyes moved from Graham to Killian. She clenched a fist. She looked at the other people that were standing or sitting. David was not there. She looked at her mother. She looked her mother in the eyes. She knew.

“Ija de puta!” She marched over to her mother. “What have you done?” Cora looked at her as if insulted. “Me? What are you talking about darling?” Regina was visibly shaking.

“All my life, you decided what is good for me and what is not. So I will ask you one more time, mother, what did you do?”

“Regina, you are in shock, you have had a long night, why don’t you go home darling?” Regina turned around.

“Mary Margaret, Killian, Graham, come with me?” They followed without question. Red and August fell into step with the rest. They made their way to Regina’s apartment. She walked to the cupboard in the spare bedroom. Mary Margaret was the only one that knew what was in that cupboard. Mary Margaret gave Red instructions to get all their laptops. She told Graham to make
coffee and August to go to her place and get as much alcohol as he could carry. Mary Margaret walked over to Neal’s. He did not know, and she dreaded to tell him. As Neal opened the door, he could see that the sweet brunette cried. He swallowed. “What is wrong?” Mary Margaret’s lip quivered as she told him what happened. Neal wiped a tear. “I’m going to the hospital.” Mary Margaret understood. Regina needed to be busy. Neal needed to be close to his sister.

As Mary Margaret made her way back, Regina told them what she was looking for. They all looked at one another, slightly shocked. “Find it, or do I have to repeat myself?” Regina asked, sounding more like the Regina they knew for the last six years.

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Emma thought about the first time she wanted her life over, to make a different decision. It was the day they took her to the children’s home. She was released from the hospital. She spent a week there. She had nothing. Everything that was given to her that day was second-hand charity items, from her clothes to the worn, small teddy bear she was given. She still had the bear. It was the only thing she had from that time of her life. A fall apart stuff toy. That alone was enough to make anyone cry. It was also part of the reason why Regina’s photo took her aback. That damn bear! The girl was her. Thirteen, could she change her fate when she was thirteen. No, there was still so much more pain to come. How many times did she cry over the day of the accident?

Accident? Why was she thinking of the accident? The sirens, was it the sirens? Her mind was trying to push through the darkness around her. Darkness. She got locked in the basement again. She heard a beeping sound increasing in speed. The last time she was locked up for three days in the dark, damp, basement. How long will it be this time? She could feel her breath turning ragged. She cried, it was dark, there was no toilet. She did not eat or had water. She broke a plate. What did I do this time? Emma wandered as the darkness engulfed her.

In the far distance, Emma could hear someone yelling. “More suction, we are losing her!”

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Despite the hour, Rumple walked into a bar in the Bronx that was still packed. He made his way over to the far left corner booth. A bulk of a man tried to stop him. Rumple spoke through his teeth. “Get out of my way!” Robin laughed. “Please let him come?” He instructed his bodyguard.

Their eyes met as Rumple sat down, across from him. “What can I do for you Agent Gold?” Robin Locksley mocked him. Rumple’s icy eyes did not waiver.

“Funny thing happened two days ago,” Rumple said with seriousness straighten his tie. Robin folded his arms as if he was intrigued. “And what would that be Gold?”

“Leopold Carmichael was released on parole.” Robin turned his head. “Are you warning me Gold or is there something more?” Rumple said with seriousness. “Warning you, no. You already knew.” Rumple sat there, seemingly with no care. “Here is the thing Robin, your partner lost his deviousness. He walked into a public place tonight and shot someone.” Rumple watched Robin’s face. He went notably stiff at the news. “Seems Leopold planned Regina’s demise for six years.” Rumple sipped the draft beer that was placed in front of him. “You know what Regina’s death would mean Robin?” Rumple got up. “What is more, he is in custody right now. He is going to tell a lot of tales to make a deal because right now, the charge is only attempted murder.” Rumple was on his way out, Robin called him back.
“Sit, sit Mr. Gold. It would seem we have business to discuss.” Rumple sat back down.

“So you know about the deal I have with Regina?”

“A deal that you now broke Mr. Locksley,” Rumple replied through his teeth. Robin knew the man. He knew Rumple was here for more.

“I did not let him out. I also had nothing to do with this shooting.” Rumple knew this already. Locksley was not his target. “Perhaps,” Rumple said as he leaned back against the booth seat. “The thing is Mr. Locksley,” Rumple leaned in. “I believe you. Others won’t.” Rumple pointed to himself as he made the statement.


“You have nothing I want,” Robin stated flat.

“Oh, I tend to disagree Mr. Locksley.” Rumple moved his hand from side to side as he said the words. Robin’s face looked grim. “The photo?” Rumple giggled. It was eerie.

“The photo is the least of your problems. Think back, what did you give Leopold?” Robin sneered. “No, he said he would take care of it.”

Rumple slapped his hands on the table. “And he did dearie! As your lawyer, he did not go to the police, because that would be breaking client privileges. But,” Rumple sounded too excited. “he was cautious and scared. He kept a lot of evidence dearie.”

Robin leaned forward. “So I have two problems?”

Rumple made a gesture with his arm. “I’d say three.” It came out as a nasal whine. Robin nodded. “So what deal do you have in mind?”

Rumpled laughed through his teeth. “Now dearie, I only want one thing, a story. I need for you to tell me a story.” He slapped his hands playfully on the table between them as if the entire scene was a joke. Robin narrowed his eyes.

“And in return, you will make my problems go away?” Rumple giggled again.

“Wrong!” It looked like he wanted to get up again and Robin stopped him.

“Gold, please? How do I get the gun? The one I killed Nottingham with? Where does Regina keep it?” Rumple folded his arms.

“Too bad dearie, that is impossible.” Robin showed his frustration. “And for the right money?”

“Still can’t help you,” Rumple said in his nasal voice. “See Leopold, trusted no one. He kept a lot of evidence. It disappeared while the cops were looking for it, which is why you hired him, why he was so successful. He locked it away, all over the city.” Rumple made a fluttering wave with his hand.

“Do I need to break every train station locker to get it?” Rumple gave him a mock gasp of amazement. “Now why did I not think of that?” He leaned over and grabbed Robin’s hands. “A story, for a story? Do we have a deal?”
Robin pulled away. “Yes.” Rumple smiled. “Excellent dearie. Well, Leopold gave Regina all the keys and combinations when the FBI closed in on him. He trusted her, since she warned him, not enough though. She had the keys, but no locations. Regina made a deal with me that was how I landed up working for her. I found all the locations and took whatever was in there.” He rubbed his hands together as if the best part was yet to come. “She showed you the photo. The one that was taken by the CCTV camera. She has the gun, your fingerprints, the CCTV footage.” Robin said nothing.

“It would have been better if you did not betray her, you broke your deal. If she survives the next few days, all of that is going to the FBI.” Robin sneered at the little man. “What will it cost?”

Rumple wagged a finger at him. “She keeps it in a safe. I do not know where the safe is. Only that it takes one person’s fingerprints, another’s retina scan and a code combination, that changes randomly every few days. And there is a key, one of those smart keys. I do not know where Regina keeps that either, or what the backup plan is if she dies.” As a thief and businessman, Robin knew two things. Rumple did not lie. The safe he was talking about was virtually unbreakable.

“What else?” Robin asked.

“She still has one account with all the business partners of Leopold’s money. Whoever has that money, can take control of the East Coast. She kept it for insurance. Now she would give it up as a reward for your head.” Robin looked very calm. He knew every boss he screwed over six years ago would come after him. That and the fact that Leopold might talk convinced him to get out of New York.

“Now my story?” Rumple asked. “I know you had nothing to do with this. The whole Sidney Glass set up, Leopold’s release, it took not only money, but it also took contacts. So who is funding this vendetta against Regina?” Robin laughed. He drank all of his beer. As he set his glass down, he wiped his mouth. “One more question Rumple?” The man nodded. “How did Regina do it? She was so young. Her mother broke her in so many different ways. You know she was the one that planned the hit on that boy?”

“Daniel?” Rumple asked Robin nodded. “Yes, Daniel. Cora told Leopold which route he took every day for his run. It was as simple as that. Then she gave her only child to Leopold. Leopold? I ask you?” Robin shook his head. “At least we have honor. We protect our families, but that woman. Then only thing Cora loves and cares about is money and power. She will do anything to get both. It would not surprise me at all if she had sold her Soul to the devil for more power. Cora is the spawn of the devil himself. She has no heart. So how did Regina pull it off? Fuck over half of the mob, get you and me, in her pocket, virtually killed Leopold and still walk away clean?”

Rumple smiled a toothy grin. “She fucked over the FBI as well, in case you did not know. She played everyone.”

Robin shook his head, “How?” Rumple looked him in the eyes. “She had a child to fight for.”

“Leopold’s daughter?” Rumple only indicated his yes.

“However, now, Regina is in love. If she could be that strong for a girl that was not hers, what do you think she will do to the people that harm her family? And yes, Regina has a family now. She has someone in her life that loves her. What will Regina do to those who betray her now?”

Robin shivered. He could only imagine. Regina was brutal the last time. She won in every way.
She had all the guarantees she needed, the money and obviously the resources. What Rumple said was true. No one will survive Regina’s wrath if she is fighting for more.

“What do you want to know Rumple?”

He opened his palms in gesture. “Who is pulling the strings?” Robin looked at him.

“You called it a vendetta. That is why I laughed. There is no vendetta. Only a mother’s obscure version of love for her child, supposedly protecting her.” Rumple got a twitch in his cheek. He expected as much, but he needed Robin to say it.

“I do not believe you. Cora does not have that kind of pull.”

“No?” Robin asked. Then smiled, “No, she does not. But the Police commissioner does, and she has dirt on him. Cora Bolívar bribed the parole board and used the commissioner. She got Leopold out. She wants her daughter back with him. Can you fucking believe that? Regina was a virgin, did you know? When she married that bastard.” Rumple’s face was spars of emotion. He did not know. “He bragged about that, what he did to her, how he ripped her, how much she bled. Gods.” Robin shook his head. “If it was my daughter, I would have killed him, slow and painfully, but no, Cora wants her to go back to him. She is so fucking homophobic that she would rather give her daughter to a sadist than see her happy.”

Rumple tried to stay calm. It took effort. “So that was the plan, get Leopold out and kill Regina?” Robin frowned. “No, I just told you, Cora did all this to get Regina back to Leopold. Regina was never the target. It was that Swan-woman. She fucked up the Glass deal. Cora was furious. She was an unknown factor, and no matter what Cora did, the woman got her rattled. As you know, it takes much to rattle Cora.”

Rumple thought about his words. Graham said Leopold was aiming at Regina, but she and Emma were standing side by side. Emma thought he was after Regina and by pushing her out of the way, Emma saved her own life. If she did not, the shots would have been through her chest, most likely her heart.

“So Robin? You only broker the deal?”

“Yes.” Rumple nodded. “I do not think that will matter to Regina, you see, I lied. Regina is fine. Leopold shot Emma. She is in a critical condition. If the woman she loves dies, Regina will become every once worst nightmare. She will destroy all happiness because her happiness is destroyed.” Rumple narrowed his eyes. “In other words Robin, she will take what is important to you and let you live to suffer like she is suffering. You are all cursed now. Regina is what others made her. This time she will rip the beating heart from anyone who had something to do with this.” With those words of doom, he grabbed his cane and made his way to the exit.

Robin knew that he needed to get out of New York and likely the country, but his options were limited. Several drug cartels wanted him dead for ruining their business when he eliminated his competition. He was unwelcome in Ireland. He needed to be smart and move now.

Rumple walked his slow walk to a panel van parked around the corner of the bar. He opened the back door and climbed in. When he spoke, there was no trace of the animated character he showed Robin. That was Acer, the psychotic hitman. “I have forgotten how scary you can be,” David said
to him as he took up a seat in the cramped space. There were two other agents with David in the van. One immediately helped Rumple to get rid of the wire he was wearing. “Do you have enough?” Rumple asked in his soft controlled voice.

“To get Locksley, yes, if Regina gives us the gun,” David answered. Rumple knew she would. Her immunity deal with the FBI gave her no obligation to hand over the weapon, but to see Locksley pay, oh yeah, she will hand it over.

“What about Cora?” David rubbed his eyes. It has been a long day and an even longer night. “So far she has not broken any laws. We only have a Mob boss’s testimony that she was involved.”

Rumple inhaled. He did not look forward to telling Regina this news. “What about Leopold?”

David shook his head. “He is quiet. All he asked was if Emma was dead. We have him on suicide watch twenty-four/seven.” David turned to the other Agents. His work was done for tonight. Cho will take over and wait until the bar closes. Then they will arrest Locksley. It was the lowest risk scenario.

David and Rumple took Rumple’s car back to the apartment. Before they got out, Rumple asked. “How is Mary Margaret doing?” David looked at him. He had only spoken to her briefly.

“I do not know Rumple.” The man nodded, he understood. The job took his first wife. It was only now that he started to see Belle, knowing that he could give her most of his attention. They walked up to Regina’s apartment. At least they knew everyone was there.

Killian looked awful. He cried, his hair was devilish. He wore only half a tux. The rest did not look any better. When she saw David, Mary Margaret fell into his arms and started crying again. Belle joined them when Red called her and Lily. Red was passed out on the couch. August, Graham, and Belle were mostly responsible for the research now. Belle informed Rumple about Regina’s suspicions. He and David shared a look. “Have you found anything?” Belle smiled at him and bumped him friendly with her shoulder. “What do you think?”

They showed the men the documents they had so far. Cora knew for sure who and what Leopold was when she forced her daughter to marry him. She did a few deals for some drug cartels in Colombia. Leopold laundered the money for her. She had stakes in various businesses, some of which took a knock when Regina got rid of Leopold. It was enough for a warrant.

David asked Mary Margaret how she was. She was miserable. Her father tried to shoot her mother and then shot her friend. She felt nothing for Leopold, but Regina’s pain was her pain. “Where is Regina?” She looked at him sadly. “The hospital called.” She answered.
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Added a little Miami med. Sorry, no sexy Dr. Eva Zambrano.

Chapter Notes

Thank you for all the comments and reviews. Usually, my stuff is much darker. Actually deep dark and depressing. That is the way I like it.
This fluffy romance was not the intended idea when I started. So please let me know what you think?
Happy reading!

Chapter 18

Neal got up the moment he saw Regina. She looked horrible. He could see that she was tired, stress and it looked like she cried a lot. She was in simple casual clothes, her hair devilish. He has never seen her looking like this. It scared him as much as not knowing what was happening with Emma.
“They do not want to tell me anything.” He said. Regina took his hand and pulled him into a hug. He was stiff in her arms. He did not expect the sign of comfort and affection. As Emma, it was something he was not use to, especially from Regina. She pulled away after a moment. “Sorry,” She said as she wiped another tear. “I do not know if I needed that or you.” Neal touched her shoulder. He did not know what to say. “Let’s go and find out together?”

She could see the relief in Neal’s demeanor. Regina walked to the nurse’s station and announced herself. The nurse informed her that the surgeon was on his way. They waited while the nurse paged him.

When the man in blue scrubs approached them, Regina felt relief rush through her. “Matthew?” He gave her a look. “Regina, what an unpleasant surprise.” He answered her in a slight British accent. She rubbed her fingers through her palm.

“Seems I keep on making impressions where ever I go.” She said it to Neal. “Neal Cassidy, this is Doctor Matthew Procter. He is one of the top trauma surgeons in the country.” Proctor could see the tenseness on Neal’s face easing a bit.

“High praise indeed,” Proctor said, then added. “I would have thought the world, but I will take the compliment.”

“Have I forgot to add that he is more arrogant than me,” Regina gave him her fake smile. “Emma Swan?” She brought Proctor back to the reason they were there. He looked at Neal. “Mr. Cassidy is Emma’s brother.” Proctor continued in his calm, impartial manner.

“Her file does not indicate any family.” Regina was at the point of exploding, but she knew, besides herself, Neal needed to know and have access to Emma.
“Neal and Emma were adopted as children, they only reconciled recently.” Proctor knew there was more to the story, but he was not going to argue with one of the leading private contributors to his hospital.

“I will add it to her file.” Regina reached for Neal’s hand. “Your girl gave us a few scares during surgery. Her lung collapsed during transfer here, despite the actions of the paramedics. She lost a lot of blood. During surgery she went into hypovolemic shock, we had to give her several blood transfusions. We repaired her lung and closed the wound in her shoulder. Surgery wise, everything was successful. She is very weak due to the blood loss. Miss Swan will remain in ICU in critical condition for the next twenty-four hours. It is up to Emma now. We did all we can. We are monitoring her heart and her breathing. We are watching for infections, but if she makes it through the next twenty-four hours, her chance of a full recovery will increase significantly.”

Regina’s lip quivered as she listened to him. It made Proctor very uncomfortable. He was used to the badass bitch in the business suit, asking him questions about what he is planning to do with her contribution. This Regina was too human for him.

Neal closed his eyes at the news and pulled Regina into his arms. She cried shamelessly. Her shoulders shaking as sobs raked through her body. “Can we see her?”

Proctor turned his head. “She is unconscious, but yes.”

Regina wiped her face. “You go ahead, Neal.” She said in her husky voice. He wanted to argue, but he did not have the energy. He followed Proctor to the ICU.

“This is nurse Tuck,” Proctor said to Neal. “If you have additional questions, he will answer you. You have five minutes Mr. Cassidy, then Tuck is going to throw you out.” Neal looked at the vast bold black man. There was no way he was going to argue with nurse Tuck.

Emma was hooked up to several machines. Neal placed his hand over his mouth to keep himself from crying. He composed quickly. He took a chair. He sat and reached for Emma’s left side. “I never allow myself to feel Emma. I do not get attached to people, you know? Because they always go away. I have just found you, Emma. Please do not leave me? I need you more than I ever thought I would need someone. You are my sister and friend. Besides, I might kill Killian without your calm influence.” Tuck cleared his throat behind Neal. Neal nodded. He squeezed Emma’s hand and leaned in to give her a soft kiss on her forehead. “I love you, Emma.” One of his tears fell on Emma’s cheek. He wiped it as he made his way out.

Regina had calmed down a bit. When Neal approached her, she knew she made the correct choice. He looked far more relaxed after seeing Emma. Regina followed Tuck to the ICU. She asked him a few questions, he answered her in his comforting factual way. Regina stood in the doorway of the ICU. She merely looked at Emma, too afraid to go closer. “She responded to Mr. Cassidy’s voice, her heart rate went up slightly. Talking to her would be good.” Tuck told Regina. She gave him a tight smile, moving forward.

Like Neal, she took Emma’s hand. She sat there for a while, rubbing her hand softly. “I do not know how to love very well.” Regina wiped a tear. “With you, it feels so easy, natural. I am not going to tell you that Emma. I want to kiss you and look into your beautiful green eyes, then I will tell you. I would have never thought we would land up here when I told you to get into my car.” She had been struggling with her guilt. She was the reason why Emma was hurt. “I only know that I
would not change anything. Meeting you, having you in my life…” Regina choked on a sob. “Having you in my life has been exciting and frustrating. Interesting, joyful. Emma, I cannot go on if you are not by my side. You have become my life. I am only sorry that my past got in the way that you got hurt.” Regina was crying more. It was these thoughts that kept her up since the incident. The one person she never wanted to hurt was now in critical condition because of Regina’s past. Regina did not realize that nurse Tuck gave her ten minutes with Emma. She had so many things she wanted to say to Emma. She got up, she leaned in and gave Emma a soft lingering kiss on her lips. Tuck was watching the monitors. Emma was responding. Her heart rate was reasonable. Her breathing was steady. It was all excellent signs.

Tuck walked Regina back to the waiting area. “I suggest that you get some rest, Miss Michael. I have added Miss Swan’s brother to the visiting list for ICU. Both of you can visit again. But first I need both of you to eat and then get some sleep. We do not need more of you in here.” Regina could not speak. She gave his hand a squeeze. She left with a nod.

The moment they stepped into the morning air, Neal and Regina both felt the exhaustion set in. “Can you drive?” Regina asked Neal. It was still dark. He had a little more sleep than her. He took Regina by the arm and led her to his jeep.

When they entered the elevator to the apartment building, Neal spoke for the first time. “Thank you. For telling them, I am Emma’s brother.” Regina only nodded. She was dead tired. “Regina, no one had any sleep, I will look after the business today?” She patted his arm. “No, get some sleep. I have already asked Leroy and Lily to take care of things.” Neal indicated his understanding. “Do you want me to come with you?” He indicated to her apartment. “No, go and get some sleep, Mr. Cassidy. I will wake you if I get any news.”

Regina did not expect all of her staff to be sleeping in her house, but that was what she found. Mary Margaret and David were asleep in her bed. Killian and Red were on the couches, Belle was sleeping in Rumple’s arms on the deck chairs outside. August fell asleep at the dining room table. Graham was up. He looked as bad as Regina. “Hey.” She whispered to him. He gave her a tired smile. He indicated with his head for Regina to follow him. She did as he took a bottle of scotch with him.

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Emma’s mind was racing. She always knew if something was wrong. Something was very wrong! I told Regina I love her. She was not pleased. No, you don’t get to say that! Regina’s words rang through her mind. Did she say it too soon? Did Regina feel the same or was she too scared? Her heart rate and breathing increase. Tuck looked at the monitors with concern.

You have become my life. Did Regina say that? Was that the same as love? She felt as if she was struggling to get through the darkness, she fought. She needed to get to Regina. The man had a gun.

“Page Doctor Proctor?” Tuck said to an assisting nurse. Emma had rapid eye movement. Her heart rate was up, her breathing labored. Tuck knew she was either going to wake up or place too much stress on her heart, evoking cardiac arrest. He wondered how strong she was in life. Tuck knew Miss Michael. She had a devastating reputation, but the way she kissed this woman made him think, that just maybe, this was the person with enough light to reach into Regina’s darkness.
Regina was quiet the entire time Graham spoke to her. He showed her the documentation, and related everything Rumple found out. Graham confirmed the arrest of Locksley. “With all this, David and Cho can get a warrant to go through everything your mother owns.” Regina’s left brow lifted, her face serious, she looked down as the vein in her forehead became prominent. She rubbed her fingers through her palm. Graham was concerned. While Regina was kicking and screaming, you knew where you stood with her. A quiet Regina frightened them all. She was unpredictable. “Get some sleep, Mr. Hunter. I will deal with this the moment I wake up.” Graham wanted to ask if she was alright, but he knew it was superfluous. Instead, he squeezed her hand. He hated to tell her these things about her mother. It never made a difference how shitty your mother was. She was still your mother. Graham did not envy her. The situation was horrible.

Graham went to his apartment. Regina went to Emma’s. She got rid of the clothes she was wearing. She showered for a long time. Letting the warm water run over her tired shoulders. Regina was leaning forward, her hands flat on the tiles as the water streamed down her back. She felt. The emotions hit her like a wave. Crying was not something she did often, however, since Emma came into her life, not only did she start to cry again, she felt, she loved. Her shoulders shook, the dark hair falling around her face under the water. *Gods, this hurt!*

After her shower, she picked out one of Emma shirts from the washing basket. She smelled it before she pulled it on. It smelled like her. Regina found a bit of comfort at that moment. She placed her tired body in Emma’s bed. Placing her head on Emma’s pillow. *What am I going to do if you die?* The thought brought on fresh tears. *Please, Emma, fight!* With the blonde on her mind, she fell into a deep sleep.

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Emma developed a fever. They treated her with more antibiotics. Managed her breathing, bringing her heart rate down. Emma thought she heard a voice, a voice she did not know. The man had a British accent. *Think only of Regina.*

*Regina. Where was Regina?* Emma started searching through the darkness. She needed to find Regina. Emma could feel her fear. She just found Regina, she could not lose her, not now, not again. Twenty four homes. *No, not homes, places she stayed for a while.* With Regina, she had everything. Love, a home, family. She needed Regina. Emma stopped believing in anything that was good. Love, happiness, family, someone to hold you. This was all fairy tales. It was the kind of things that happened to other people, not to Emma Swan. Her life was only unhappiness, pain, loss… She needed Regina. Not just for her sanity or the confirmation that there was still good in the world. That hope was not futile. No, she needed Regina, like she needed air. Regina Mills was her inner child’s wish come true. Her safety, her warmth, her light.

Emma thought about her *moment*, the accident. She was somehow thrown from the car. Her parents were dead. She looked into her mother’s beautiful green eyes and even her four-year-old mind knew the truth. *Mama,* the small girl, whispered. She turned and ran. She fell, ripped her dress and hit her head very hard. By the time she woke up. Emma was alone, she could hear sirens. She wanted to go and see, but everything in her body hurt. She walked towards the sirens, never realizing that she turned in the opposite direction and landed up in a nearby neighborhood, where, when she fell again, the kind woman picked her up and called the police. The rest was all a nightmare after that.

“*Do you have such a moment?”* Emma smiled sadly at her. “*I do.”*
“What would happen if you could change that moment?” Emma reached out and touched Regina’s face. “I will never meet you.” Her moment. If she walked in the other direction, they would have found her. She would have been raised by her aunt who adored the blond bundle of energy. Life would have had its moments of pain and regret perhaps, but she would have been safe and loved her entire life.

“I will never meet you.”

“I am here Emma, hold on, please?”

“I have just found you, Emma. Please do not leave me? I need you more than I ever thought I would need someone. You are my sister and friend.”

“Emma, you have a family here. This is not just a job any longer. This is also your home.”

The various conversations ran through her mind. The darkness did not scare her anymore. Emma moved in the bed. Tuck was at her side the moment her heart rate picked up once more. In his career, he saw this before. Some patients wanted to die, like Emma. While they were operating on her, she almost gave up. It would be so much easier to give in to the darkness, to embrace the peace that came with it. The experienced nurse knew, however, the last hour, something changed in Emma. She was fighting and fighting hard.

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Regina was still in Emma’s red flannel shirt. She had jean shorts on and was pacing up and down in Emma’s spars lounge when David and Mary Margaret knocked on the door. Regina, opened for then, not pausing her conversation. David lifted an eyebrow when he saw Regina. She was barefoot. Her nails all painted the same color, the rich deep red she wore as lipstick the night before. Her legs were smooth, the mocha skin legs perfectly toned. David swallowed and shook the image out of his mind.

Fine, she was his mother in law. But gods damn she was only a few years older than him, and she was fucking gorgeous, even with all the shit going on. Mary Margaret saw the faint blush on his skin as she caught him staring.

“Remember Mr. Nolan, you can look at the menu, but you eat at home.” She told him softly with a kiss on his cheek. He loved her, there was never any doubt in either of their minds about that.

She busied herself with making coffee. Regina took her conversation to the bedroom. The Nolan’s allowed her the privacy. Her first call was to the hospital. There was no change in Emma’s condition. Emma made it through the first eight hours. She was shot Friday night. Regina and Neal got back from the hospital in the early morning. She slept for four hours. Regina wanted to get back as soon as she could. It was almost noon.

When she returned to the lounge, she gratefully took the steaming coffee from Mary Margaret. There was a silent agreement between everyone, not to ask Regina how she felt. Mary Margaret knew that not only would it annoy Regina, they all had the answer as well. Until Emma came off the critical list, they would focus on other things.

“Do you need me at the office?” Mary Margaret asked as Regina sipped her coffee with her eyes closed. Regina shook her head.

“No, you need to rest. You will be running the office until I get back.” Husband and wife shared a look. “Is Rumple up?” Mary Margaret nodded her head, saying nothing as she watched Regina. “Good, I need to talk to him. David, Judge Spencer is writing your warrant as we speak. It will give you access to any property and accounts of Cora. You only need to take the documentation Belle
found with you.” David opened his mouth to say something. He closed it again, nodded, kissed his wife and ran off. He had spoken to Cho about the raid the night before on Locksley. It went down without incident. Their actions with Cora was limited. Regina smiled to herself as David dashed out. She knew he would be over the moon that his search warrant would be accompanied by a warrant for arrest. Two counts of conspiracy to commit murder. Cora was going to jail, today! Regina did not even have to think about it.

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“I will never meet you.” The words rang in Emma’s head. “I will never meet you.” No! Regina was her love, her life. She needed to turn back, walk the other way. She would deal with the pain, the sorrow, and the loss, it eventually brought her to Regina. All she needed now was Regina… Emma turned around.

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Cora Bolívar called her lawyer the moment she saw the FBI descending on her home. There was no answer. “What is the meaning of this?” She accused David the moment he got out of the issued car. “Cora Bolívar, you are under arrest.” He swung her around and cuffed her, it was the single most satisfying moment of his career. This woman had hurt his family, he will hurt her back.

Cora was mouthing off as David placed her in the car. He dropped her cell phone in an evidence bag, she protested, telling him that he could not do that. A junior Agent was reading her rights to her, running the arrest charges against her. She lawyered up as soon as she was asked if she understood her rights. Cora Bolívar did not get where she was in life by being dumb. She watched as unit after unit of FBI vehicles stopped at the house, boxing and taking all of her documentation. What she did not know, was that it was happening at her office and another residence as well.

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Regina wanted to get to the hospital. This meeting, however, took precedence over everything else. Today was the day that her enemies would never forget, it did not matter who they were. The skinhead man that was sitting across from her and Rumple thought about what she had just proposed to him. It was a good deal. He would be insane not to take it. The cost, however, was high and risky.

“You do know your proposal is bloody insane?” His accent was thick. His brown eyes alert. Regina gave him a tired smile.

“Why do you think I came to you Will?”

He slapped his hands on the table. “Well, Michael, it would be my bloody honor to fuck up everything around us!” He did not smile, Regina, however, could see he was pleased. Will Scarlet was a thief with honor. Robin’s half-brother. A man that lived in the shadows of other mobsters all his life. Regina gave him the opportunity to change all of that. Will was a pawn. His entire life, he was the man behind the dealings. When Robin or any of the other mob leaders wanted information, something valuable or unobtainable, Will was their man. Now he would use that influence to help Regina.

She gave him a document. Their agreement was simple. He ensured her safety from any faction and she gives him all the mob money, including everything Leopold owned. She added a few personal requests as well. Everyone that fucked her over in the last few days was going to pay. She had no illusion what so ever that more people knew about Cora’s plan. No one would make such a bold, public move without support.
David already told her that Cora was unable to get hold of her lawyer. It confirmed her suspicions. Everyone was breaking ties with Cora. She warned them. They gave her assurances, Robin’s deal was to protect her and those around her. Every gangster and mobster she had an agreement with, fucked her over. As she shook Will’s hand, after he signed both copies of the contract, she knew she was about to return the favor.

Will ensured her that everything she asked will be done. She only had to give him a few days. He had a few loyal men, now he would turn several others before he strikes. Regina’s assistance in the matter would also help immensely. Her next visit was with Cho.

She gave David and Cho two boxes. Funny, she thought. They were tearing through Cora’s life to get something, anything to prove her guilt in the murder of Daniel and the attempted murder of Emma. Regina knew that the two boxes she gave them, would provide them with the evidence to nail four of the most prominent mob bosses on the East coast. They, in turn, would provide the FBI with everything they would need to hang Cora if only to save themselves. Regina was doing it again, playing all sides. She did not care. She warned them, she kept their secrets in return for her safety. Any deals she had with anyone was off the moment Leopold got out of prison. No one warned her. They were all kinds of stupid because if Emma had died at the scene, she would have taken the money and did all of this herself. She would have taken over every cartel and every organized crime base. She would not have sat back as she did with Daniel’s death. Contemplating suicide. No, she would have taken control of her life and made every last person that destroyed her happiness pay. It would have cost her, her Soul, but without Emma, it would not have mattered. If any of them thought that Cora had no heart, she would have shown them what she was like without a heart. And Emma was her heart, her life. Her business done, she went to the hospital.
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

This story was light escape writing while I was busy with a Serial Killer story. It took on a life of its own and turned out to be much longer than I initially intended. Thank you for all the support and guidance during this ride. I look forward to the next one. D. ox

Chapter 19

“How is she?” Regina asked as she walked into the ICU. Tuck was nearby and came to her as soon as he saw her. Regina was dressed the way they were all accustomed to, business-like. Tuck saw on the news that Cora was arrested. He did not know if he should give his sympathy to the woman in front of him or leave it. No, he thought. Emma was all that mattered.

“She is fighting.” Regina inhaled. It was not the news she had hoped for, but it was better than the alternative. Tuck showed her in. She took up a seat, held Emma’s hand. Regina thought about what to say to her lover. Do I tell her what I have done? Emma did not know this part of Regina. She told her about her past and the things she did to protect Snow, but this was different. Her phone vibrated in her bag. No one would dare disturb her, except for one arrogant bitch. Regina ignored the call. She spoke to Emma. Telling her in a soft, husky voice what will happen in their future. All the things she wanted to share with Emma. The places they would go. That they would dance the Tango there and be the envy of all. They would dress up, looking sensual and breathtaking, they would dance. Filling the crowd with their passion and love.

Emma listened to the soothing voice. La Boca. Did she want to go back there? Would it be painful? It was on their return from the Airport, after a three week holiday in Argentina when the accident happened. Emma remembered the awe she felt when she saw the beautiful Latin women dance on the sidewalks and in the market. Their dresses, short, their hair up. The men were turning them, their eyes playing the seduction game as the lured the women with their eyes under their Panama hats. She fell in love with the dance. She fell in love with the woman. Her mother taught her the basic steps. A young boy even took her hand and moved her around the market in his arms. A sweet innocent, first love Tango. Even as a child, Emma was beautiful and the boy had an instant crush. Emma’s mother and father laughed. The tall man held his wife. Her back leaned against his chest. In love. Happy to see their daughter enjoying the festivities. La Boca, yes, Emma thought, she would go there with Regina. Regina would hold her like that, and they would dance the Tango.

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Back at the apartment, all of them were waiting for news. They chose to stay together. All of them needing each other’s comfort and support. Rumple was sitting with Belle. He took care of a few things on Regina’s behalf. He and Graham doubled up on security. The used a company that would do anything for a client if the money was right. They spared no expense. There was not a person that would be able to come near Regina for the foreseeable future.

Between Mary Margaret and Red, they made comfort food. Red really just wanted to stay drunk, her heart was so small that all the tension was getting to her. Mary Margaret needed to keep her mind
occupied, hence the mothering of everyone. They were very concerned about Neal and Killian. Neal did not eat, and Killian could not stop crying.

“I have to do something,” Killian said all of a sudden and got up. Neal asked in his quiet manner. “What are you up to Killian?” The blue eyes of Killian looked at Neal. When he spoke again, Neal could see a strength in him he had never seen before. “I am going to propose to Phillip. Then I am going to inform my parents.” Killian bought Phillip a ring a long time ago. He had loved the man for nearly a decade now. It was too long, too much time wasted. If he had learned anything about Emma and Regina, it was that happiness might not last forever. He did not want to wake up one day regretting all the time he could have had with Phillip.

Neal stood up. “Do you need a wingman or a driver?” Killian patted him on the shoulder. “No, thank you. I am sure I can propose on my own.” Neal smiled at him and pulled him into a hug. Killian was taller than Neal, but the gruff man held him, as he pulled away he told Killian. “I am so proud of you!” The words stirred Killian in a way he could not comprehend. Approval, acceptance, love. It was all in that one sentence. If it were not for Emma, he would have never found this man, would have never learned how deep and compassionate Neal could be. It was strange having a straight man as a friend. The things they shared was so different from what Killian was used to. He shook Neal’s hand with a smile. “Thank you, Neal.”

Killian was not the only one that felt Emma had changed them, changed their lives and circumstances. Emma brought something to all of them. For Snow, it was that look in Regina’s eyes. The look that the young brunette thought she would never see in her mother’s eyes again. Neal, like her, discovered a family. He had worked with these people for six years, only now feeling as if he belonged with them. Graham had peace within. He no longer felt that insecurity he had, that people looked at him differently. That he was not worthwhile or as accomplished as them. Emma was an example of what strength was, what could be accomplished if you worked for it. Only then did he realize that he had come a far way for a middle-class man. Red, Belle, and Lily all thought of Emma’s courage. Not only to come to New York, or standing up for Regina, it was more than that. The courage to make yourself known.

Red wanted to do her own exhibition, she, however, never seriously considered it until now. She always felt that Regina’s work was so much better. That if she took the chance, she would always fall short. She knew her work, and Regina’s differed vastly and that they would never be competition for each other in the market, then why was she comparing their work in her mind. Red knew she would speak to the Boss as soon as everything was back to normal.

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Regina reluctantly left the hospital. She was heading to the police station where her mother was kept. “What took you so long? I am phoning all day!” Regina looked at her mother through the glass. If their situation were not so serious, Regina would have laughed. Cora was about to find out that orange was really the new black! “I am so sorry mother that my dying friend took precedence over your incarceration.” She spoke to David before she came to visit her mother. Leopold received a message. A message via Will. He was telling all his secrets. Every last one. With Leopold’s confessions, directions of where bodies could be found and Regina’s evidence, the FBI finally had a chance to put a lot of bad people away and find retribution for a lot of victims. Leopold was safe in prison before, he even had a few luxuries. He never had a concern of being shanked, beaten up or rape. Now, however, Regina changed the rules. The power shifted and the only way he could ensure his life behind bars was not misery for the rest of his life was to try and give Regina what she wanted. He gave them Cora, as did the other mob bosses that did not get away in time. Most of them left the country the moment Regina made her intentions clear.
“I cannot get hold of anyone. Bail me out so that I can start suing!”

Regina looked at her mother with calmness. “You had Daniel killed.” It was a statement, not a question. “Do not be ridiculous! That was a hit and run!”

“My mistake then, I thought it was just a hit. One devised by you, as was the hit on Emma.”

“How could you even think a thing like that Regina? That woman has poisoned you. Against your own mother!” Cora’s shock and appall were commendable. If Regina did not know the entire truth at that point, she might have believed this woman who was now a stranger to her.

“I have spoken to a friend about you. He told me you knew what was happening to me in Leopold’s bed.”

“What ever do you mean Regina?” Cora continued with the façade. Regina sustained to address her calmly. “You knew that he raped me every night he came to bed mother.” Regina thought she saw something cross Cora’s face. At that moment Regina’s face changed. “I think therefore it would only be appropriate that you and Leopold would suffer the same fate. I have arranged some friends for the both of you. You will meet yours tonight. She has my full permission to use you, whichever way she chooses.” Regina had so much malice in her face. All the soft lines fell away. Before her sat, the woman she had made and Cora shivered at what was revealed to her.

“I, Regina, you have to believe me, I only did what I thought best for you.” Regina tilted her head to one side. “I know mother, we are what people make us. You made me the woman I am today, so it is only right I should pay you back in the same coin.” Regina got up. “Enjoy that!” She said with a bright fake smile.

“Regina Mills! Do not turn your back on me!”

“Or what?” Regina spat back. “Vete a la mierda, madre!”

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Tuck was keeping close to the ICU. In the last half hour, Emma started to move a lot in her bed. The girl was fighting back. When Emma’s heart rate picked up again, he watched her closely. She struggled. Emma was breaking through the darkness. When she opened her eyes, they were wide and full of concern. Her sight landed on the big nurse, who jumped into action the moment Emma opened her eyes. He called for someone to page Proctor. “Emma, Emma, calm down. It is alright. You are in the hospital. There is a pipe down your throat to help you breathe.” Tuck spoke to her calmly. Emma seized her struggling movement. “Do you understand? I am Tuck.” Emma nodded at him. “Alright Miss Swan, let me look at you.” Tuck did the basic assessment. When Proctor came in, he took over. He spoke to Emma in his distant manner. “Miss Swan, you gave us a few scares. Welcome back. I am Doctor Proctor.” He looked into Emma’s eyes before he continued to assess her. “Regina is fine. You were the only one that got hurt.” He saw the relief in her body and eyes. She relaxed. There was no more urgency for her to speak. “Emma, I am going to take the tube out. The one that is helping you to breath.” She indicated her understanding. There were a lot of people in her room now. They all knew what to do, all of them ready in case something went wrong. A nurse was standing next to her with an oxygen mask. “We are going to keep you on oxygen until we are sure you can breathe on your own. There was some damage to your lung.” Emma nodded. She was a little frightened. She wanted Regina. As if Proctor read her mind, he added. “Tuck already called Regina and your brother. They will be here soon. Okay, here we go. Do not try to speak immediately.” Their eyes met. Proctor gave her a glimpse of a smile.

As soon as the pipe was out, the oxygen mask was placed on her face. She could feel the pain in her
chest now. Her breathing was labored. Proctor looked her over. He took a glass filled with ice from a nurse and placed a block into Emma’s mouth under the mask. She accepted it gratefully.

Emma’s mouth was dry. The ice melted quickly, the doctor gave her another cube. Her eyes kept on going to the door. Then a thought occurred to her. “How long have I been here?” She struggled to get the words out. Tuck helped her to sit up a bit. “Almost a day.” He answered her. She closed her eyes. Proctor and Tuck made arrangements for Emma to be moved to a private room. She would remain under constant supervision for the next twenty-four hours, but Proctor knew the worst was over.

Neal was the first to bounce into the room when he saw Emma’s green eyes he smiled. All the lines on his face exploding into a grin. “Emma!” He kissed her, took her hand, continued to grin like a fool. “Hey?”

“Hey.” He smiled back. Her eyes shot up. No one needed to tell him that Regina arrived. He could see the relief and love in Emma’s face. Neal got up and stood back. Regina’s eyes were bright with tears as she took a moment to look at Emma. Then she was at the blonde’s side, leaning in and giving her a deep, longling kiss. Neal stood with his hands in the pockets of his hoodie, trying not to stare at them. “Oh for gods sake Regina! She just had an operation on her lung, give her a chance to breathe!” Mary Margaret scolded. “Hello, Emma honey.” Regina stopped the kiss, her forehead connected with Emma’s. Her smile wide. “Sorry.” She whispered to Emma. She straightened herself, then looked at Mary Margaret as if nothing was amiss. Emma could not keep her eyes off the woman. They flocked around her bed, asking questions, Emma answered them in her raspy voice. Mary Margaret wiped a few stray hairs out of Emma’s face, then cupped her cheek. “You scared us. Don’t do that again?” Emma gave her a small smile. The little brunette leaned in, kissed her on the cheek, then announce her departure. Neal kissed Emma on the mouth with a promise to see her soon.

Regina’s eyes bore into Emma’s when they were finally alone. Regina held Emma’s hand as she took a seat on the bed. “Please do not ever do anything so erratically or imprudent, Miss Swan?” Emma smiled tiredly. “I am not planning to Miss Michael, but I cannot promise that. You know me? Jumping into cars with strangers, beating up colleagues, telling my boss I love her. All erratically.” Her eyes closed, she needed rest. Regina did not mind. She took the time to look at Emma’s beautiful features. She brushed her lips softly against Emma’s. “Rest well, Miss Swan, I will be here when you wake up. I will always be here. ”

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Six months later

Regina Mills stood with her hands on the balcony of a walkway, connecting two wings in the office of the Carmichael building. Her keen eyes picked the blonde head out amongst her employees in the open plan office. Emma felt the dark eyes on her. She turned to look up, looking into the eyes of her lover. They shared an intimate moment before Emma tucked a strand of hair behind her ear and continued her work.

In the months after her recovery, Emma changed. With Regina in her life, she finally made peace with her past. What she had with this woman made the path of her past worthwhile walking. She realized late one night after making love with Regina that she would not change her moment, not if it meant missing Regina from her life. She curled into the woman at that point, the mocha arms encircled her. “I love you, Miss Swan,” Regina whispered against her cheek. It made Emma smile. A delight, she never knew could exist, filling her. “I love you, Miss Mills.” She husked back. It was a night of many more to come where they would fall asleep in each other’s embrace, their bodies, and minds filled with each other.
With her acceptance of her past came other things. She carried herself differently, as if the broken orphan was gone, replaced with the beautiful swan. A woman that dressed and spoke with authenticity, touching all that met her. She took up her role in the executive office after she passed her studies with flying colors, despite all the interruptions to her schedule. As did Regina. With her mother and her influence out of Regina’s life, everything seemed to fall into place. Her fear was gone, a certain calmness filled her, only noticeable for the important few that knew her well.

As Regina watched her where she was doing market research with Lily, Regina could feel the pride and love. She turned to make her way back to the office. She met a frantic Red. “It is a complete fuckup!” Regina smiled patiently. “Miss Lucas. Let's calm down. Your work is amazing, and the exhibition will be wonderful.” Red looked at her with tears in her eyes. Regina made a mental note to ask Snow for some calming tablets for the super hyper Red. Her first exhibition was a few weeks away. Neal delivered the final prints early the previous morning. They walked to the office together. “Mrs. Nolan, can you please calm Miss Lucas down? Miss Jones, what are you still doing here?” Killian opened his mouth. “For gods sake, Killian, go home.” He gave her a boyish smile. “Do not kill Arora before I am back?” Regina looked at him annoyed. “I cannot promise that Miss Jones, the woman has only half a brain cell and I think it is slow.” Mary Margaret placed her lips together.

If anyone thought that the Evil Queen was calmer and more reserved now that she had found love, Arora proved them completely wrong. From the first cup of coffee the temp gave Regina, the ruler of the empire made its appearance.

Regina made her way to her office. Her phone rang with a message. Your parcel is here Miss Mills. Regina had a wicked grin on her face at the news. She inhaled deeply. The rest of the day was going to be a long wait.

Upon her exit from the publishing house, she sent Emma a message. They have fallen into a comfortable routine. They still lived in separate apartments, not that it mattered, they spent every night in each other’s arms.

Emma smiled as she received the usual notice. She made herself ready for the evening. She listened to the ring of the elevator, knowing it would be Regina. She gave the woman a few minutes before Emma made her way next door. She set up everything an hour before.

Regina opened her apartment door, stunned to silence. The curtains were all closed. The only light was the flickering lights of dozens of candles. Regina felt a thrill rush through her body. “Oh, Kitten, what are you up to?” It was another area where Emma changed. As if being face to face with her mortality pushed her. She tried new things, not only while they played but also in her life. There was fresh excitement for her with every new thing she learned, from simple things like ice-skating to applying for her second year of studies. It was beautiful to see Emma enjoy life so thoroughly.

Regina heard the door open. She was in the bathroom, changing. The gift that arrived earlier at the office next to the bed. Emma stood there. In the middle of the room. Her green eyes were full of lust as she raked them over the body of her Mistress. Regina had her tight black leather pants on with a midriff cutout vest and high heels. Emma swallowed. Her eyes never left Regina’s as she walked forward. She had an emerald green coat on. It made her eyes seem even more green. Regina licked her lips. Her head tilting, eyebrows in question. The jacket was new. “I have a gift for you Mistress.” Her voice was silky. Regina closed her eyes. Gods, this woman! Their play changed radically after Emma recovered. She was the one pushing the boundaries, then one day after play, she turned to Regina with a fire in her eyes that Regina had never seen before. Emma asked for more. Regina questioned it. Emma reassured her with a soft kiss. “Make me your's Mistress.”

Regina watched the toned, slender body relax under her ministrations. Emma gave her everything.
Since that first time when Regina asked Emma to submit, Emma had always held back, cautiously. That night, however, every last one of Regina’s requests were followed, everything changed after that. Emma realized her power. Her submission was driving Regina crazy. There was no begging for release that night, Emma played her role until the two of them were ready to burst. When she allowed Emma to touch her, the woman took Regina to such a high that she could not walk for the next two days.

Regina had a feeling that she was going to have trouble to walk tomorrow as she admired the look in Emma’s eyes. “And what gift did you get your Mistress?” Regina was anticipating a new toy under the green coat. Her eyes went dark, her lips slightly parted as she waited. Emma met her stare as she dropped her jacket to the floor, giving Regina a view of her naked body. Regina clenched her jaw. Oh, gods, I am dead! Her eyes burned with desire. They were apart for the weekend, Emma’s insistence that she should prepare for a new project. Instead, she had her body pierced, her nipples and clit, like Regina. A delicate chain was connecting the two rings in her nipples. Regina knew she would still be sensitive. She walked over to the naked woman. Her finger stroking over the chain, she gave it a feather-light tug.

Emma’s reaction was instant. She gasped, her head falling back. Regina dipped her fingers into Emma’s center, flicking the new stud with her thumb. Emma closed her eyes. “Gods, so wet already Kitten?” Regina purred the words into Emma’s neck.

She took Emma’s hand, leading her to the dressing area in the room. She opened one of the cupboards, a full-length mirror revealed there. Emma saw the appreciation and hunger reflected in Regina’s eyes. Her Mistress pulled back. Returning with the box and riding crop in hand. Emma felt her lust heighten at the sight of the crop. Regina tapped her legs apart on the inside of her thighs. Emma complied. “Look at yourself, Kitten.” Emma looked in the mirror, she smiled the moment she felt Regina push against her back, looking over her shoulder. “You are your own woman now Kitten.”

Emma breathed in sharply as Regina started to kiss her neck softly. “Touch yourself.” The soft command came. Emma did. Her desire was for something different, but she knew, they would work up to that. Regina watched the display in the mirror. Her lust and love reflected in her eyes. “Close your eyes, Kitten?” Emma complied, she felt as Regina placed something soft around her neck. When Emma was allowed to look her hand went from her center to the new collar. A soft black collar with Regina’s signature on it. Emma gasped, her eyes full of tears. It was a special moment in their relationship. It was an indication that she belonged to Regina. To only Regina and Regina to her. “Thank you, Mistress.” The sincere words filled Regina with gratitude.

Regina was kissing Emma’s taut stomach. She watched as the tenderness in her kiss caused Emma to ripple with gooseflesh. It made her smile. One moment responding only to intense pain and now, equally to such softness. She was indeed an amazing creature. Strength and vulnerability, childlike delight and intense adult passion. All mine. Regina thought. “Did you go for your final fitting?” Regina looked up at Emma in time to see her roll her eyes. “What?” The brunette asked amused. “As much as I love that man, I really do not know why he is dressing up his best man as a glamour butch!”

Regina giggled. “I have to admit Miss Swan, I cannot wait to see you in your tux with high heel shoes on.” Emma raised an eyebrow. “Oh really?” She questioned. Regina sprayed over her naked body. “I will even let you be the man for the night…” They both laughed at the familiar misconception from straight people. When they were seen together as a couple, no one would ever see anything except two stunning women.

“Have you thought about what he asked us?” Regina did not want to push Emma. Phillip and
Killian’s request was unexpected, but the more Regina thought about it, the more she wanted it. “To be their surrogate mother?” Emma looked at Regina. “Would you like to have a baby?” Regina wanted to pull away, but Emma kept her there, on top of her body. “I would,” Regina answered shyly. Emma’s eyes filled up with love.

*It seemed that Alice Jones never cared about Killian being gay, she accepted him and Phillip as they were, instantly going into overdrive to arrange the wedding. Her only request was a grandchild. “From both of you.” She added to Liam at the moment. The Jones brothers had their mother’s blessing.*

“I would love to have a baby with you Regina.” Regina felt the swell in her chest. Here, under her, she had everything she had ever wanted. For the first time in her life, Regina Mills felt like she was her own woman. Not some obscure entangled version of a woman, her mother wanted or tried to make, here with Emma, she was complete, not someone that was created by Emma, only loved by her.

Regina moved off Emma. She opened her nightstand drawer. “I do have another gift for you.” The blonde questioned her with a look. Regina stretched herself over the naked body under her. Her eyes were intense on Emma, as she pulled up slightly, she opened her hand for Emma to see.

Emma felt her entire body being engulfed with the warmth and love radiating from the look in Regina’s eyes. Neither one spoke as Emma took the diamond ring and placed it on her finger. Her eyes filled up with tears. Yes, she belonged to Regina, now, forever, in body mind and soul. “Yes,” Emma whispered. Regina sealed the promise with a deep kiss. “Always,” Regina whispered back.

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