Know who my dad is?

by TwoPointNo

Summary

Diverges from Canon after the whole Queens of darkness storyline because, Lily's obviously Regina's daughter. We, as a fandom, can't and won't ignore that.

Regina, Mal, Henry and Lily navigate their new life as a family and Emma Swan is very much around.

Notes

Hello so, since that damn season aired I have this unwavering belief that Regina is, in fact, Lily's father. Since I do not own the show the storyline was dropped and all of our dreams and hopes were shattered.

This break I started typing up how I would've liked for that whole thing to develop; it's not anything special 'cause no one dies, no one travels in time, no one falls in a portal, and we ignore all the FUN FUN FUN things they like to shove in their script to keep their characters too busy to deal with things and their audience super duper happy.

So this is basically plot-less word vomit of these characters interacting, some things I would've like to see and some things that pop up in my mind. So some chapters might be very short, and others might be this long...

Read up, have fun, would love to hear what you think.
Not my demon name.

Emma Swan is in the sourest of moods pressing her foot to the gas pedal like she drives a sports car instead of her meager yellow bug, going down the highway towards New York with some rock music Regina can’t neither recognize nor tell from her other kind of rock music, happy rock music or Hook related rock music, and so on. And on the passenger’s seat Regina Mills uses one hand to clutch at the back of Emma’s seat and the other to run her manicured nail over the textured fabric of her black pants, refraining from anxiously tapping her foot and making a noise with her heeled boot that would surely push Emma over the edge in her current state.

It had been one of the many tests life had for Henry to hear that Snow White and Prince Charming were anything but pristine heroes, but it was Emma who took it the worse since it was technically for her that they had perjured themselves and she had met Lilith previously, Regina guessed it was only getting worse every mile they got closer to her. On the other hand, Regina hadn’t been surprised when they sat her down and explained to her what was it that they had done to Maleficent’s child before she even hatched out of her egg; The Enchanted Forest was a cruel world despite its name, no soul was left unharmed, they all had sins to atone. It was what came later that had her close to buzzing in her seat, Maleficent had asked her to have a private conversation after they left the sheriff’s office, and she had obliged.

Back in her house, over a cup of wine Regina had been both reticent and desperate to drink in Mal’s presence, Maleficent had motioned for them to sit on a couch together and took her hand.

- You have already agreed to leave this town with the girl, Swan, to find my daughter and I expected no less of you Regina. Thank you. – the air was heavy and Regina didn’t trust her voice so she took a sip of her wine in lieu of speaking and Maleficent went on, understanding her as she always had - But before you go I would like to… confess.

Regina took a second, longer sip of her wine – If you could be so kind as to rip off the band-aid, I would be thankful

- Before I go on… I would like to make clear I did not understand your last sentence – she chanced a smile Regina’s way but the brunette was taut in her seat and Mal sobered again – Lilith, she’s yours.

- Excuse me? – Regina managed to put her cup down on the table by them where Mal’s was, untouched, before she turned to glare at Maleficent – Outside of jests, what are you here to say?

- There was only you… us. I will swear it on anything you wish me to.

Regina stood then and put some distance between them, Mal was not lying, she would know, but it was impossible. How on earth could they have had a child? She turned abruptly to face Mal again – You are sure. That means you knew, back when you were pregnant, you knew and you chose to not tell me about this, for three decades!

Maleficent crossed a leg on top of the other as she angled herself more comfortably on the seat to look up to Regina and her rage – Yes darling, every day I was in that deep dark cave I thought ‘My what is on today’s plan? Certainly not telling Regina about our long-lost daughter, perhaps some other activity that requires a human voice, some singing? I will revisit it after breakfast’
Air rushed out of Regina in one exhale and her figure got smaller, but the anger didn’t recede as much as Maleficent would’ve like it to – You had months, after our last meeting and the curse sweeping you down into the dungeon.

- The cursed required the heart of which you loved most, and it wasn’t me…- Maleficent dropped her gaze -but it could’ve certainly been our daughter if you knew. I tried Regina, to convince you to stop the madness, and I tried to help Snow White and her prince, it only got us here. This is what fate wanted of us

- What Rumplestilskin wanted of us perhaps – Regina dropped into a chair opposite of the couch Mal was on and summoned the wine to herself to drink it in one big swallowing motion that had Maleficent chuckling in front of her, she glared – This is a big fucking revelation ok?

- Indeed. Won’t you ask how it’s possible?

Regina scoffed – You’ll humor me and answer?

- I love you.

Regina put down her cup again, slowly gathering her thoughts – I… am sorry for holding you hostage for three decades, you were the most precious thing I had ever had. I couldn’t bear seeing you every day and not having you or worse, having you and it not being the real you.

Maleficent nodded – It was one page in the story of my life my dear, and it has several tomes – she watched as a small smile formed on Regina’s face and she risked getting closer, rounding the table she took Regina’s had on her own – You did come by to visit a few times. I would love to meet this beautiful Henry you liked to talk about?

Regina hoped her skin didn’t betray her and looked away - Emma has him, I hope.

- The most precious thing you’ve had, after me, and you share him with Snow White’s daughter. You’ve grown Regina, I’m terribly sad to have missed it but looking forward to reaping the benefits – Regina let out a slow breath as Mal inclined her head to lay a kiss in the back of her hand – Goodnight darling. I will be back to see you off tomorrow.

When Regina let only a small goodnight in return, Maleficent smiled again and walked out the house, hopefully not all the way to Gold's cabin.

Back in Emma’s car, after having hit a dead end in New York Regina is battling enough of her own thoughts to be any help to Emma and her ever worsening mood, to pile up on top of everything they seem to be running out of fuel, and when Regina has dared point it up to Emma she’s gotten only glares in return. They spot a gas station coming up and Emma makes no move to slow down and as Regina is about to tell her to pull up and get some gas she veers dangerously fast into the station and stops by a pump, slamming the door on her way out. Regina sighs and walks out of the car as well, towards the diner next to the station, she sits and a waitress she doesn’t look at twice asks for her order, two black coffees, she can’t trust anything else in that establishment.

Emma Swan walks in and drops herself in a chair that looks like it has only a few more of that kind of drops in it before it gives out – What the fuck are we going to tell a dragon and her two magical lackeys after this shit show? Sorry, your kid moved, now please don’t kill us?

- The self-proclaimed people locator Emma Swan, giving up? – Regina hopes her voice didn’t betray how desperate she felt, in a world without magic nothing Mal or her could do would find
them their daughter quickly, she needs Emma.

The waitress interrupts her train of thought with their coffees, and before Regina can take a sip of hers to test its flavor Emma, who didn’t even grab hers, gasps

- Holy shit, Lily?

- The waitress looks around the diner quickly – That’s not my name. – She points at her tag and Emma frowns as Regina openly gapes at the woman. It’s true. It is her hair on this stranger’s head, her features, Mal’s height, Mal’s eyes.

Emma goes on, taking her coffee so the waitress, Lilith, can at least lower her arm – Starla? Like shit it is, I know that birthmark.

- Do I know you?

- It’s me. Emma.

- Swan? Fuck.

After a rocky start Regina requests Emma to let her ride alone with Lily in her car as Emma follows in the bug, and strange as she finds the request Emma obliges if only to calm her nerves after having hold a gun to the head of one of the only friends she ever had as a child. In the other car Regina observes Lily, as she preferred to be called over her full name, changes the radio station repeatedly. She finally grows bored of it and flicks it off, opening a glove compartment with a thud outside of it and taking out a candy bar, she offers none of it to Regina and speaks as she chews

- So, what’s your deal? Why did Swan bring you with her? You guys divorced but still besties?

Regina turns to her quickly to frown and puts her eyes on the road again, hands in 10 and 2 – What makes you think…? No.

Lily actively waits to take another bite of her chocolate before responding, grating on Regina’s nerves on purpose – Your nails are pretty short for a bitch dressed like you are, Emma’s always been on the butch side of things plus, I heard you say ‘our son’ once when she was about to kill me. No wedding bands. Must be divorced. Got dragged into her fairytale character shit and the relationship couldn’t take it?

Regina laughs – I’m the Evil Queen dear, if anyone got dragged into anything here it was Miss Swan, not me. I cast the curse.

Lily takes the last piece of candy into her mouth and lets the wrapper fly out of the window, lifts her boots on the dash of her own car and makes Regina cringe – I respect that. Didn’t read up on you when I looked into things. You evil huh? You friends with my mother? Know who my dad is?

Regina sighs – I am.

Lily waits to see if Regina is going to continue her statement but it seems that that’s all the talking they are going to be engaging in. She pulls on the lever that makes her seat drop back and settles in - …Okay.

They make it to Storybrooke after sundown, but at least the trip only took them one day. A disgruntled Emma passes by Henry with a hair ruffle and all but ignores her parents on her way
inside Granny’s dinner and Regina rolls her eyes at the antics as she leans down only a little to hug her son, her nerves calm when she sees his face, less round that every day before this one, she has only a few minutes of footage of Lily from before this day, not one memory to compare. She instructs him to go inside with his grandparents and turns back to Lily, still inside her car.

- Will you drive me? Or would you rather experience your first approach to magic?

Lily struggles to hide her excitement to see something magical happening, she shrugs – Whatever is faster. So we can get on with it.

Regina is trying, so hard, to not react to her despondency, it’s not her fault, god knows all of them have been burdened with many issues by their upbringings, their fates, what other people have chosen to thrust upon them with magic. She reaches out for Lily’s arm through the window and they appear in Mifflin, on the grass in case Lilith’s façade of toughness doesn’t hold up and she has to vomit. The girl stumbles but takes it with aplomb and follows a Regina that didn’t even bother waiting for her into the house through the back door.

Lily whistles as they cross the kitchen – Shit, is this my mother’s house? Are we rich? – Regina opens the fridge and takes out a beer for her, serves two cups of wine and doesn’t bother answering her. Lily peers at the halls and the furniture as they advance further into the house, into a study where they sit. She spots a frame on the table near them and grabs it without prompting – your house then? You, the boy and Swan. Not divorced, still together.

Before Regina can deny their involvement again a cloud of smoke appears on the doorway and a tall, blonde woman in a suit materializes out of nowhere. She steps forward but stops herself –

- Well, that’s a way to summon me before someone that’s never seen magic.

Lily puts the frame back in its place, loudly – It’s ok. I just rode one of those. I know about the whole supernatural stuff. Are you Maleficent? – Mal only manages to nod and step closer, stopping again and glancing at Regina when she does, Lily stands then – No horns?

Mal ghosts a hand up into her shock of hair – I don’t know what the curse did to them – there’s a minute of tense silence between them before Mal decides she’s had enough of it and moves forward in one stride, engulfing Lily in a one-sided hug. She pulls back to cup her face in her hands and smiles – Look at you, a perfect mix of us. The dragon, thrumming in your veins! Your mother’s magic! You’re magnificent! - Mal turns back to look at Regina staying put in her seat and quickly back at Lily with her eyes watering, she pulls her back in for another long hug and Lily chances a look at Regina too over her newly-found mother’s shoulder.

- Those two sentences were actually more fucked up than the teleportation.

Mal releases her and goes to sit by Regina, completely over the moon as she is she tries to extract as much information of Lily as possible. Quickly she tells them she was adopted by the Page family, but they never quite got her, and that she did run away a few times and manage to cross paths with Emma once or twice, that when she turned 18 she decided to simply leave her home since she finally could. And there she is, 32, no family of herself, a few jobs waitressing, not a lot going on. Mal takes all this in with a bittersweet and confused expression on her face, the seemingly cold hard facts mixed with the nonchalant way that the story was told had Regina thinking that there was more to it. Lily huffs once at them and downs the rest of her beer in one go and Mal throws a sideways look at Regina with a small smile, Regina wants to assure Mal that many people do that but her voice hasn’t cooperated since she left Henry back in the diner. Lily breaks the silence after she puts down her bottle

- So what about you oh mythical being? What was your childhood like? Adolescence? Early
adulthood where you’re stuck? How did you meet my father? Where is he? Do you have a house? Why are in Swan’s wife’s house? All that

Mal frowns – There is no father. There’s Regina. I expected her to have told you already – She turns to Regina swiftly and it is her turn to swallow her entire cup of wine in one go under Mal’s gaze. Lily splutters on her seat and moves forward

- The plot thickens! Don’t know how I missed this shit in my research… but I bet there was no IVF back in the medieval era, who did you have to… you know?

Malf out understanding only the gist of most of Lily’s phrases tries for a smile - Us dragons breed through magic more than we do biology. As long as there is someone to lay the egg and love, we don’t need anything else. – Regina’s hand moves towards Mal’s cup of wine and Mal takes it in hers to halt it – We are your parents. We love you.

- Right. - She stands up and moves towards the door – I believe you, because this whole thing is fucked up so two moms? Not too weird. But I’m gonna go. It’s been a shit day, I almost died, my body feels all tingly, Regina obviously doesn’t fucking like me, so I’ll just go find my car and a hotel room and I’m sure we’ll see each other tomorrow.

- Lilith wait!-

- No. It’s all right. I’m not a kid, I won’t die finding a hotel room and I bet even if I did try to disappear you can track me with your magical things tomorrow. It’s okay, really. Nice meeting you guys.

They watch as she stalks out of the room and her heavy boots carry her downstairs, the following slam of the door jolts them back into action and Mal drops Regina’s hand and distances herself, taking her wine cup with her and drinking it as she paces the room. In her seat Regina peels off her blazer and unbuttons her cufflinks to roll up her sleeves, she tries to process the day, the daughter she just met walked out of her house blaming her, and she might be right. She’s not feeling a lot of positive energy towards the woman yet; she’s crude, despondent and she enjoys aggravating people for no reason apparently.

Mal stops mid-sip and lowers her cup slowly – She said she almost died – She turns to Regina

- Emma held a gun to her head, because Lily seemed to have a plan to kill Snow and Charming.

- A gun?

- A weapon.

Mal’s body tenses and she takes a swig of her wine again – And she seems to be under the impression that you are married to Emma Swan, which you are not. – Her tone was inquisitive

- I made it clear I am not, she was merely goading me, as you are.

- I’m sure she sensed the hostility coming off you.

Regina sighed and moved forward in her seat but Mal held her hand up to stop her. She rubbed her hands on the pattern in her pants – Mal It’s been a hard day, I’m just trying to make sense of everything and –

Mal interrupted her – You didn’t even tell her she was yours, and then you sat here silently as if this had nothing to do with you. How did you think it was going to unfold?
- I don’t…- she sighs -I will do better tomorrow.

- This isn’t about doing better! – Never had Maleficent raised her voice at Regina before, not even when she was attacking her precious unicorn. Regina closes her eyes in her seat and Mal puts her cup down, the force of it sloshing the drink out and onto the table – I thought you would love to learn you have a child, of your flesh and blood, and you meet her and you treat her like one of your peasants. Did you hug her? Even once? Did you even touch her? Do you not care?

- I do, I just… I didn’t know! I didn’t carry her! You’ve been waiting for her three decades, I… – Regina drops her head on her hands and her hair moves forward and covers her face even more – She doesn’t feel mine.

- She looks like you Regina, more so than she does me. She has magic that I’m sure you have sensed already. And I am telling you. What else do you need?

Regina looks up – It’s not that I don’t know, it’s that It doesn’t feel like it.

Mal takes a deep breath and moves past Regina to go out the same way Lily had and Regina’s hand shoots out to clamp around her wrist. It’s certainly not the most miserable look she’d seen in Regina’s face but it’s the first one that doesn’t stir any compassion. Regina pulls at her – Stay. Please.

- Maybe Emma Swan will come with your real child and I might kill the woman and her gun.

- You can’t kill a gun, it’s a weapon.

Maleficent pulls her wrist out of Regina’s grasp – Only you would ruin my dramatic exit even when you’re in the wrong. – Her shoes click against the tiles as she gets out of Regina’s house.

Up in the skies, circling Regina’s town over and over again, Mal lets her tears flow. It is not often that dragons cry but it is long due for her. She thinks she can pin point the night of Lilith’s conception; they had spent the day together in Maleficent’s library, Regina reading up on some of her nefarious plans for Snow White’s heart if she ever got a hold of it as Mal read some prose about a maiden who encountered a fairy who granted her just one wish. The silence they shared was comfortable and when Mal chanced a look Regina’s way she would notice the way the setting sun liked to dance on her long dark hair, and how her hand liked to trace the runes in the books’ pages. Regina was not yet too far gone into her madness, some days she allowed herself simple riding outfits and would discard her boots to put her socked feet on Mal’s furniture when they sat. Mal put down her book and leaned towards Regina to put a soft kiss on her neck

- Perhaps we can forgo supper?

Regina chuckled above her and put her book down careful to keep it on the opened page – You would keep a lady from her education and her nutrition, darling?

- If the lady would have me – she took Regina’s hand to kiss it as well, and then guide it over her shoulder as Regina chuckled

- Well, – she undid the ties holding Mal’s shirt in place and with her other hand she searched the pins holding the blonde hair up and undid them one at a time – Let us sacrifice the time we had for nourishment.

They woke up in the same couch the next morning when the sun caught up to them, hands
intertwined and her heart felt heavy as she watched Regina stretch atop her and move her hair out of the way to smile up at her, something had changed, and it would be months before Mal could tell what it was. Those months passed and Regina’s bloodlust grew the more the peasants tried to help Snow White run, as Maleficent’s body adjusted to its new inhabitant Regina started spending less and less time around, there were weeks in which she would not show herself at all, cooped up in her castle scheming or traveling her land leaving no stone unturned to find the princess. The last night they spent together Maleficent was sure what it was had her feeling nauseous every morning and so she turned down the honeyed wine Regina offered her, The Queen merely shrugged and decided to drink double as she was planning to, finishing off the pitcher by herself.

- You should stop, darling

Regina stopped pouring her wine into the goblet to laugh at Maleficent – You won’t drink and you won’t let me drink?

- You should stop all of it, the drinking right now, and the madness in the Kingdom, you have run her off her throne, you have killed her father, ending her now would be a mercy. What does she have that you don’t?

- The people’s favor… Love.

- Maybe if you stopped this hunt and stopped terrorizing your people, if you paused to enjoy what’s around you…

Regina laughed at her louder and finished topping up her cup - I think you’re confusing our arrangement – Her last word was slurred, her tongue having trouble moving properly within her mouth – We drink, we fuck, occasionally we frolic around your castle. We will never marry, nor have a family, we could never rule this land, I want more.

Maleficent struggled with the choice of telling Regina about the pregnancy or keeping it a secret, she knew Regina had always wanted a family of herself but the Evil Queen in the height of her vengeance might have believed loving a child was weakness like her mother proclaimed. The fact that after that night Regina stopped even staying past their romps made it quite clear that the woman that she loved was slipping away and it was maybe too late for them to be a family. She tried convincing herself that it was perhaps a phase and that, like herself, eventually Regina would tire of vengeance and mellow right back into that woman that stumbled into her castle looking for magic; but instead she stormed in one summer afternoon to demand her dark curse and the rest was history.

In her house, Regina texts Emma to please take care of Henry for the night and settles in with the half drank bottle of wine on the floor of her study with her back against the couch. She doesn’t understand how she could have missed it, for Emma and Lily to have been born just a few weeks apart, enough for Snow White and Charming to get a hold of her, Maleficent must have been pregnant well before she attacked her over the dark curse… how could she have been so lost in herself to not see that? She downs another cup of wine and recalls how Maleficent stopped drinking, how her skin was more sensitive when they slept together, how she retched a few times when she made herbal tea near her. The worst kind of blindness is that of one who does not wish to see. What would a family have meant for her then? Would she have taken it and cherished it? Could she have?

Storybrooke was not created with a foster system of any kind, there were no children without a family in her boundaries for obvious reasons so it wasn’t until she became interested in adoption
that Regina Mills learned how children without parents fared in the world without magic. Of all her transgressions, some of them were only weighing on her now that she was on her way to become one of the ‘heroes’, and one that constantly demanded atonement was creating a situation that resulted in an innocent child paying for the sins of her mother: Emma Swan growing the way she did had handed Regina many sleepless nights, the woman had become her friend and she was growing to be a good parent for Henry and so, when she served her a bite or two more of lasagna than she should and got one of those patented Swan grins, Regina felt she was doing right by her wrongs. But what could she tell her own child? Abandoned to a similar fate, jaded by a fate thrust upon her all because of a situation Regina herself engineered in all accounts. It was her who neglected Maleficent enough she felt so cornered as to plead to Snow, she didn’t put the knife in her hand, but it was her who loomed a shadow so terrible that forced Snow into plunging it in the back of the dragon.

Mal once mentioned that as a dragon she rose with sun or something alike, to drag Regina out of a warm bed for no godly reason, she hopes that knowledge will become useful now as she waits outside Granny’s diner while it’s still dark outside for Ruby to open. She enters as soon as the sign says open and the brunette gives her a raised eyebrow

- New record, first one to camp outside the door. Coffee?

Regina manages a nod, still burrowed inside her coat and the happy effects of the wine bottle she consumed by herself certainly passing. She nurses her cup as a few other costumers trickle in and give her a few greetings, blue collar workers have never had a gripe with her. As they come and go to their jobs her effort is rewarded when, surely just a few minutes after sunrise, Lily comes in and drops herself in a booth unceremoniously. Regina stands and sits in front of her with her half empty coffee mug.

Lily doesn’t startle but she does bristle – Good morning Regina, you look like shit.

- Yes well, I’ve learned a few things that have kept me up at night these last couple of days. – Ruby passes by to refill her cup and hand Lily one, and a menu, she doesn’t miss the opportunity to send Regina a look before she leaves and Regina doesn’t acknowledge it – What about you? Have a good night’s sleep?

Lily seems to think about it for a second, and then she adverts her eyes to look at the coffee cup, holding it with both hands as she shakes her head minutely – I can smell, hear, see and sense some shit I couldn’t before. Not good for falling asleep.

Regina lets out a breath, honesty is good, honesty means they’re at least trying that morning – Miss Lucas, the waitress so dutifully listening to our conversation from the kitchen, is a shifter like you are.

Ruby’s head appears in the window to the kitchen – Not my fault! – and retreats where it came from.

- You could talk to her about it sometime… and order out loud to save her the walk up here, I will have my usual.

- Christ- Lily clears her throat and raises her voice just a bit, enough for a dwarf to turn to them - I guess just some eggs and pancakes?

Ruby speaks in what is probably a normal tone in the kitchen since Regina seems unaware of her –
Coming right up!

They spend a moment in silence, not too tense, but not exactly one they want to find themselves in for the rest of the meal. Lily slouches in her booth and Regina crinkles her eyes minutely and the younger woman breathes deeply – So where’s Maleficent?

Regina glances the kitchen’s way to let Lily know their situation isn’t public quite yet but answers quickly – She’s not happy with me either, but I wanted to talk to you first. Perhaps you could accompany for a walk later?

Lily shrugs again and before she can say anything Maleficent enters the diner, apparently having had the same idea Regina did but with less commitment to the element of surprise. She spots them and sends a beatific smile her way, Lily manages a small one back and Maleficent comes to the table and takes the seat next to Regina’s, smiling her way too even when dimmer.

- Lilith! And Regina. Good morning.

Lily groans in her seat – Not my demon name.

Maleficent’s expression turns confused and Regina smiles – In this land’s lore Lilith is the name of the first demon, mythical creatures that opposed the God of the land, also mythical here. Call her Lily

Maleficent nods – Better a flower than a demon – They sit in silence as Ruby serves two plates and asks for Maleficent’s order throwing another, stronger look Regina’s way, which she ignores as she cuts into her meal. When she leaves Mal looks between them – You haven’t mentioned… - Lily shakes her head and looks at Regina touching Mal’s exposed arm

- No.

- A… wolf? If I’m correct.

- Yes.

- And we suppose she’s dim? Not many clues are needed here. Look at yourselves.

- Oh, she’s dim.

Ruby laughs in the kitchen and bellows out – But not dim enough to walk around without condoms in my wallet!

- Hilarious, mongrel.

After their meal, they choose the park around the lake for the solitude much more than for the scenery, it’s still quite early and even if it wasn’t there’s only two groups that use the furthest away part of the greenery: teenage couples in the height of their infatuation and old couples looking for calm. A bundled-up Regina walks a few steps behind Maleficent and Lily who talk easily about magic and what being a dragon entails, about how soon they could try to explore Lily’s second nature and about how it feels to have been a dragon in a world without magic. Mal veers the conversation towards casters’ magic in an attempt to engage her but Regina’s still finding her footing and doesn’t chip in a lot. Eventually Lily decides she’s walked enough and goes to sit on a mossy rock making both Mal and Regina stop in their tracks, hesitating between ruining their clothes or standing around awkwardly, Lily laughs at them and Mal gives Regina another look
filled with a warmth Regina hopes she can one day muster for the woman mocking them. She conjures up one of the benches from another part of the park and they sit by the rock.

After a few beats of silence Regina burrows into her coat again and looks at Lily briefly before turning to the lake – I would like to apologize for my behavior yesterday. It’s not that I don’t like you… I was not expecting you, as you were not expecting me. – Lily turns to look at her but doesn’t react and Regina sighs – I have done so many horrible things Lily and I carry that weight every day, but you… I caused so much of your pain and it petrified me, facing you, a new sin to atone for. I can’t ever give you back what I’ve taken.

- Well, I don’t blame you for any of this shit. You didn’t even know I existed. I blame Swan’s parents – She sniffed quickly and used the tip of her boot to pick at the grass in front of her – I’m sure you guys would’ve raised me real different if you could’ve since you’re royalty and all that, and you’ll forgive me ‘cause I said I wouldn’t kill them but if they ever step up to me I’m not sure I can control myself, I ain’t like you two.

Maleficent laughed heartily from beside Regina and both brunettes turned to look at her with matching expressions – Apologies for ruinsing the moment but it sounds like you’re exactly like us both.

- None of us will harm any Charmings over this – When she heard no answer Regina worried – Promise me.

- Scout’s honor.

- Yes, darling.
You can't curse around me!

Regina knocks on the loft’s door and smiles at a Henry still clad on pajamas as he lets her in and half hugs her, she finds the rest of the Charmings having a tense breakfast around the kitchen island and they greet her with smiles she doesn’t return, stands by Emma and waits for Henry to resume eating his cereal. They don’t dare ask about Lily until Emma brings her up, eyes rimmed with dark bags like she too hadn’t slept in a couple days. Regina lets her mind wonder over Emma for a minute until Snow makes a move to stand from her stool and she remembers what she came there to do. She lifts her hand to stop there and Snow sits down again immediately even when no magic was used.

Only Emma keeps on eating, immune to Regina’s antics most of the time. Regina rolls her eyes and starts speaking – About Lily, do not question or try to rebuke what I am about to tell you, I am completely sure and I do not wish to hear any objections you might have, are we clear? – They nod and Emma stops her chewing to look up at Regina quizzically – To simplify it, I am her father – Emma seems to choke on her food for a moment and Snow and Charming look at each other, Regina looks only at Henry who seems to be mulling over the information – I did not know about her until two days ago.

It’s Emma who reacts first – Sh…oot. I’m sorry about…- She makes a finger gun motion looking apologetically at Regina - yeah. You do kinda look like each other, she was way more latin when we were kids.

- Miss Swan, my entire lineage and I are from the Enchanted Forest, not South America.

- Right, yeah. Enchanted South America maybe?

Regina lets out a breath as Emma grins her way and resumes her eating like nothing had happened while the other three shift in their seats, Snow tries to open her mouth first but Regina holds up her hand again – I am not willing to hear anything you want to say quite yet. You both need to stay away from us… From Maleficent, Lily and me. Henry, we can discuss more at home?

He hops out of his stool and dashes upstairs to change and gather his things, his face betraying no anger. Regina guesses being somehow related to a dragon outweighing anything else at the moment. Of all the things from the old world she’d only ever wanted him to have dragons, he used to be obsessed with them growing up and she could never fault him, they were majestic creatures. She let herself out of the door and Emma followed her.

Regina turned back to her when she closed the door – Miss Swan I will not hear any speeches about forgiveness or whatever it is you wish to tell me, I’m being terribly reasonable about this, don’t you think?

- Hey – She holds up her hands – If I found out someone had cursed my kid with some darkness I would have hit them already. I wanted to tell you that you guys gotta be patient with her… she’s a piece of work but she only wanted to feel like she belonged somewhere... Plus finding your parents is never what you wanted it to be. I always wanted them to be cool spies that couldn’t keep me because they were under attack, that kinda came true, and look at where we are now. Lily was probably hoping for some cool dragons and she got a dragon that would date you.

Regina rolls her eyes at Emma as usual and after a moment of waiting for a Henry she takes the opportunity to bring up the elephant in the room – Emma I know this savior business has taken a toll on you, you have had no respite in three years and as much as we were used to constantly being
in survival mode, it is new to you. Take care of yourself first – Emma adverts her eyes nodding with a sad smile – It is no proven theory but I believe that in doing what they did, your parents cursed not only Lily but you as well, and that maybe being around each other is the only way to allow you both to be in your best shape. She will fight you too, god knows I hadn’t heard your name said with such scorn from anyone that wasn’t me, but you should try to reach out to her.

- You should’ve heard the way your mother said my name.

Regina chuckles as Henry dashes out of the door panting like a dog with his backpack on tow – Must be genetic, then.

Regina is so so grateful for Henry’s endless chatter as they drive home, after she had told him he was indeed still allowed to spend as much time as he wanted with Emma and his grandparents he had launched himself in an endless explanation about how cool dragons are and how he’s read a lot of how different cultures perceived them and about how last night, Maleficent had been flying around for a few hours and he could tell she matched mostly the occidental descriptions and now he wondered if there were other magical realms where things looked more Asian… But when one of the few traffic lights in town stop them he goes silent for a moment and looks at her in a way he hadn’t before, ever. He turns back to the road quickly

- So did you guys like… cast a spell? Or brewed a potion? Or was it like a ritual?

Regina waited for the light to go green and started talking with the movement – You heard me say, back at the loft, that I didn’t know about her until Maleficent told me the day before yesterday – he nodded – so none of those options seem likely, do they? We were… a couple for a while, Lily happened the traditional way.

He shook his head and adverted his eyes to the window by his side – But two women can’t… I mean, maybe with magic, I don’t know, but accidentally?

His cheeks were flushing and as much as Regina wished they weren’t having this conversation it seemed they would, it was wishful thinking on her part to think that he wouldn’t at least ask - It seems to be more about the fact that Maleficent is a dragon than us being two women, they reproduce differently than humans, not that I knew that – He seemed torn between wanting this new information on dragons and learning any more sordid details on the conception of Lily, Regina chuckled – Perhaps this could be a reminder for your future to always use protection, no matter how unnecessary it may seem.

He frowned and flushed again – Are there even girl condoms? Were there any condoms in The Enchanted Forest?

- I will write a strongly worded letter to Snow White so someone that isn’t related to you can teach your class better Sex-Ed. Deal?

He exhaled in relief and nodded as Regina parked her car in the driveway, she put the safety brake up and before she could get out of the car he spoke again – If it happened magically maybe it’s because you guys have true love and it helped you guys out! did you want a kid back then? One that was actually yours?

- Henry, you are mine – She uses both hands to cup his face and he scrunches up his nose like she sometimes does, completely involuntarily of course, Regina chuckles and kisses his two cheeks – and you are my true love too.
He groans.

Regina cooks a feast that afternoon, mostly to distract herself from the disaster that the dinner she has planned with Maleficent and her two children could be. A five-course meal has never been rejected by Henry Mills though and he’s happy to help her with any task that requires him to use knives he can pretend are swords in between tasks. The doorbell rings when they are mostly done, just watching a cake rise through the oven door, and Henry dashes out of his seat to open, greets Mal and Lily as politely as possible, takes their coats and leads them to the living room.

- Mom is probably going to change her clothes so… do you want some juice meanwhile? Or something else, we have everything! – He smiles at them and almost bounces in excitement under Mal’s amused gaze and Lily’s confused one. They both turn it down and he sits across them – I’m Henry!

- I am Maleficent, and this is Lily. I’ve heard quite a lot about you. – Mal smiles at him – When I was trapped by the curse you mother used to come by and tell me all about your adventures, she had many depictions of you wearing hats with animal’s ears knitted on top of them.

- When you were a dragon under the library? – She nods and Lily looks between them, the kid seems to be way more informed than she is, under a library? He keeps going – So cool! And mom was going down there to visit you? I didn’t know!

- I always listened with rapt attention but I was too proud to allow her to see I craved her visits, so eventually she stopped coming

He looks down – Maybe it was my fault, I started being really mean to her when I found out about the curse so she was sad for a while… and then she had to send my other mom to kill you…

Lily speaks then, sitting up right – Wait, what? She sent Swan to kill you? How did that turn out?

- Like any attempt to get rid of Maleficent, it didn’t quite stick.

Mal smirks before turning to look at Regina – Well darling one must hold on to life if one has a woman who knows how to make a dramatic entrance

- Mom is really good at those. – Henry nods as he stands up, freed from keeping them company he can go take a lustful look at the cake and get started on setting the table like he’s always in charge of.

They watch him go, Regina and Mal exchanging a look as she sits on the chair he just vacated and Lily breaks the silence that settles – One of you fill me in please? – At Mal’s confused look she clarifies – You need to tell me everything that’s happened… ever.

Regina conjures up a beer for her and two cups of wine for Mal and herself, Henry who sees it disappear from the fridge hollers an ‘I offered’ that makes Regina smile quickly before scolding him for yelling inside the house when a normal tone would do. She takes a small sip of her wine and looks at Mal sipping hers, in their silent conversation she loses and so starts explaining. – We met when I was only a few days over twenty, I had been married to the king for a little more than two years and I was tired. I wanted desperately to be rid of him and my magic was the only tool I had, but I was untrained and a foul man wanted to take advantage of my naivety. Maleficent’s name came up and I saw an alternative, she had succeeded in her own revenge and she was a dragon, it seemed like the fix to all my problems.
I was in chaos – Henry enters the room silently, hoping that Regina would let him stay, he sits by Lily on the couch and Regina nods for Mal to continue – After I put Princess Aurora under the sleeping curse and Briar Rose died shortly after, I had nothing to live for. I retreated into myself, started dabbling in any substance that would grant me sleep without dreams, stopped taking care of my castle… I lost the ability to turn into the dragon. Until Regina came along one day and saved me.

They share a small smile and Henry beams from his spot as Lily only sniffs and drinks, and Regina continues – We became fast friends after, I helped her clean her castle and she taught me a bit of magic on the side. It was a reprieve from my marriage when I found a few hours to escape.

- We would go for flights over the land and the sea…

- Mal had an excellent, very thorough library I liked to browse

- And eventually we fell in love, we had a few years.

Regina pauses and looks down, takes a sip of her cup of wine – I was growing more and more bitter though, had The King killed, started hunting down Snow White – She looks at Lily apologetically – I couldn’t be part of any family in the state I was back then. Mother had told me that love was weakness so I started pushing Maleficent away and after I had the curse in my hands I didn’t even bother to check on her.

- I tried communicating with Snow White and her husband but they seized the opportunity to better their child’s chances of being the savior they needed, they took you still inside your egg. I enlisted Ursula’s and Cruella’s help and eventually we managed to rescue you but it was too late, the deed was done. They escaped the curse with you and came to this land but, you’ll meet them, they’re hopeless when it comes to child-rearing and they say that after a month or so they let you go to this foster system. And they lost track of you. Regina’s curse swept me up and dropped me in a cave under the town’s library in my dragon form.

- After her 28th birthday Emma came to town

- I brought her!

Regina smiles at him softly – I got Henry through a closed adoption but he figured it out all by himself with the help of a book, stole my credit card, found Miss Swan, and brought her here to break my curse. It was all unraveling for me, and Emma was just as combative as I was so we entered a war and in one of my attempts to get rid of her Henry paid the price and fell under a sleeping curse. To save him, we were manipulated into slaughtering Maleficent to retrieve bottled true love that had been hidden inside her. Emma did what she had to do to rectify my mistake and then, when we were betrayed, she broke the curse still because of her love for our son. A lot has happened in this town since… those are stories for other days though.

- Cruella and Ursula just now managed to bring me back to life out of the ashes of my body and my priority was to find you.

They all stay in silence for a moment, Lily seems to be mollified by the story somehow and Regina finishes her cup as Mal only starts hers. Henry smiles – That’s way cooler than anything in the book! And you guys are cooler than grandma and grandpa! Lily what did you do in your 30 years alone? Emma went to jail!

- Emma went to jail? I thought I was the evil fuck up.
Regina lets out a loud huff through her nose and Henry laughs – You can’t curse in front of me!

- Shit. Sorry

Mal joins his laughter and Regina stands – Why don’t we eat?

Lily takes a few seconds to tighten up her shoelaces and finish up her beer and when she enters the dining room she’s met with Henry and Maleficent carrying trays up to the table and Regina serving wine and setting silverware down, it is the single most complicated set up she’s ever seen for a meal and she has to catch herself for a moment. Since finding out who her mother was she’d spent a lot of time wondering how it would have been growing up in the middle ages, on some lavish castle with a Disney villain and she’d never quite stopped at dinner time but this? It is certainly close. She takes a look down at her beat-up boots and back at Regina in a perfect dress and high heels with red soles, she doesn’t know the brand but she knows that the ones with the red soles are expensive, Maleficent in a tailored suit that Lily doesn’t understand when she had time to had made since her story didn’t leave gaps for shopping, maybe it had been magic and then at Henry, she didn’t think any 13 year old boy could wear anything but jeans or sweats inside his own house but Henry was wearing brown dress pants and a plaid button up that wasn’t even flannel. If anyone looked in the house she would probably look like a burglar about to tie up a nice family.

She sighs and trudges up to her seat as they finish setting up and sits. Mal makes a joke about Regina’s cook not knowing that they didn’t eat like this in the land without magic and Henry excitingly tells them that they cooked it all from scratch, Lily raises both eyebrows before she remembers herself and leans back into the seat listening to the boy explain dish by dish and the apparent order they’d chosen. She had worked in a reasonably well rated restaurant and the display before her has nothing to envy that of a good chef in a big city, she tells Regina so and the woman smiles at her warmly like she had smiled at the boy earlier, Lily doesn’t know what do with that so she adverts her eyes and starts eating in the order Henry pointed out as Maleficent makes yet another joke.

The meal goes well, and she offers to do the dishes, reluctantly, because she hates doing dishes but the Pages were really strict with their manners and she hasn’t managed to kick them all, and luckily Regina declines, even more strict with her manners and absolutely adamant to letting any guest lift a finger in her house; and Henry drags her upstairs so she can see his room and yada yada yada.

She glances around the place filled with books, toys and comic books and he takes a leather-bound tome out of his night stand and hands it to her with a smile as he points out some other stuff he deems reasonable. Lily goes through some of the pages of the book and traces Regina’s form in a drawing where she’s holding someone’s glowing heart in her hand

- Hey kid you got a dad? – She reads the page following the drawing and looks at him, silent for a minute. He doesn’t cry though, just shakes his head and sits on his bed – Swan gave you up, so you don’t know who your dad is?

- He died last year… but I only knew him since the year before that so I guess it’s less awful. Mom raised me by herself until I was 10

- I was adopted too… was she any good?

He nods excitedly and rifflles through a drawer to pull out a picture album. He pulls her to sit on the bed next to him and hands her the album, she starts going through it – We had a lot of fun when I was little, she didn’t tell me I was adopted or any of the other stuff so I was really angry when I
found out, but we’re okay now.

She keeps her eyes on the photographs and stops at one where Regina’s face reminds her of her own, Henry upside down in a monkey bar besides her – What about Swan? She’s good too?

- She’s only been learning you know? But the other time we were cursed and mom gave her her own memories, so now she’s much better and she knows how to cook good stuff that’s not just cereal

Lily guffaws and hands him back the album, they seem to have been doing fine before she came barging in their lives, and she kinda feels for Regina, being blindsided with a daughter she never even thought about having. The dark cloud hanging over her head always manages to snatch nice things out of her grasp eventually but, as Henry hands her a controller and powers up an old Nintendo wii and hands her a controller she hopes this works out for her.
They start spending some time together, in odd assortments, sometimes it’s Maleficent Lily and Regina, sometimes Maleficent leaves Lily to spend time with Regina and Henry without her intrusion, sometimes Emma comes around, and one time by the time Lily has been in town for a week Regina has to circle the town square block twice to do a double take when she drives by and sees Henry and Lily sitting on a bench passing comic books back and forth between them; Emma and Lily start spending their afternoons off together too sometimes, Mal has started to appreciate her and Henry too, they’re joyous where Lily, Regina and herself tend to turn somber. Everyone seems to be warming up to Lily much faster than Regina herself is and the feeling is mutual, silence sets in when it’s just the two of them and when it breaks it’s always small talk that sounds forced before they find their rhythm, still, they are trying their best.

Maleficent enjoys it all the same, spending time with Lily fills her with joy that she had only felt perhaps when Regina would forget herself and spend an afternoon with her in her castle in a playful mood, or when they would fly out to the sea and rest on the beaches for as many hours as their disposition would allow. Mal loves that Lily looks more than Regina than she does herself, she’d never been too superficial of a creature but had always regarded Regina with an awe only a being that had seen an endless sea of humans could, many have thought Regina to be one of the countless beauties out there but only one like Maleficent could be sure such radiance was found far, far in between.

One night after dinner, when Emma leaves and Henry retreats upstairs Regina manages to convince Lily to stay at the house for, at least, the night. She seems to have decided to stay around in Storybrooke and so, paying for a room at Granny’s could get costly and with no job it can only pile up on her. Regina wants to offer a job as well, something simple in town hall, but she knows Lily is too proud to accept her help past shelter for a few nights. After she has gone up to a guest room as well, Regina sits by Maleficent in her couch and for a few episodes of a show Henry had chosen they share silence. It is Mal who speaks first in a commercial break that advertises the strange, three-colored mixture they have taught her to use to clean her teeth with the small brush.

- It is past midnight- she gazes at the round contraption in the wall that tells her the time like they have taught her to -You are not one to stay awake past midnight

- Unless I have the right motivation- she smirks Mal’s way and turns back to the TV quickly, remembering herself – I have company

- You could have asked me to go

- I don’t want to.

- You can ask me to stay

As the crime show comes back into the screen Regina turns to face Mal – Just like that? After everything that’s happened between us?

Mal gives her one nod and turns to face her better – I love you.

- So you’ve said

- And you haven’t, – She takes her hand – you never have and I don’t wish to force you to. But we both know it. And I don’t want to see us waste another three decades because I didn’t speak up
when you tried to escape your feelings. - They stay silent for another few minutes and the show drones on over their thoughts. Mal interrupts Regina’s reverie – Is this about Cora crushing my heart?

- Mother is dead, hadn’t you heard? – There’s a beat of silence and Mal squeezes her hand, she hadn’t asked about Cora’s whereabouts and she can’t say she’s saddened by the news – But isn’t it always about mother? Love is weakness and all that.

- You are so much more than the wounds inflicted upon you by your mother Regina. I know you are aware of this, and you have worked on it with this cricket you say, and you are helping your new sister through it as well – Regina closes her eyes and lets her head fall against the back of the couch with a sigh and Mal moves closer – Why must you fight this every step of the way?

- I hurt you, Maleficent

- And I’ve forgiven you

- I’ve done nothing to deserve that – she turns her head and opens her eyes to look at Mal - I don’t deserve you

- You do. – Regina raises her eyebrow at her in her odd position, it makes Mal smile, sometimes it feels like she’s only childish in her presence on purpose, so the populace won’t believe her if she tried to retell her antics- And even if you didn’t, I would give myself willingly to you. Allow yourself to have this… us- Regina closes her eyes again with a deep breath and Mal smirks – Is that surrender I see, Your Majesty?

- If someone gets hurt over this, I will kill you. – She doesn’t open her eyes, bracing herself for what’s to come

- I would allow you, and only you to carry on such feat – She surges forward to lay a kiss on the corner of Regina’s mouth and when she retreats Regina throws her a questioning look – I am easing myself in sweetest, I have been parched and now I wish not to drown

Regina laughs and pulls her in by the collar of the shirt she’s wearing – I can’t believe you still talk like that

- I can only hope it makes you quiver now as it used to – Mal smiles as she closes the space between them to kiss Regina properly this time, both hands dropping to her waist to pull her closer, whey they break apart Regina’s hands move to her neck and start stroking the back of it. She closes her eyes and hums as she moves in to kiss the other woman’s jaw playfully

- Stay.

- I wouldn’t dare leave, my dear
With only one hand?

Next day is an office day and in such days Lily is usually left with only Maleficent to accompany her at least until school lets out, but in the height of her happiness Mal seems to have decided to go have lunch in Regina’s office and Lily sits alone with her cheeseburger at Granny’s when Emma comes in and drops herself in front of Lily, across her booth

-Lils

She pulls her best, most saccharine face and greets her as she had – Ems!!!! – but mockingly

- Okay, you don’t have to be a bitch about it – She orders from the distance and Ruby shows her a thumbs-up as she takes out her coat – So how’s the day going? Had the Regina Mills famous three-course breakfast that makes Henry complain about my cereal?

- Shit I’ve only spent one week around the woman and having this cheeseburger for lunch is making me depressed – Ruby makes a face behind her and Emma laughs – But yeah, I can’t keep staying over there, last night they were making out and I just… can’t

- What?! Who? Henry? With who?!

Ruby shows up with Emma’s food and all but drops it in front of her and shoves her further inside the booth to sit down – Regina and Maleficent?

She’s kinda becoming friends with Ruby, friendly at least. But it’s still been an adjustment the way she just treats you like she knew you since birth – Yeah… I heard them talking late after the kid and I went up and kinda tuned it out but then there was kissing for a while and then they came upstairs, if they did fuck they did it very silently – Emma chokes on one of her fries – but yeah… I can’t sleep under those conditions. I was stressed.

Ruby smiles – How long have they been up to this? The whole week? Before she went to find you?

- I’m Regina’s best friend! She would’ve told me…

- I thought I was your best friend- Ruby pushes her with her shoulder - Did she call you this morning to tell you? No. So, we don’t know… Oh my god… Bets on the wedding?

-How can you be my best friend? You're my mother's best friend!

- Regina is Snow's best frenemy! I'm being replaced all around. Did you know she and Belle talk? Just sit down and have very nerdy conversations over tea. Lily, you're my only hope.

Granny hollers for her to keep working and she begrudgingly stands up and goes to take another order as Emma takes gulps of her soda – Anyways, Regina and Maleficent huh? This is... Yeah. I hope it works out for her. I kinda broke her up with her last boyfriend accidentally by bringing his dead wife back from the past.

Lily’s head tilts comically but before Emma can swallow enough to make fun of her she speaks- You’ve fucked over my parents so many times

Emma shrugs – She loves me – they eat their meals for another minute maybe, because god knows Emma Swan can’t be silent for any longer than that – Hey! Why don’t we find a place for the two of us? I’m living with my parents too and it’s gotten old… with Neal there, and I don’t wanna hear
my parents making out in the middle of the night either… I don’t even need super hearing, the loft is that small.

Ruby dashes in again but this time sits by Lily and takes one of the fries off Emma’s plate – Wow, you’re really going to do that to Snow?

Emma shrugs again – She has Neal! She’ll be fine!

- And why don’t you just move in with Hook? Where does he live? The ship?
Lily frowns – Who’s that?

- You haven’t introduced her to Hook? – Emma adverts her eyes and Ruby puts an arm around Lily
– You are not going to believe this. Emma Swan here is dating real life Captain Hook!

- With only one hand? – Ruby nods eagerly – And the perm?

- No! – Emma looks at them snickering – He has excellent hair. And he’s kinda cute when he’s just showered and he doesn’t have all the leather on

- So he looks good strictly when naked? – Ruby lets out a whistle and Emma blushes as Lily goes on – At least Regina got herself someone that looks good all the time. I can’t live hearing you screw an ugly man… I bet his hook makes a terrible noise against the bed frame.

- I’m breaking up with him! – Ruby stops laughing and Lily lifts her eyebrows

- Shit, you okay?

-He’d been on my ass since Neverland so I just thought since he’d tried so hard to get me…- Emma looked at Lily and then at Ruby - I deserve better… right Rubes?

Ruby nods – He’s kinda shitty, I’ll be glad to see him go. In fact, drinks on me when you dump him! Girls night! Lily’s introduction to the Disney Princess posse.

Lily doesn’t really hear the rest of it - …Neverland?
I do better by myself, Regina.

Emma made quick work of dumping him. The next night Lily, Ruby and Emma are first to arrive to the bar. Ruby says hello to the bartender in a very friendly manner and jumps the bar to come out later with a bottle of some brown liquor and a beer in her hand. She hands it to Emma and smiles conspiratorially towards Lily

- How fast is your metabolism?

She hums - I’ve never gotten home drunk after I left a club now that I think of it
Ruby smirks as she tilts the bottle into her mouth and then motions for Lily to let her do the same – A woman after my own heart.

Emma is into her second beer and they’re more than halfway down the bottle when Regina shows up and joins them without as much as asking what they’re drinking - To the pirate’s departure, may Miss Swan find a better match with a more varied wardrobe -she takes a second shot immediately

Lily lifts an eyebrow as Ruby smirks her way too – You should’ve told me you were into all these kinds of fun before your dragon showed up, we could’ve enjoyed ourselves – Regina laughs her deep, husky laugh and Emma groans into her beer, leave it to everyone to flirt in front of her and her broken heart

Lily shoves Ruby - That’s my… mother.

Ruby gives her a quick once over and tilts the bottle into her mouth again – She certainly is. – She retreats for a second and comes back with two more bottles and Emma goes to work in one of them.

The rest of them start trickling in: Belle, Aurora, Ashley, Mulan and Ariel are there and they move to a table to commiserate on how awful Hook was in the first place. Regina has her arm around Emma, both tipsy beyond their means, she rubs it up and down Emma’s arm as the blonde drinks to stop herself from crying, not because he’s gone but because she wasted so many months on him.

- You are a great woman Emma Swan! We can find you a new suitor!

They all hum and nod and start pitching in ideas in their drunken state as Lily and Ruby drink in a steady manner to maintain their current state, in their loud listing of the town’s single people they don’t notice Snow coming in and pulling a chair next to Belle’s for a while.

Emma acknowledges her first, dangerously nursing both a beer and a shot, she sees Snow looking worriedly at her – Mom! I’m so sorry! I had to break up with him.

Regina turns to ice when she sees her across the table and Snow glances at her but looks at Emma again – Sorry for what honey?

- You wanted me to keep him – she hiccups – to marry him and have babies.

- I just want you to be happy, Emma.

- You should know by now, Snow, that thrusting your desires onto others doesn’t yield good results – Regina stands from beside Emma – Why did you come?

- I was invited…
Before both Regina and Lily can chop off her head Ruby holds up both hands - It was a group chat invitation. – Her screen lights up to the ‘Ruby’s princesses’ group chat, where she indeed typed up the place and time for all of them to see

Snow, fully sober unlike any of them, tries to calm her friend down – Regina please, we’ve overcome so much already, we can’t let this ruin all that

Lily stands up from her seat and its legs screech terribly against the floor – This is right here.

- And I am so, so sorry Lily… I was backed against a wall and I made a terrible choice. Can you forgive me?

- I can’t! I can’t ever forgive shit because of what you did to me! – She takes a deep breath to calm herself but gives up – You know how many schools I got kicked out of? How many fucking psychologists I had to see? How many damn rage control courses I had to sit through? – she kicks the stool she’d stood of and it clatters to the floor making the rest of the bar turn to them – None of it fucking works because you with your little meek-looking pale face and your dumb jock of a husband decided to shove your daughter’s angst into me. Fuck you. – She breaths heavily in her spot for a moment before walking out of the bar without any more prompting.

Regina extricates herself out of the table with a last pat to Emma’s back, she stops by Ruby’s seat on her way out – You will have to deal with three of those if you try something funny with her – Ruby salutes Regina and she smirks at her as she leaves after Lily.

Out in the street she catches up to her and tries to match her pace as her daughter stomps away, she calls out for her to stop. Lily huffs – I’m sorry I embarrassed you okay? But just… let me process this shit and I’ll be better tomorrow morning. You can go back in to hang out with your friends

- You’re more important than them Lily. You are my daughter, you don’t have to deal with anything alone ever again, talk to me.

- I do better by myself, Regina

She clamps her hand on her arm hoping she has the strength to stop a dragon on the warpath and she won’t be just dragged away but the minute she touches her Lily stops in her tracks and Regina pulls her in a reluctant hug – I thought I did better by myself too until I found someone who would listen – it takes two hiccupping breaths and Lily breaks on her shoulder, sobbing and letting her weight fall into Regina – I’m taking us home, okay? – She says nothing, doesn’t seem able to.

They appear by her couch and Lily drops herself down on it seemingly unable to stop crying once the dam was opened, Mal enters from the kitchen and looks at them instantly worried – What happened to her?

- Snow White came to the bar. Henry?

- Put himself to sleep a few hours ago.

Regina nods, grateful, and they sit on either side of Lily, not too close but enough that she can reach out to either of them. Regina conjures up a glass of water and hands it to her – Do you want to talk about it? Well, you don’t, but would it help?

Lily drinks the water and uses her own sleeve to wipe at her face – There’s so much garbage inside me all the time. All the negative energy and the anger and the pessimism, and I’ve learned to like… ignore it most of the time, it just explodes once a month, I get fired from another job and keep it moving y’know?
Mal’s face clenches – You’ve had a lot of issues with this?

Lily laughs bitterly and sniffs, dumping herself against the couch harshly – When I was a kid I was always breaking shit for no damn reason, Susana and Andrew were always putting me on timeout or whatever and as soon as a mood hit again I would take a golf club to another window. I’d fight the girls at school, the psychologist there used to say I was acting out because I needed more activities to release my energy and I always fucked up at those too, sports were good ‘cause some of them needed aggression but eventually I’d yell at the coach and get kicked off too. Shrieks couldn’t help me, then all the schools got tired of me and when I could tell my parents were getting tired too I just… ran. I found Emma one of the times, she was stealing some food and I had money so I bailed her out, Emma was always helping me out after that… when I got too maniac she could calm me down y’know? She was kinda dumb though so I fucked that up too stealing from a family that wanted her and I was all alone again. I might be crazy and I’ve seriously fucked up more than one asshole in my life but I’m smart and I never get caught so I’ve avoided jail, but it’s just so hard to stay in one place and have people when on one of the bad days I might blow up at them for some dumb small thing. I didn’t even make it to week two here, now I bet they’re all scared of me.

Mal stands then and paces the room tensely, she’s not one for explosive behavior and the calmer she seems the more meticulously she’s planning someone’s downfall. Regina watches her, angry as she is she knows that if she were to see Snow White she may say some things to her that would do irreparable damage to their relationship, if she can even refrain from physical harm for Henry’s sake. She can’t let the silence stretch for long though or Lily will think they’ve given up on her too so she puts an arm around her like she did Emma earlier, the move reminding her just how tipsy she still was – Lily how would you like to engage in some childish activities? – Mal looks at her in the middle of her pacing, her shirt buttoned off and her hair down of its earlier do, she too seems ready to do anything. Lily looks at her through her reddened eyes – Mother beat the rebellious streak out of me, it wasn’t until I rediscovered my own magic that I had an outlet for a lot of my pent-up energy and I vow to give you that, but tonight, we have only the old-fashioned way. Let’s go slash some tires.

- Are you sure?

She gives her a grin that crosses her entire face – What can she do? Call the cops on the mayor? – Lily chuckles and wipes her face again as she nods – Grab a knife Mal

- I don’t know what slashing tires entails – still, a beautifully carved dagger appears on her hand and she hands it to Lily

She laughs wholeheartedly then and swipes at a tear rolling down her face with the hand not holding the curved knife – You guys are great.

As it tends to happen the Emma pity party had turned into a Snow pity party after Regina and Lily had left so when they appear outside the building the loft was in, their car was parked there and Snow was nowhere to be seen. Lily takes the first tire down with a healthy stab and as she pulls out the dagger Mal makes a noise of assent

- Ohhhh is this round thing a tire? The carriage’s wheels. This is just like killing their horse.

Regina rears up – No, it’s like damaging the wheel of the carriage. The horse would be the engine, and still, no horses are dying.

- Yes darling – She sing songs as Lily takes out the second wheel – Lily you must make sure to
never eat a horse or your mother here will never forgive you for it

- Why would I eat a horse?

- Oh, we must try hunting soon! You will love being a dragon my dear.

Lily hands the knife up to Regina and she stumbles up to the car and instead of going for a tire Mal and Lily both recoil as she starts scratching the metal to scribble ‘CHILD SNATCHER’, the car’s metal seems unable to resist the dagger and it ends up being a deep gash in some parts and Regina cackles when she’s done – I might have to buy them a new car for this – She sets fire to the third tire and it melts too quickly for a normal fire

Maleficent is next up and she takes a moment to touch the tire and observe the rim and the machinery underneath the car before cutting almost delicately into the rubber, testing it. She stabs it when it doesn’t deflate quickly enough through the surgical incision she had made on it. The truck finally looks lower than it should and Regina sighs leaning onto Maleficent and letting her wrap an arm around her as they stand there watching, Lily’s smiling slightly and she turns to them – Doesn’t this shit have an alarm?

- It is a very safe town… when it comes to regular crimes

She huffs looking at the work they’ve made on it – We’re the only dangers then? – Regina smirks and Lily rears up and slams her boot clean through the light in the front, the metal thing going back into the recesses of the car. She smiles at them – We can go now.

Mal looks at the hole in it and Regina pouts minutely – I want to shave Charming’s head

They don’t have time to question her before she’s grabbed them both and they appear by the bed, she freezes him and stumbles into the bathroom to find shaving cream. She lathers him up and grabs the dagger

Lily snickers – Do only half of it so he has to choose to look all the way fucked up tomorrow morning.

Maleficent laughs behind them – She is a child but, Regina what’s your excuse?

- I’m drunk, he should be happy I don’t slit throats now.

They look at him, head maybe a quarter poorly shaved, a bit of skin nicked and Regina nods resolutely – This will do – she hands the dagger back to Maleficent and she drags the blade trough the empty side of the bed

- They shall sleep on the floor.

- Mattresses are really easy to come by these days - Maleficent sighs and passes a hand through her hair and Regina steps up to her and hugs her, looking up at her – But it’s the thought that counts darling.
Lily wakes up to Charming’s steps pounding up the stairs, she leaves her room to see what the commotion is just as Mal does and they both startle at him there, handcuffs in hand and beanie on his head. He moves to take her and she rears back making Mal yell a warning at him that wakes Regina up, she comes out of the room after Mal squinting her eyes and looking as unkempt as anyone except Henry perhaps had ever seen her. Charming has no case, no one had seen them, there were not security cameras, there was no evidence left and they stayed all night in the house getting to know each other, as a family. He leaves the house fuming, Henry gawking at the scene unfolding in front of him clad in superman pajamas.

Lily breaks into laughter first, leaning against her doorframe she clutches at her over-used gray t-shirt and her hair drops of the knot she had put it in, Mal’s chuckles come next joining her mirth and last, Regina relaxes and drops against the wall laughing as well, until she notices Henry retreating into his room and slamming the door behind him.

Emma Swan, sunglasses on, hair completely hidden by a bright red beanie, and same clothes as the night before, shows up in 15 minutes, enters Regina’s kitchen before doing anything else and dumps herself in the stool next to her – You bunch of good-looking assholes, what is this? A target ad?

- Miss Swan, Henry called you?

Lily, the only one qualified to use kitchen appliances and not hung-over stops stirring the eggs – How did you get in here? - She turns to Regina who gives her an amused look

Emma snatches the shades out of her face and reveals pitiful red-rimmed eyes – I have a key – She holds up her hand – Yeah yeah in case of emergencies and whatever, your son called me here knowing I was hung-over and I just broke up with my pirate boyfriend. It’s probably an emergency. - Regina has the decency to look ashamed and Emma frowns as Maleficent and Lily advert their eyes – Wait, where is he?

- He’s locked himself in his room

- Why? – She whines, any magical emergency is better than a Henry meltdown

Lily chips in – Wait, don’t you live with your parents? Where did you sleep then?

Emma slumps against the kitchen island and furrows her brow - Regina, what happened?

The woman sits up, impossibly straight in her stool and Lily turns to look at her as she turns off the stove, Regina dusts off her already clean satin pajama top – Last night I slashed your parents’ truck’s tires, scratched it well beyond repair, cut straight through their mattress and shaved roughly a quarter of David’s hair while he slept.

Lily sighs – I mean, shit, I was there too. I did, yeah, all of that.

Regina holds up a single finger before Maleficent can say a word – Miss Swan… Emma. It was me. I was drunk and aggravated.

- Cut the shit, Regina. – Lily passes them all plates with eggs and toast and moves the pan to the kitchen island for herself, using a fork to eat out of the anti-adherent surface, Regina has bigger issues to think of though and Emma drops her head on the cool counter – As sheriff, I hope David
is smart enough to let this be… as your friend, I get it, you’re all insane but we already knew that, and I guess thank you for not seriously harming my parents. You should talk to the kid though, I mean, that’s some really fucked up low scale criminal behavior… Back when you were a has been murderer he could separate that from his mother in a way, after he learned to, but this is here and now, we don’t want him thinking it’s ok to vandalize shit. – Regina puts her fingers in her temple but nods and Mal puts a hand low in her back for support – Okay then, in goes Emma Swan, The Savior, The Tantrum solver

- The woman on the walk of shame

- Shut up, Page. I just crashed at Red’s. I love my little brother but he cries like a banshee.

- Not too good at solving tantrums then.

Emma pulls a face and pushes her plate Lily’s way before standing up and leaving the kitchen, her boots stomping upstairs. Lily picks it up and goes for Regina’s and Mal’s as well, turns her back to them to wash them – Hey, I’ll get out of your hair now.

- What? Where are you going? Why?

- I’ve been here two days and I’ve already made your son stop talking to you… I’ll just go someplace else

Mal’s hand tenses on Regina and the brunette passes both of hers through her own hair – Lily this is not your fault at all, I want you to stay, please. I am not angry at you. – Lily says nothing as she finishes cleaning and Regina presses on– You had agreed to the weekend, at the very least.

- Okay. – Her voice is small and Maleficent uncoils by Regina’s side

- This has been a tense morning – She moves to the fridge and opens it, looking around it curiously until she finds what she’s searching for – I need meat. – She pulls out a steak, terribly frozen and makes a displeased noise deep in her throat – Fix this, Regina. – A small burst of fire thaws it but leaves it still very much, raw. Maleficent uses a nearby knife to spear it into her mouth regardless, under Regina’s amused gaze. She offers a bit to Lily and the woman recoils – You’ll see! This is your future.

Henry unlocks his door for Emma to enter and she goes straight for the bed, careful to leave half of it for him to join her. When he does she puts her shades back on – Do you see how bad I look? – He nods with a smile on his face – Don’t ever drink. Specially if there’s a werewolf involved. Or a dragon. Now, what’s up?

He lies down next to her in the bed – David came by earlier and he was so angry, apparently, they destroyed his car and he had a hat because they cut his hair too and I just… wasn’t mom better now?

- Do you remember when Greg and Tamara took you? And then Pan had you for a while… Hell, when Zelena had you for a few hours… we could have done anything. And your mom just heard that her daughter was taken from her for 30 years, you have to cut her a little slack. – He sighs next to her but doesn’t rebuke her and Emma smiles – But the littlest of slack, what they did was bad, a crime, it’s not good at all… but you know how extreme situations in this town are.

- At first, I thought maybe Maleficent wanted to…kill grams and gramps.
We all did, but turns out she’s kinda all right - Emma takes off her sunglasses and turns to look at Henry directly – Have you thought about what Snow and Charming did, though?

He shrugs and Emma sits up by him, to pass a hand through his hair, much longer than Regina probably likes it - They fucked up – His eyes open comically at her and she shrugs – It deserves a little cursing.

- The curse was coming…

- No. I’ve thought a lot about that and Snow and Charming put me in that tree because they cared more about the curse breaking than about how I’d do out here in the real world, and that’s all right, they wanted that curse broken really bad and It’s worked out for us. But what they did to Lily… they took her and gave her all this extra bad stuff… I don’t know, and to Maleficent, I was theirs to send away, they chose, but they didn’t give Maleficent the benefit of choosing.

- But Mal was a dragon under the curse, what would’ve happened to Lily?

Emma takes off her hat and her jacket – That would have been Regina’s decision, or maybe even the curse’s. Some kids here ended up with their parents, some didn’t. But they all ended up here with houses and had nice lives. When we were in New York, tell me, how many homeless kids did you see there? – He looks away from her then – And the ones in the system… Some mornings after a nightmare when I wake up, for a minute, I wish I had been left as an eternal baby in Storybrooke instead of having to grow up out there. I’m sure Lily’s felt that way a few times since she found out about who she is.

He nods at her and sniffs a bit – Okay. But I’m still worried about mom. She was doing great! And now Maleficent is around, and she’s a villain too, she just came back from the dead… we’ll have to start all over again with her.

- She’s around…?

- She’s been here in the morning two days in a row, in her pajamas, in mom’s pajamas but bigger.

Emma takes his hand and they find themselves suddenly down in the kitchen, where Lily, Maleficent and Regina are still sitting, nursing cups of coffee. Henry darts an apologetic look at Regina and she lets out a long breath smiling his way but Emma slams both hands in the kitchen island and they all turn to her – Regina are we not the bestest of friends?

- Miss Swan you don’t look like you can be the best at anything right now – She glances at her, up and down – but I suppose we are, sadly.

- Exactly! And what is the number one rule of besties? Lily? – She frowns at her with a terrible look in her eyes – okay, emo, Henry?

He shrugs and stops halfway to the fridge – Um? Raising you son very well together? – Emma shakes her head - Telling each other everything?

- Telling each other everything! – She slaps the counter with every word and Maleficent smiles at her antics from besides Regina, she finds her quite amusing with her tangled up hair and tequila-stained t-shirt. Emma rounds up a silent Regina who knows better than to look like she enjoys the comedy show – So why do I have to find out from your children that you’re participating in some hanky-panky with your ex? Huh?

- There has been no hank…- She stops herself with a deep breath before giving Emma the satisfaction - Nothing has happened.
Everyone glances at Maleficent briefly and her small smile drops from her face - Oh? Is this about me? I haven’t understood most of Miss Swan’s sentences this morning.

Regina turns to look at Mal and her bright, bright smile inculpates her more than any confession – Hopefully dear you can remain oblivious for much longer, when it comes to Emma, ignorance is bliss.

Mal smiles right back and Emma gags playfully, that draws a smile out of Lily and Emma beams – Confess, you are romancing our local queen.

- Yes. – Mal nods on top of her deadpan affirmation and Regina puts her hand on her arm so she will stop

- That’s enough, Miss Swan, thank you for coming. Please, go.
I think I’m getting there myself.

Emma does not go, reticent to go deal with the situation at home she opts to stay in Regina’s and take a shower before putting on her clothes with the one blouse from Regina’s closet Henry seems to insist she wear. After, he sits on the floor between Emma’s and Lily’s legs as the PlayStation boots up in the screen, his mom is quite lenient with homework whenever she does something that she thinks Henry could be angry at her for and he’s not above using that to play some extra video games and watch a few more movies. Above him, sitting on the couch, Emma pushes Lily playfully and the brunette sits still, trying hard not to react at all. Henry selects the racing game they’d agreed on and Emma’s voice carries over the loading screen

- Hey Kid what do you think of me and your big sis living together?

He tenses up - Is this a gay situation too?

Lily bristles then – No. Why don’t you get a place by yourself like a real adult?

Henry passes her the second controller instead of passing it to Emma – Yeah, Ma. I want my own room.

- It can be a three roomer, all comfortable. – Emma moves to snatch the controller out of Lily’s hands but she blocks her move easily – Sound-proofed for when you wanna sneak Ruby in at night.

- And for your one-handed dates too? Or do you only do them on a boat?

Emma opens her mouth to answer but Henry jabs her in the leg and frowns – Um, I’m still here.

Lily laughs as the TV signals for them to start and Emma settles for showing her the finger making sure to keep it in Henry’s blind spot, Lily shows hers right back without letting go of her place in the race.

- What are they doing? – Regina arranges the blanket to cover both Mal's and her legs on the couch in the deck outside

- Sounds like a lot of those cars that pass by so often

- A movie maybe, or a game – She smiles at Maleficent’s confused expression and burrows further into her heat – I’d love to take you out to dinner

- We’d go eat at the wolf’s rest stop? – There’s so much in that world Maleficent doesn’t understand, why anyone with a house and a hearth goes to the local rest stop for a meal with no need is one of those things, specially why Regina does it, why she has no cooks at her house or why she wants to take her there – I quite enjoy our meals here in this house, or even Ursula’s cooking in Gold’s cabin, although her father did appear yesterday so I don’t suppose she’s still around

Regina gives her one of those smiles again –Here, we go on outings when we court people, sometimes we eat at a restaurant. Not a diner.

- What is a restaurant? – Regina’s smile grows into a chuckle and she drops her head in her shoulder in the middle of her laughter, Mal can’t help but smile even when she was being mocked
- You’re enjoying this, perhaps too much?

- I’ll find a way to curse you a little, just enough to help you learn about the land without magic - she calms down as Mal reaches around her to pull her in with her arm – What could you enjoy? … jewelry, but not making it, a store-owner? Too pedestrian… perhaps money? Do you look like a banker? – a wicked grin appears on Regina’s face and Mal grins back, it’s habit more than understanding of the situation and Regina probably knows it – or do you look like the woman who will balance the town’s budget for the mayor from now on?

- I would do anything for you.

Regina’s playful smile drops into a small one, and she reaches for Mal’s hand on her shoulder, her eyes roam over Mal’s features – Yes, I think I’m getting there myself.

After they have lunch Emma follows Regina into the kitchen to help clean up, she likes to feel useful as much as possible and there hasn’t been one meal in which Regina has managed to convince her to stay back, her own dishes in her own house could sit in the sink a good few days while she worked a case but Regina’s and Snow’s she jumps to. Regina dries and re shelves besides her and as Emma scrubs at a pot she gets distracted and her mouth opens of her own accord

- Emma?

- Wow, first name basis? What’s up ‘Gina?

- Don’t ever call me that again – Emma stops scrubbing to laugh – I know it’s not your day and it’s perfectly fine if you say no- Emma turns to look at her and her laughter dies down significantly so Regina goes on - Would you stay with Henry tonight?

- Of course – She makes a show of lifting her eyebrows and finds an absurd tone and accent Regina can’t place at all – But whyyyyyyyyyyyyy? Is it perhaps, some hanky panky?

She breathes deeply, she might be friends with the woman but she’s decided to never give her the pleasure to laugh at her childishness – I might be planning a date.

She turns into Emma Swan again - This is such a bestie activity right here! – then she turns into a schoolgirl, removes her rubber glove to twirl a lock of her hair in her finger – O M G!!! Where are you taking her?! What are you wearing, let’s go look through your closet!

- Should I call Ruby? – She interrupts whatever Emma is going to say – To keep an eye on Henry, not to select of an outfit.

Emma deflates – Fine. You suck the fun out of besties. Of course, I’ll stay with the kid, and for future reference you don’t have to ask, just send him over.

- Thank you. Tonight, you’re welcome to stay here if you plan on acting like you’re not related to Snow and David for a few more hours. – Emma gives her a pitiful look and Regina puts a hand on her arm – If you’re still here by breakfast tomorrow morning, I’m forcing you to talk about it. – She leaves Emma to her pot and her thoughts and walks out of the kitchen.

A minute later though Emma comes right into the living room after her – Mills kids! Guess who’s in charge tonight? Mommy is going out. – Lily snorts besides Henry – Regina, tell her I’m in charge.
- You’re in charge… of Henry, try not to burn my house down.

- You suck the fun out of baby-sitting.

That night Henry stands between Emma and Lily in the window as they watch Regina and Mal walk towards the car, both wrapped to perfection in dresses that complement their hair and make-up choices and on top of apparently not too high heels. Henry retreats from the window before the other two and Emma takes the shot to annoy Lily some more

- Have you ever looked like that? – the brunette scoffs – So fashion is not genetic? Let’s play dress up, I bet Regina’s dresses are super short on us. Oh, look she’s opening the car door for Maleficent! Can Maleficent even open a car door?

Lily refrains from landing the punch to Emma’s shoulder she had already planned in order to keep watching the show. She hums – I’m sure in your fantasies it was you who opened the doors and pulled back the chairs, gonna have to imagine some new scenarios, Swan.

Emma glances nervously around for Henry as the car pulls out of the driveway – Regina’s my friend!

- So was I

- Well I- Emma sputters – Fine, I’ve considered it. – Lily lets out a guffaw and Emma pushes her – Well we have a kid together, shit makes sense on paper, I bet everyone’s thought about it! Plus, she’s hot!

- I think what you mean is that… – Lily’s laughter dwindles down and she loops an arm over Emma’s shoulder and pulls her close so whisper in her ear - she looks like me.

Emma elbows her in the gut as her laugh gets more boisterous – Oh no, Regina’s way hotter

- You always did like them centuries older than you apparently

- Fuck you. - Emma elbows her again and she falls into the nearest seat with an oof, laughing more than ever as Henry walks in with a bowl of cereal, just before Lily and Emma were going to head to the kitchen to collab on some dinner, to find them like that.
Somewhere in town, well out of any main streets, is the one restaurant worthy of being the venue of a date for someone with Regina’s station in society. It sits near a cliff, overlooking the sea, and it’s surrounded by the thick greenery that is the forest adjacent to Storybrooke’s urban area. Maleficent enjoyed the car ride far more than Regina used to when she still wasn’t too accustomed to the machines, the more they drove the more the scenery turned into something she was familiar with, Regina’s music choice was soft and her company even more so, the night was going well. The restaurant surprised her also, it seemed different than the rest of the city, the building was much more angular for once and it seemed to have been designed to blend in with the location.

They leave the car and Regina chances a bright smile to Mal above it before she motions for Mal to follow her up the path. Their table is out by the floor to ceiling window that lets them see the night sky over the sea and Maleficent smiles at the view before turning back to Regina – Do you recall that cave, carved into a cliff’s face that you were so petrified to visit?

- I recall almost dying trying to reach it the first time we went, yes. – Mal makes a face that conveyed they’d had that conversation more than once and Regina smiles at her – It was worth it of course, for the view.

- Yes, for the view.

Riding atop a dragon over the open sea, against the winds had sounded marvelous when Maleficent’s silver tongue was trying to convince her to take a few days away from the court on a month when Leopold and Snow had been away, but getting it done had been an affair that had tested Regina’s resilience. When they made it to the cave though, Regina was confronted with the preparations Mal had made before hand, with the vantage point to track the sun’s ascent into the sky every morning and with the whistling of the wind hitting the rocks around them, it had been magical. Since then Regina wanted to do that for Maleficent, find a place that would take her breath away, back in the Enchanted Forest she could not find a spot Maleficent hadn’t seen in her countless years, she might have an advantage now in the Land without Magic. At least for now, that restaurant would have to do.

The waitress leaves a couple of menus after Regina informs her of the bottle of wine she’s to bring them and Maleficent takes her hand as she peruses the options – Darling I am honestly scared to eat any of these things. – She sends Regina a smile – Would they serve me any meat, raw?

- Not without me leaving you here to eat it alone – she grins at Mal and points at the steak-driven portion of the menu – Rare is the best you can do without making me lick blood-water off your lips later.

Mal intertwines their fingers and tugs Regina’s hand closer - There will be licking then, will it? - she grins deviously but the woman returns to pour them both cups of wine and take their orders before Regina can respond.
- Before we jump, head first, into this I want to apologize. – She holds up her free hand to halt Mal’s interruption – as I grew more and more into the Evil Queen I began to neglect you, spend less time with you, paid less attention to your wellbeing when we were together, you did nothing to deserve that and I hope you know the only issue was me. Eventually I abandoned you with not a word nor a letter, I just ceased contact, no one should go through that, and knowing what I know now… I have a lot to atone for when it comes to us. – Mal nodded and her thumb rested on top of Regina’s over the table – Trapping you under that library was my last selfish act in this relationship, I swear. From now on I’ll love you like you should be loved.

- You’ve become terribly sentimental- her voice betrays her halfway through the last word and she takes a deep breath to calm herself, lest one of the other people that choose to eat at a restaurant see her crying in the middle of the place and then surely Regina who would join her – I would apologize too then, for not giving you the support you needed- Regina’s confused expression is endearing, but without telling her so Mal goes on - I let you plunge yourself into darkness thinking you’d pull yourself out of it any moment you wished.

Regina nods once with a smile - My time with Dr. Hopper has helped me voice many a thought I wouldn’t dare before – She pulls her hand up to lay a kiss in the back of it – I love you. Let us not waste any more time.

- I must say I like this new Regina – The waitress appears again with their meals and after she goes Maleficent holds up her cup – To you Regina, slowing down enough that happiness finally catches up to you.

In Regina’s house Emma wrangles a very much awake Henry into bed, she’d let him eat some more even after dinner and it was proving to be a bad decision when his energy refused to go down like it should’ve. They are nearing 11 pm and after living a year with Regina’s memories swimming in hers she knew anything after 10 pm was just sacrilege. After she manages to convince him to at least stay in bed and try to sleep she goes down moving towards the living room where they had been channel surfing with Lily, the night had been easy going up until then and Emma knows Henry wanted to stay up partly to continue to hear about their adventures together when they were kids. She decides to swing down into the basement and comes up with a bottle of wine she knows Regina won’t miss too much, because she had given it to her and Regina had told her that it needed another few decades to be drinkable, and she had been lying, to spare her feelings, hopefully.

She takes two glasses out of the cupboard, plastic, and dumps herself in the couch next to her friend – 21+ party can begin now!

- Do you just… take her shit? – Lily frowned as Emma poured the two glasses liberally

She laughed – Regina doesn’t mind, trust me. I come in and take leftovers sometimes, she just asks me for the Tupperware next time she sees me. – When Lily only looked at her with that harsh expression she tacked on – I mean If she came into our place and ate something we wouldn’t mind either, sometimes she just teleports in there and goes straight for baby bro, they’re friends… we have bigger fish to fry in this town

- Is that safe? How will she know if she gets robbed?

- Well I don’t take her clothes or her expensive shit… except the booze, I drink the booze – She takes a big gulp of her glass and glances at Lily staring at her own cup she remembers her weird behavior at dinner and how she didn’t want to take the controller when she dragged Henry upstairs
- Hey, are you scared she’ll get mad if you touch her stuff?

Lily stiffens beside her and reaches for the glass to drink it all in one go – Whatever.

- No, c’mon! Don’t clam up on me – She tops off both glasses – We said best friends forever.

- Swan we’re in our thirties, that shit wasn’t real

- It so was! – She takes a controlled sip of her glass as Lily downs her – Man, this is some poetic stuff! Our parents hated each other, we both ended up here, ran into each other when we were 15, separated, found our freakishly young parents in our thirties, and now it turns out you got half of me in you! I bet we can be the best best friends earth can possibly see, ever.

- Fine. – she takes the bottle and drinks straight out of it for a moment – I am scared they will throw me out soon. Did you see them? Do you see this house? I don’t fucking fit in here and fuck, I… like them.

- Yeah, they’re kinda Ivy league and we’re kinda community college – Lily frowns even more and Emma scrambles to rectify – but from when they’re from love is way more important, and they love you. My mom is royalty too and she’s been okay with me, Regina’ll probably just buy you some expensive version of your clothing.

- Just okay? – Emma shrugs nursing her drink and Lily takes another gulp out of the bottle – If you’re gonna make me talk, you gotta talk right back.

- I thought she wanted me to be more girly too so I just…-

- Started wearing floral prints?

- Yeah. – Lily laughs at her and she breaths out, her laughing is much easier to deal with than Regina’s stoic anger in her behalf – And they had the baby… named him after Henry’s dad, I like the kid but it’s just like, if you wanted a replacement baby at least they could’ve named him after someone who didn’t leave me in jail? So yeah, they love me and all but it hasn’t been as fun as I thought finding your parents would be.

Lily serves herself a proper glass and scratches at the label – Henry keeps showing me shit from his childhood… it doesn’t feel good y’know? Knowing It should’ve been me or something

Emma nods and finishes her own glass in one go too – He did that when I came along too, imagine how good shit was for him that he wants to show people. I only have one box of happy-ish memories from the whole 28 years I was out there

- I haven’t spoken to the Pages since I was 18. I broke in, once, to get something from my old room and it was gone, they turned it into an office in like a month.

Emma huffs and raises her glass to clash against Lily’s with a dull sound, there were real wine cups in the house but sometimes the new life Emma lives felt performative, she knows Lily appreciate the old kid-proof glasses like she does – To us being very fucked up.

Regina and Mal appear in the foyer past midnight, hoping everyone will be asleep, but Lily and Emma still sit in the living room with a new bottle of wine Emma didn’t have the clear mind to google before starting. Mal stands behind Regina with her hands on the smaller woman’s hips and her chin grazing the top of her head laughing softly at a joke they shared before ditching their car
in the restaurant when they realized Regina wasn’t apt to drive, they move to the sound of their
daughter’s laughter and find them playing some sort of card game.

Emma sees them first and grins, it’s lopsided – Regina! You guys are back, aaaaaand cuter than
ever! Wine?

Regina squints at the label and shakes her head – Do finish the bottle Miss Swan, know you will be
doing yard work for the thousands of dollars you’re consuming.

Lily coughs over her sip of wine and Maleficent smiles over Regina’s head, at both of them – I
won’t allow you to enslave the children over wine, Regina. Let them have fun.

- My good alcohol is wasted on the likes of Emma Swan, can’t tell a 20 dollars bottle from the one
she’s drinking I’m sure. – Emma sticks out her tongue at her but Lily keeps quiet on her seat – Lily
you will be instructed in the art of wine, I can let this one’s bad influence get to you

She salutes her shakily and Mal laughs behind Regina, passing an arm across her front – Is it not
the costume to allow the visiting royals your finest drinks and your cooks’ most brilliant
concoctions? Well dear, Emma is a princess in her own right, as pedestrian as her palate is.

Emma grins at Regina who rolls her eyes – Yeah, listen to your woman.

Regina turns to smile at Lily, making Mal release her hold – I trust you won’t allow her to vomit on
our furniture – Lily shakes her head, her voice not cooperating and Regina moves to leave the room
– Goodnight Lily, Lily’s friend.

Emma sticks her tongue out again and Maleficent laughs, before she follows Regina out she bends
over the couch and lays a kiss on the top of Lily’s head – Sorceresses don’t hold their wine as well
as we do. Don’t tell your mother but I’ve dared exchange her wine with grape juice when the
necessity arises, treasure my secrets little one – She moves away and addresses them both again–
Goodnight, children.

Emma drops down into her chair letting out a relieved breath - Cool, she adopted me too.

Upstairs, she finds Regina peeking into Henry’s room to find him fast asleep, or from what Mal’s
hearing, pretending to be. Regina closes the door and Mal chooses to say nothing, she needs him to
be squarely on her side, and she bets Regina’s already aware he wasn’t as deep in slumber as his
limbs sprawled around suggest. She follows Regina into her room, where she’s slept with her for
the past few days, she supposes Cruella wonders about her but she couldn’t care less at the
moment.

In the bathroom Regina bends over the vanity’s chair to remove her earrings and Maleficent shuts
the door she just walked through and steps out of her shoes, onto the carpeted floor as she rakes her
eyes over her form– Cast a silencing spell. Both ways, Princess Emma is singing. - Regina obliges
with a raised eyebrow and a shimmer covers the walls of the bedroom as she leaves the bathroom
and walks by Maleficent heading to the closet, the smell of the unfamiliar perfume invades her
nostrils and she clamps a hand over Regina’s upper arm to halt her advances – I was told there
would be some licking of my lips?

Regina laughs and moves in for a tortuously slow kiss, with her heels on they’re almost equal
height and she takes the opportunity to loop her arms over Mal’s shoulders fully, she releases her
lips with a wet smack – There, all clean - Mal grins wickedly at her
- Regina, you look like sin in some of this land’s garments – Her hand trails down over the fabric hugging down the body in front of her – This borders public indecency, this is a long bodice – Regina laughs above her as Mal’s head drops to lay a kiss on Regina’s bare shoulder – How can one be expected to not fall into madness seeing so much of your skin for so long?

- It is much more maddening to be teased and not shown, wouldn’t you agree? – She moves her hand to undo the few ties holding up Mal’s long, flowy dress, and she obliges easily, turning her back to Regina briefly so she can make quick work of them, Mal starts on the pins that hold her hair up knowing Regina prefers it to be down despite how it might get in the way. The dress falls in a heap around Mal’s form and Regina’s hand follows her spine - No underwear?

- I haven’t quite deciphered it yet – Mal turns back and scans the strapless dress Regina wears to no avail, in her examination she misses the way Regina’s eyes darken and her nostrils flare as she thinks of the suits Mal seemed fond of being worn with nothing underneath. – Should I just pull this thing down off you?

Regina chuckles as she reaches up to lay a hand flat against Mal’s chest, between her collarbones, she uses it to nudge her back until she sits on the bed and the turns to sit on her lap – There’s a hidden zipper Mal

She tugs it down and frowns when faced with the bra underneath – I’m going to rip this dammed thing off!

Regina stands before she loses her clothing to passion of all things and steps out of the dress. She crawls on top of Mal as she moves back into the bed, reaching behind herself to unclasp the bra and dropping her heels on the way – You’re quite impatient

- You took me to dinner wearing undergarments

Regina silences her with a kiss, she molds her body against Maleficent’s easily muscle memory fresher than she expected. She was almost never the one that ended up on top though and their change in dynamic thrills her, Mal’s dazed expression while pinned under her sends a rush through her she can’t put in words. She moves to nip at her neck – This won’t be the last time, will it? – Maleficent can’t produce more than an amused huff and Regina rewards her with a tender kiss behind her ear – Then let’s make it quick, yes?

Ten minutes later, maybe less, Mal pants above her with one arm thrown over her eyes and the other limp, her hand still tangled in Regina’s hair. She disentangles herself out of the dead weight of Mal’s legs and moves up her body, kissing her way to the top of her head as she sits against the headboard, her hips by Mal’s head. – You are not human, Regina. I know not what you are quite yet but know I am on your trail.

- Is that so, dragon?

She drops her arm by her side to look up to a laughing Regina, who passes her fingers through Mal’s hair slowly, where it is sprawled all around her, surely tangling up into an otherworldly mess – I will retaliate, and your torment will be so slow, so excruciating, you will beg. – she uses her hand to trail Regina’s side down to the lacy undergarments she hadn’t removed yet. She can tell, by the general flushed state of Regina’s skin, by her hooded eyes and by the sheer smell that Regina is already halfway there, so she decides to return the favor quickly before her foretold torture. In one swift move, she is between and under Regina’s legs, pulls her forward as she inhales deeply with a grin, Regina yelps above her and Mal laughs as she drags her down into the bed again and destroys the lingerie. Regina’s protest is cut out with a heavenly moan as Mal dives into her.
They never bothered with the curtains the night before so the first sun rays filter through the window and draw Mal’s attention as they dance over the bedding, she doesn’t dare move and disturb Regina’s burrowing into the duvet, that is until she shifts oh her own volition and the sun falls over the strands of her hair draped on the pillow they share. She moves to take a strand but before she knows it her hand is on the back of Regina’s neck and her mouth to the side of it, she doubts she’s ever managed to restrain herself even ten minutes when she wakes next to Regina.

-No - Regina groans and shrinks further into the bed – wait… for the alarm.

Mal chuckles and pulls her closer with the arm she has still thrown above her – What nonsense? – she resumes her kissing and when she reaches an exposed ear she bites into the lobe – The sun is up

- Don’t care – Regina pulls roughly on the sheet and covers the side of her head that Mal had access too, but in doing so she makes her feet an easy target and after Mal lays a soft kiss on her ankle, there’s no going back to sleep so she throws the duvet off herself and glares at the woman crawling up over her

Mal smiles brightly – I apologize, you just look so delicious in the morning.

- Depriving people of sleep is a known torture method.

- You’re dealing with the Mistress of all Evil, – She removes the remaining sheets off Regina and presses kisses to the skin as she reveals it – and as all evil, you should be fond of a little torture.

Regina laughs, she supposes since they’re awake already, starting the day on a good note will make her forget the good half hour still left on her alarm clock, she moves her legs to intertwine with Mal’s and the woman moans against the side of her breast, but before they can continue there’s a knock on the door

- Um… guys…. whatever it’s about to happen in here, I can hear it – Lily clears her throat at the other side of the door and Maleficent laughs and lets her weight fall on a mortified Regina who lets out a shriek and covers them both up, lest a magic-wielding dragon be able to see through doors too, Lily shuffles about to leave – Okay, thanks… Moms.

- She can manage Moms?

Lily walks down the hall and Mal grins up to Regina with her chin resting on her chest and her arms sprawled up around them – My heart is full to the brim right now – she stands by the foot of the bed and lifts one of Regina’s legs to lay a kiss on her calf before sauntering off towards the bathroom – Up! Let’s go cook some breakfast!

Emma sits next to Regina on the porch swing where they overlook Henry dropped on his back on a blanket with a comic book and further away Mal sitting cross-legged in front of a similarly sat Lily, going through some breathing exercises which they need to lay the ground on their first lesson on how to be a real life, fire-breathing, spikes-on-tail, flying dragon. Emma initially thought it would be way more exciting to watch but this far she’s only been sitting next to Regina in shared silence with a pair of shades on her face shielding her from the morning sun. She turns to look at Regina who watches Mal and Lily with a peaceful expression, glancing to see if Henry’s not being attacked by ants every few minutes. She looks like her usual self except, much more relaxed in her seat,
with her own magazine by her side untouched and a glass of the juice left over from breakfast. Emma decides perhaps she needs some annoying

- Hey so, how did last night go? You give it to her good? – she wiggles her eyebrows and doesn’t count on the shades being so large Regina can’t even see it – your wife over there seems pretty smiley this morning on some sweats you stole magically from my closet, don’t think I didn’t realize.

- We did have sex last night, if you must know. – Emma’s mouth opens up comically and she turns to her at whiplash speed, Regina’s eyes bore into hers even through the shades somehow – But you are rambling Miss Swan, could it be that you remember what I told you before we left last night?

Emma wracks her brain but it refuses to cooperate, screaming in agony as It is – I have no idea what you’re trying to use to change the topic so… Ok - Emma’s mouth opens and closes for a moment before she can come up with something to go on, they’d never discussed anything this personal without at least someone having a breakdown, she sits up – Good. Good. Can tell you were great champ, she looks real relaxed.

Regina smirks in her direction and turns back to continue to stare at Maleficent with that expression – Well, she has been celibate for as long as you’ve been alive, anything would do, I’m sure.

Maleficent huffs on her spot, eyes still closed - Dearest stop trying to force praise out of me, we won’t ever concentrate if we hear our names fall from your lips.

Lily drops her forcefully straight stance and groans – and I don’t wanna hear it, please.

Henry removes his head from under his comic as Regina laughs and Emma frowns confused and yells at him – Super hearing, write that down in your dragon info sheet kid.

He shrugs and goes back to his thing and Regina sobered up and takes the glasses out of Emma’s head – I told you that if you were here by breakfast, you’d have to talk to me.

Emma groans – I was promised some dragon transformation action, I couldn’t leave.

- Emma, you have been drunk two days in a row now. – She stands and motions for Emma to follow her inside the house, leaves not even checking that she does and waits for her in the living room. She only goes on when Emma drops herself by her side – What is it?

- A bunch of shit?

- Start by the top.

- No booze, right? – she lets out one dry chuckle and when Regina only gazes at her with her sad, brown eyes Emma folds – ok, do you think I’ve changed a lot? Since we met

Regina seems to mull it over – Perhaps, but we all have, thank god. You’ve adjusted to us and our dynamics, yes.

- That’s polite… I used to like myself, I was badass.

Regina frowns – You’ve taken down several *mythical* monsters, don’t you feel bad-ass now?

Her enunciation of the word makes Emma smile but deep as she is in thought she doesn’t have the mind to mock Regina for it – when we’re not fighting some fucked up shit, I don’t like myself anymore. Don’t recognize who I see in the mirror. At first it was, y’know, like you said, adjusting
to my parents and Henry, and you, like, to having people to care about but now... fuck, I was dating Hook. Four years ago, I was kicking at least one Hook in the groin every week, now it’s like I can’t say no. Christ, I let Mary Margaret buy me clothes even.

Regina hums – I thought that was my fault, I tried to give you a sense of style when Pan’s curse hit and I was afraid it had backfired into these monstrosities of shirts you’re wearing now – Emma’s smile was small again and Regina sighed – Are you afraid Snow and Charming will reject you if you don’t adjust? That Henry will?

- Kinda, yeah.

- And I assume you have not talked to them, because Snow can’t be talked to most of the time. – Emma shakes her head – Henry not loving you is far-fetched, we agree? – Emma nods – and David does as Snow says most of the time, he’s a simple man, so who are you trying to please, Snow? The only thing I can say for Snow right now is that she loves you, Henry, David... even me perhaps, after everything. If we let her she will plow right through us with her good intentions and ideas of the perfect future, she will find you a husband, children, pastel dresses, bird pets and she will bake you a pie every Sunday but only because she assumes that’s what we all want; but Emma she will never reject you for making your own decisions. Your sole mission in life isn’t making us happy

- Thanks Regina. - She nods and moves to stand – You’re very good to me, I’m glad we’re besties. I’ll get out of your house now, go deal with my parents and their vandalized car.

- I hope you know you’re always welcome. And I will repay the sweatpants as soon as I can... and the car, perhaps.

Emma nods at her - Am I getting some Gucci sweatpants?

- Gucci makes sweatpants?

- Are you getting some sweatpants now that you know Gucci makes them? – She gives Regina a lopsided smile and the woman glares at her.

- I thought you were leaving.

Outside Henry approaches Maleficent gingerly as Lily sits still as a rock before her, he thinks he sees them breathe but he’s not sure and since both his mothers have disappeared inside the house to talk about god knows what, he doesn’t want to walk by to go retrieve another comic. When he’s sufficiently close Mal suddenly reaches out and clamps a hand over his exposed leg, he shrieks and she starts laughing as she releases him and he plops down back into the grass.

- She’s deep into a meditative state, she won’t wake if you make some noise. – She smiles down at him softly and he doesn’t really know what to do with it.

It’s not that he’s scared for his life but he’s not completely at ease by himself around the woman yet, she’s only been around for a couple of weeks and they’d never spoken a lot. He shrugs and asks her why she isn’t meditating as well, as she explains the basics of a dragon’s breathing and the fire they carry within them he slides closer, surely staining his shorts with something his mother won’t like. After a few minutes of easy banter around the topic Maleficent changes her position to face him fully, her soft smile still in place

- I see a lot of your mother in you – he only stares at her with wide eyes so she continues – I would
loathe to impose myself on your life and what you have built here with Regina and Princess Emma, but with the same breath I would loathe to be denied of loving Regina like I know I am able to.

- Um, yeah, ok. – He frowns and scrunches up his nose, Maleficent smiles bigger – So, are you like asking me for permission to date my mom? I thought you two already lived here.

- Oh no young Henry, Regina would never do such a thing without consulting with you first, I’m sure. – He shrugs at her – and if you can find it in your heart to allow me to stay a long while, I would like to marry your mother.

- Now?! – He knew where it was going, magical true love baby and all, but his eyes still bulge out at the suggestion, he had avoided speaking to Hook for this very reason and now when he relaxes for a second another one blindsides him

- No, not yet. Regina’s reticent to marriage for many a reason and we have not discussed this at length but when it is time, I want to know you are agreeable to it as well.

- Ask me when you’re going to ask her?

- I shall. – She stands and hold her hand out to help him out and he points at Lily – Oh do not fret, she’s finding her inner calm, she will be there a few more hours. He follows her inside a few steps behind with his comic and blanket in hand, the last time he had gotten an almost sibling and an almost third parent hadn’t been too long ago and his mom had suffered a lot for it, but on the other hand Mal seems softer than Robin Hood had, she smiles at him more gently and she treats mom like she had been there when he was growing up and mom was all mushy and stuff, not like Robin who was always calling her strong and brave. They enter the kitchen to find Regina chopping something up for lunch and she smiles at them before she sees Henry’s short and tsk. Mal laughs as Regina bends down to inspect the smudge and before she can chastise him he gives Mal a thumbs-up she doesn’t quite understand

- Mom, Maleficent can come live with us.

- Henry, you’re sure? - She looks up at him with a big smile and Maleficent nods softly at him above them, he nods happily down at Regina and she straightens up and hugs him, she pulls back adjusting his hair – I appreciate that. You’re still washing these by hand.

He groans and trails away from her, before he can leave the kitchen though he sees Mal come closer to hug his mother and snatch a cube of raw meat from the counter as she presses a kiss to her hair. He dashes upstairs to write it all down in his dragon facts notebook.
Maleficent comes out of the wonderfully hot shower she enjoys daily and finds Regina still wrapped in a towel robe seething on the bed. She glares at her as soon as she comes into view and Maleficent stops dead in her tracks. – Darling, does my singing upset you? I was in there for a while and here you sit, beautifully petrified

- There’s no clean underwear in my closet. You’ve been taking my underwear this whole time.

It is no question and Mal smiles at Regina’s temperament – Well, yes.

If humans could breathe fire a steady stream would come out of Regina’s nostrils, Mal is sure. She stands as she huffs and a deep purple cloud envelops her and leaves her wrapped in a knee-length red dress, hair, make up, accessories and all – Get dressed, we’re going shopping.

- We will go to a shop. – Mal nods to herself, happy to have deciphered the word by herself with nothing but context clues, she frowns when Regina walks by her– If there’s no clean underwear what are you wearing under the dress?

- Nothing. And you will live with the knowledge and do nothing about it.

She reaches out for her but her hand is slapped away. Fire does leave her nostrils with the harsh breath she lets out and Regina cackles on her way out of the room. Wouldn't it have been easier to clean some underwear with the same purple mist for dramatic effect?

She finds both Henry and Lily in the kitchen already halfway through a new box of cereal, Regina had wondered if anyone could eat more than the Charmings, some nights it was hard to tell whose plate was refilled the most: David’s, Emma’s or Henry’s, The Savior’s magic was spotty at best but she had perfected the art of refilling her plate and her drink without lifting a finger so on any given moment she could be on the third or fourth serving; It seemed the answer to Regina’s question was dragons, dragons could eat a Charming under the table. On Maleficent’s credit card the one sole purchase had been two whole pigs from the butcher’s shop that she seemed to have shared with Lily the one night she took her to practice her shifting. No piece of the pigs had survived.

Regina gets to work in actual breakfast after she greets them and when they both finish their plates and place them in the sink, Lily more gingerly than Henry she stops them before they leave – We’re going shopping out of town, one hour.

Henry dashes out of the room, still in his pajamas. Lily sticks around, putting the box in its spot and doing the dishes – You don’t have to buy me anything. I’m good.

- Your one bulky jacket is tattered at the very least, I’ve seen several holes on it. Winter is coming,
do not make any of the obvious game of thrones jokes.

- It’s outside holes, it’s good on the inside - Lily shrugs – Plus, I’ve never gotten too cold... must be the dragon magic huh?

Regina turns away from the stove to smile gently at Lily – Your mother desperately needs clothes, Henry’s growing out of his and I simply love shopping. So, come with us, help us pick a few things, we’ll catch lunch. You don’t buy anything if you don’t want to.

- uh, yeah, sure.

Regina drives straight through Boston, on her way to the nice high-end malls, Henry and his endless chatter entertain Maleficent as he explains anything she points at as Lily frowns as the streets get cleaner and the density of big, plush trees grow. They leave the car and enter the place, all polished floors and cream colors decking the walls, for once her eyes are as wide as Maleficent’s as they walk the place. Henry separates from the room to breeze into a Levi’s store with jeans lined up floor to oddly high ceiling. Regina steers the tree of them into a store and they get shuffled into a comfortable sofa and offered refreshments and strange looking appetizers as one woman takes Mal with her.

- Hey Regina? – Regina hums over her champagne flute – How expensive is this store?

Regina chuckles as Mal throws her a delighted look over the other woman’s head as she’s shown a three-piece suit – Lily I will let you in in a secret of mine, Henry’s much too young to have asked any questions and I simply don’t see why I must upset the general populace with it. – Lily turns to her, paying mind to her tattered-up booths and whether they might or not smudge the white carpet under them, Regina smirks – I am terribly rich.

- Yeah, I think the general populace can tell.

- No dear, terribly. When I cast the curse, a few things I couldn’t part with: my books, your mother’s books, a few other magical knick knacks, some dresses, a few pieces of jewelry, and the whole value of my kingdom’s coffers. The gold turned into money, it’s in my bank account, a few millions. – Lily coughs over the orange juice they had offered her, no beer in the designer store apparently. Regina waves over the girl that wants to come close to help – And in the terrible wealth scale that’s America, us mayors have a quite generous salary as well. For thirty years this check has been coming in. Now, in Storybrooke we spend the usual: we pay for our gas, our food our clothing, our utilities… The house is the property of Storybrooke, that I’ve been saving on, but still, it is a very cheap town to live in and with most of a good salary untouched for three decades, trust me, it piles up on the savings account.

Lily sits there absorbing the information as Maleficent comes out clad in a dress to show them, Regina nods her approval and the girl ushers her deeper into the store again. Another one comes by to refill their glasses and smiles at Lily oddly before moving to Regina with her friendly smile – Regina! You never told me you had a sister!

- Oh, she’s just not an avid shopper. I convinced her to come with us today under the condition that she buys nothing – they shared an amused look and Lily feels herself redden, are they shop-shaming her? Regina continues chatting with the girl – A dear friend of us told me you sell sweatpants – The girl nods – I think we would all love a pair, right Lily?

She shrugs mutely.
After a few hours of similar interactions in different stores they’re all carrying several bags, more than Lily’s ever carried in her life, she walks by them still haven’t accepted anything beyond the now she realizes Gucci sweatpants and a pair of leather boots that already look like they will be replacing the one she’s wearing, forever. Both her and Henry stray away after one minute of standing by Regina and Maleficent picking silky, lacy, underwear together and she passes by a motorcycle store. She must be looking at the one on display for a few minutes because Regina sneaks up to her without a sound and nudges her, or it might be the bags prodding her

- Do you want it?

Lily turns to her at whiplash speed and sees as Mal and Henry drink smoothies in a bench outside the store chatting at full speed again, she focuses on Regina again and swallows – I’m good. Are we moving?

Regina sighs – Lily don’t deny yourself. I have no problem with spending money on you. Are you familiar with the Disney movie, The princess diaries? – Lily nods uneasily – That’s you now. Surprise! You’re a princess, one that likes leather and motorcycles, but a princess nonetheless.

- That’s fucked up

- Yes, well. It’s the truth. Do you want it?

She turns to look at it, ever since she was a kid, she’d always liked bikes. And that right there was a wet dream of a bike, matte black and looking like it came out of an action movie, she didn’t know any of the details but she knew she wanted it, like a child. She was half-way into the nod when Regina called the dude in charge and handed him a card.

- We’re buying this motorcycle, figure out the specifics with her. And can I have the jacket on the display as well - Lily saw another man dismount the jacket of a mannequin as if compelled by Regina’s voice from afar, she raises an eyebrow but Regina chuckled – It’s for Emma. I can’t buy either of you better childhoods, but I can arm you with a sense of style one jacket at a time.

Having accepted the big gift, Lily’s much more comfortable accepting a professional haircut, a myriad of jackets and jeans and boots and a new phone to replace her fucked-up-screen old buddy, she turns it on as Henry toys with a new Nintendo and hopes she can tamp down the urge to throw it into a wall the next time it surfaces. They move to leave and load up all their bags when the man from the store jogs his way up to them

- Hey, that card actually came through in one payment. You can take it right now. Regina scoffs at him – You doubted it would?

His eyes grow wide – Um no, Mrs. Mills, ma’am, Miss? Umm.

Lily interrupts his panic attack – I can take the bike? Like, drive it out of here?

- If you have a working license.

Henry bounces up and down by Regina – Can I ride with her? Mom! Mom? Can I ride back with Lily?

Regina glances at Lily and Maleficent gazes with awe as they roll the bike up to them – Is it a small horse machine?
The men turn to look at her oddly but they retire when Lily takes the keys, their job done. Lily nods at Regina and she nods at Henry who flies out to Lily’s side to clasp on a helmet. Regina closes Maleficent’s door and checks both their helmets – You better not die on this thing, Lilith.

- Yes Ma’am – She salutes Regina and Henry copies her and on a blink, she speeds up on the dreadful thing and draws an arc around the parking lot before tearing out into the streets of Boston.

Emma sits outside Granny’s playing a game of UNO with Ruby on her break when a motorcycle that certainly looks, feels, and sounds like it was going past the speed limit pulls up in front of them, it’s new in town, that’s not good. A young man gets down from it and she’s about to scold them, she turns to look at Ruby who hasn’t tensed up like Emma has, until he removes his helmet and Henry’s face emerges exhilarated and with his recently cut hair messed up. He grins at her and throws in a Hey Ma, Lily’s helmet goes down next and she passes a hand through her hair to pat it down into the work of art Regina’s hair stylist had made a few hours ago. Emma gapes at her

- Regina did not just buy you a motorcycle.

Henry sees his mother’s car approach and moves to it, to get his new stuff out of the trunk probably, and Lily smirks at Emma – After all these years we confirmed what we knew all along. My parents are way cooler than yours.

- Man, what the fuck? – She goes to the sidewalk to take a look at the bike and Lily laughs as she crouches to take in all the details – And she let Henry get on?

Ruby whistles on her seat – Well I do enjoy a woman with a bike.

Emma groans and turns to look at her friend – There’s no women with bikes anywhere you’ve ever lived.

- Imagine how excited I am.

Lily laughs but before she can say anything Regina and Maleficent catch up to them, the former handing Emma a bag. She grins up at her and tears into it – Cool. Sweatpants! – She takes them out and blanches – Gucci sweatpants? And a jacket! I can’t take this.

- You will take it.

She darts her eyes between all of them and hugs the bag to her, carefully – Thanks, Regina. I can’t even… Does this mean you bought sweatpants for yourself too?

Ruby interrupts her – What do I get?

Regina tilts her head – Our lunch order?

- Wow, you’ll regret this when I’m your daughter in law.

None of them answer to that, Emma groans again, Lily dismounts the bike, Henry looks up from his Nintendo, Regina raises an eyebrow and finally, it is Mal who breaks the silence – What? What does that mean? I don’t like it.

Ruby jumps out to approach them and loops an arm around her shoulders, it’s been a while since she’s had to strain to accomplish that – I’m gonna win you over so quick. I got a kitchen full of raw meat, I know your kind.
I’m very very bad at budgeting?

Emma jumps in place and spreads her arms with a grin – Ta-daaa – while Regina looks at the small area from which both the kitchen and the bathroom can be seen.

She lifts an eyebrow – Miss Swan, this is the third apartment and I am still waiting for the serious option. Or for you to show me a house.

- Look Regina, I’m not you so a house is a no go, no one can sustain all that space ok? And these have all been serious options.

Henry comes out of the room he’s sure would be his and purses his lips – It’s like, there’s three options, one and two are so bad, the third one that was only kinda okay looks great, and Mom would go ‘If you must’ and you’d cheer. There would be no cheering for this place Ma, you know that.

Emma sighs and drops to the floor with her back against the wall – I really don’t? I used to live in dumps all the time to be honest-

- Your apartment in Boston was cute Ma – he sits next to her and they both look up to Regina to hear her words of encouragement but none come and Emma sighs again

- It really wasn’t, you were just 10. I had one minimalist table with one chair, and you came in took some sh… stuff from my fridge and didn’t look around enough to notice.

- I will give you a raise – the both look up to Regina with matching lopsided grins and she rolls her eyes as she moves to the sole window to be met with the wall on the other side of the dingy alley the place overlooks – How much more a month for the apartment you visited that you wholeheartedly liked but then pouted at as you left because it sounded too expensive?

- I’m very very bad at budgeting? So, I haven’t really like counted expenses that well because food and gas and… stuff, Mary Margaret buys most of what we have at the loft and I ride around in the cruiser and the bills David pays so-

- My god. – She snaps a finger solely for the dramatic effect and both Emma and Henry land on the couch next to Lily, whose budding magic flares up and zaps the blonde in the arm and throws her a few inches closer to Henry

- Hey what the hell!

- You just showed up! Out of fuuuu--- freaking nowhere, hey Regina.

Maleficent puts her book down calmly to watch all of them, she catches Regina’s hard expression and grins – Children, what did you do?

They all start protesting one over the other as Regina marches out of the room and returns promptly with a vial she shoves into Maleficent’s hands. They all fall silent. – This is what will happen. I have managed to find a potion that will allow me to give Maleficent a cursed identity’s memories without the whole memory loss hassle to help her adjust, and for her very real fake job I have chosen an accountant. You three will sit here and listen to a very boring lesson in basic finances from her. Henry, you might think this is cruel and unjust punishment since you have done nothing but I have seen you eat through your very healthy allowance weekly, no more. Lily, you too might believe you have done nothing but just yesterday you were sent to buy groceries and came back
with half the list and had to pitch in your own money somehow? And last but definitely not least, if anything the worst offender, Miss Swan, who cannot even quantify the gas she puts in her tiny yellow monstrosity of a car in order to rent a place my son will be living in.

- Wow, I was attacked way more. This is bias. Thank you, word of the day app.

- You will all sit, you will all listen, you will all make a budget of your income vs your expenses, and only then you’ll be allowed to order whatever pizza you’d like for dinner. If not, we’re having soup.

They groan in unison and Emma speaks again – This is ridiculous, I am an adult, I can eat whatever I want for dinner. – she reaches into her multiple pockets and comes out with $5.48, to which Lily adds $7.90 and Henry scratches his head. Emma speaks again – Fine.

Maleficent drinks the content of the vial without hesitation and Regina looks expectantly, after a few seconds she smirks her way – Perhaps, I can make them build an Excel spreadsheet. – Regina laughs and Mal takes her hand to pull her in to sit on her lap from a quick kiss on the cheek – Thank you darling, I will enjoy counting coins, even invisible as they are. – They spend a moment content with looking at each other, until they’re interrupted by Emma’s groan. Regina stands chuckling and leaves the room.

Lily frowns – It’s like Satan married Darth Vader. Regina’s Darth Vader…- She lowers her voice - Lily, I am your father

Henry drops back into the couch – You don’t even have to reach, it’s like the Evil Queen married Maleficent.

- You know what dude? you’re right.
What if I never do?

With her new memories and job Maleficent was much less amusing to sit around but it didn’t mean Emma wouldn’t come by at least twice a week and spend more than it was normal just hanging around and watching them interact.

One time, Regina enters the room where they sit watching a movie they wouldn’t have found legally without Regina’s HBO subscription and Maleficent, who is there mostly to share Lily’s space, gets distracted easily when Regina sits by her in the couch – Regina, you look simply ravishing in that dress. Could we perhaps find me a job directly in town hall so I don’t have to miss a minute of this magnificent show you put on display daily?

Emma moves to whisper Lily’s way – That is way too much right? – Lily shrugs – I mean good, they’re happy, but what the fuck?

- I can hear you.

- Right, super hearing.

Regina hums – We can both hear you, your whispering technique is quite bad.

On another occasion, Henry scores a goal easily on her and when he stops celebrating he sees her looking at Regina where she sits on the porch swing, with Mal’s hair in her lap as she braids it into an intricate pattern. Mal sits on the floor, barefoot with a novel and a steaming cup of tea.

- What’s up with that? Hair-braiding?

He shrugs – Do you want your hair braided?

- Should I? Is that normal?

He takes the ball – You’re asking me? – and goes back to his end of the yard and Emma stands for another moment watch as Regina bends down and Maleficent tilts her head up for her to lay a kiss on her forehead

She uses her key to walk in one day and almost takes down a bouquet of roses that hadn’t been there before, Mal chuckles at her clumsiness as she always does, Emma had always been convinced there wasn’t a creature more graceful than Regina on the face of their planet but Maleficent was just as composed but taller, extra points for tallness. Emma drops herself on the couch but far away from her and she smiles as Mal puts down her book anticipating her chatter

- So, your birthday? Old anniversary? Thanks for the sex? Or even better someone fucked up real bad?

- None of the above. It simply seems Regina was thinking of me when she walked by the flower shop. – Emma raises her eyebrow at that and Mal chuckles and puts her book on the table, closed completely – I’ve grown fond of you, and by the way you behave around me I can see we’re much closer than we would be if It were up to me, so let me blunt. You must terrible at romance.
- Huh?

- Every time you’re around us you react as if everything is strange or an exaggeration or something only someone from the Enchanted Forest could think of. Have you ever been treated well?

Emma’s mouth opens and closes in rapid succession – I… guess not?

- Every morning I wake up and I observe how the sun creeps by me and reaches Regina, in that moment, when she stirs next to me my heart beats faster and all I can seem to do is reach up to touch her, my day does not start until she tells me to please let her sleep longer. Would you not buy flowers for someone who makes you feel that, everyday? – Emma shrugs – If you don’t know then you must have not felt that way quite yet.

- What if I never do?

- Then you can continue teasing Regina about her soft, mellow side. There’s infinite joy in that as well.
I want her to feel loved.

Emma blinks and she’s suddenly in Lily’s room, not that it looks like anyone’s room yet but she has a feeling it’s Lily’s because the décor seems like Regina’s, Henry’s room is not this one and whatever the master bedroom looks like, there must be at least one gold-coated throne-like chair in there. She knocks on one of the doors and the faucet stops running and Lily comes out with her face soaking and dripping down her neck all the way to her shirt.


Lily frowns – How did you get here?

- You didn’t bring me here?

She sighs – Sorry, didn’t mean to. – She flings herself on her bed and Emma has to tamp down the urge to do that too, only for the bouncing – They’re fighting and I just thought maybe if you were here I wouldn’t pack up my shit and leave, so I guess that dragged you here.

- They’re fighting? – She rushes to crack another door open and surely, angry hissing can be heard coming from the studio next door – Didn’t know Romeo & Juliet there ever fought... – When Lily doesn’t laugh at her brilliant joke Emma sits by her on the bed – Hey but involuntary kidnapping! Bet Regina’ll be proud of you when you tell them... it took me forever to even move myself, let alone other people.

- Yeah, I don’t think she’ll care. That’s what they’re fighting about, apparently she should’ve started teaching me weeks ago and I got angry and some lights flickered and Maleficent asked how my lessons were and I just went ‘What magic lessons?’ like a fucking idiot, and now they’ve been at each other for half an hour.

- You gotta admit, shit had been going wayyyy too good. – Lily turns to glare at her and Emma makes a face at her and motions for her to shuffle further into the bed so she can lie down beside her – Plus, parents fighting over extracurriculars for their kids is a milestone.

- Does she fight you over Henry’s shit?

- Are you kidding me? She tried to kill me! – She laughs

- Does she fight you now?

Emma sighs and she brings her arm up to cover her eyes – I think I’m more of a cool aunt than a mother for him to be honest... I want him to sign up for a sport I guess but it’s up to him more than anything... it’s like he stays with me a few days when he wants to and he kinda has to do what I say but outside of the cursed year in NYC I’ve never even done his laundry, or actually dealt with him while he’s sick... all the hard mom stuff? He asks Regina.

Lily turns to look at Emma then – you okay?

- Meh – she shrugs – It’s way more than I could even ask for. And I hate laundry.

On the next room Maleficent paces up and down breathing harshly – It as if you merely accepted her taking up space in your life and that’s the last concession you made, Regina!

- You’re getting awfully worked up about these magic lessons Mal, what’s the rush? She’s barely
turning into a dragon and that’s a skill she should’ve had since early childhood, her reciting spells can wait-

- It’s not just that, Regina. – She stops her pacing in front of her and faces her – You don’t spend any time with her, just the two of you, ever. It’s always you and Henry, you and me, you and Emma Swan! Gods! You are a fool if you believe she hasn’t noticed that if I have! You don’t touch her? For some reason, you smother both Henry and I with affection to the point he’s relieved when you only kiss him once and again, Emma Swan gets hugged a few times a week, but when it is Lily you nod at her, sometimes you smile at her as you nod, I’ll concede that point.

Regina hadn’t thought too hard about either of those points, truth is she was being overly cautious - Perhaps she doesn’t like physical affection?

- I believe there is not one person alive who does not long for their mother to hug them Regina! And you of all people should know that – She watches as Regina shrinks on herself and sighs, softening her voice - Don’t be daft dear, it doesn’t become you.

- I really am doing my best – she hugs herself with one arm as she reaches for Mal – I am bonding with her I am just doing so slowly. I took me years to be able to hug Emma Swan, I can assure you of that, Lily’s been much more welcome than anyone else in my life, I even tried to send Henry back once. – Regina tries for a smile as she holds up her hand

When Regina’s hand contacts her arm Mal retreats and sits down on a chaise nearby – I don’t want her to feel welcome, I want her to feel loved. Like she would have been, had I raised her. – She reclines against the seat in a sloppy way Regina hasn’t seen in her since perhaps their first meeting, when she had no regard for decorum and would only make the bare minimum effort with each move –I must say I hate how much love you have for Snow White’s offspring these days, for Snow White herself if the way he gazes longingly at you when you ignore her in public. Perhaps I should visit the cricket.

Regina takes a deep breath – It wouldn’t do you any harm, he has shown me how in the midst of an argument sometimes we say things we do not feel just because we know it will hurt the other side. I know you’re not jealous I have found family in Henry, and his blood relatives. And I hear what you’re saying, about Lily feeling loved. I will work on it.

- And I will leave before my urge to throttle you overpowers me. – She stands promptly and leaves Regina sitting alone, she hears the front door slamming faintly and pours herself a glass of whiskey, neat, double.

Hours later Lily walks straight through the living room at an abnormal speed to avoid Regina but when she walks back with a snack in her hand, facing Regina’s way, she motions for her to join her on the couch and Lily has no choice but to oblige. She pours her a glass of an amber liquor and Lily looks at it and at the chips on her hand, she knows she’d had worse combinations in her life but never in front of Regina, or Maleficent for that matter, these are people that do better than box wine with lunchables for dinner. They drink in silence for a moment but Lily has never been good at sitting in silence unless she’s the one brooding

- So, where’s Mal?

- Probably scaring the civilians by flying over the town like she’s in a NASCAR circuit. – Lily smiles as she takes a sip of her glass and Regina mimics her – Do you know how to ride a horse?
- No?

- Would you like to go learn?

Lily puts down her glass – What? Now?

Regina nods and Lily shrugs as she tends to do – Well then, find a pair of boots you don’t mind getting muck on. – Lily stands and hesitates for a moment and Regina stands with her – Emma can leave of her own volition or she can stay. I felt her magic when she appeared

- I kinda… did that? Somehow?

Regina raises an eyebrow – Well, that’s an impressive fluke.

They appear inside the stables and the minute she regains her cool and aloof composure every single horse rears up and starts whining and bucking against their stalls, she cringes at their unrest and Regina smiles as she takes her by the arm and drags her down the aisle with her

- You are a predator, and they know it. – They enter one of the stalls and the horse huffs almost recognizably, obviously torn between Regina and the predator – So what we need to do first is get at least one of them to trust you. This is Xavier, after my grandfather.

Lily sticks to the door – uh, sure, what the fuck, hi Xavier.

- Xavier this is Lily, my daughter. – She strokes the horse’s fur and it seems to relax, unlike the other ones still trembling for their lives confined to their stalls. Regina motions for her to join her and Lily does, reluctantly. – How much of my disagreement with your mother did you hear before Emma Swan came to save you with her endless chatter?

Lily adverts her eyes to focus on the horse’s coat – Look, you don’t gotta teach me magic if you don’t want to and we don’t have to be best friends or anything. I’m good.

- You are not good, you are a nuclear bomb. There are no recorded cases of dragons breeding with magic practitioners, for all we know you might be the first sorceress with the natural ability to shift into a dragon, and you come from Cora Mills. First, we thought mother was the most powerful sorceress ever seen, then I came along and I was so good Gold chose me to cast his curse, and just a few months ago we found Zelena, leaps and bounds over me when it comes to raw power if not discipline. So, you must be the equivalent of a nuclear bomb, except you go off more like a grenade, shouldn’t ever be jostled with the safety off. - Both Lily and the horse were paying attention and Regina continued - Right now the safety is on, and I think you need to practice a few more of Mal’s breathing exercises before we yank it off you and release you into a town full of well-meaning idiots.

- Why didn’t you tell her that?

- She has a point. – She takes Lily’s hand over Xavier and squeezes – You are more than a roommate I need to adjust to, or a stray to feed and clothe when it passes by the house, I do love you, I hope you know that and you can find it in yourself to love me back. We can start with this.

She bends down and comes back up to hand her a leather seat and Lily turns it over in her hands trying to make sense of it – Wow, so I’m getting on the horse, right now, tonight, in this moment?

- No time like the present. – She helps Lily saddle Xavier and when they’re done she pats her back
softly – So Lily, do you like hugs?

- Uhhhh.
I’ll take a box!

Lily mentioned she had held a job in a reasonably well rated restaurant back in the real-er world and so, they had begun to team up in the evenings to cook dinner, between that and the time they spent at the stables Regina seems to be well out of the danger zone of Mal’s wrath and if they’re being honest both Lily and Regina were feeling the change. They pass by the bakery in one of their grocery runs to pick up a dessert, it’s not every day that Regina passes up the home-made stuff but when she does she refuses to go pick up some pie slices from Granny’s like Lily suggested.

They enter the store and Regina peruses the options on the menu before she lifts up her head and sees Emma in a nook in the corner, nursing ice cream from Ingrid’s shop and dragging out eating a cookie with it. She clamps a hand over Lily’s arm and she narrowly avoids dropping her own cookie

- Ouch! Maybe you’re a dragon too.

- Why is Emma eating that cookie as if she has manners?

Lily looks up and smirks her mother’s way - She likes the baker – she motions subtly with her head to the man in question – She will deny this but she’s made me come here and eat really fucking slowly like three times, and he comes up to us and goes – her voice turns lower and her face shifts expression – Oh, Princess- I mean… Sheriff… I mean Emma… what a pleasure! If you don’t mind tasting our new pastry, I love your input! Yada Yada Yada. – she turns around again to grab another cookie from the nearby jar – And she eats that shit up! I’m talking eyelashes batting, hair twirling, and then she goes: oh… Luke, this is just so good! I’ll take a box! Someone’s getting fat if she keeps this up… and it’ll probably be Henry.

Regina smiles as Lily puts her hand above her heart and sighs apparently imitating Emma, she thinks how the Lily that first showed up in town would never do something so childish freely but there they are. Regina chances a look at the baker in question, Luke, as she kneads bread in his station and furtively looks at Emma eating her cookie still. His father was the royal baker for Leopold, and he’d always been around the kitchen learning for when he retired, very respectfully asking her if she liked what he helped his father make and sometimes he even joined her in picnics if the King dared let her out of his sight, after the struggle for power they chose to come with her. He was always stocky, with brown skin and a mess of curls in his head that this world’s products have at least shaped, he’s quite nice on the eyes; and a baker for Emma Swan, perhaps a match made in heaven. She follows Lily further inside the store as she snatches not one but two cakes off the display, one that’s surely just for herself. Regina tuts

- Oh come on!

- You might be a dragon and allowed to eat as many calories a day as you desire but I still stand by healthy choices in those meals. My magic burns out most of what I eat but you don’t see me over indulging.

- I don’t see you indulging at all! Don’t be such a mom about it!

Luke notices them then and scrambles to dust his hands in his apron to take their order – Your Majesty. Princess... I mean... Miss… Lily. – He bows his head solemnly.

Regina smiles at him and at Lily’s groaning, there were a few that were still loyal well beyond curse after curse, she appreciated them all. She gives him a nod – Mr. Baker
- Your last name is Baker? Dude…

Regina laughs – Dear, you’ll be surprised what The Smiths used to do back in The Enchanted Forest. - He lets out an easy chuckle and takes the two cakes from Lily as she smiles her victory and Regina sighs – I’m paying for two cakes, two? Cookies she snatched out of a jar and inhaled while he walked from the door to the counter and whatever Emma is having.

He smiles briefly in the blonde’s direction and then hands Lily the bag shaking his head – It’s on the house.

- How many times will we have this conversation? You will take my money, and don’t let Henry con you out of pastries either. – She pauses while he sheepishly takes the cash and puts it on the register – Or Lily for that matter. They will eat you out of a store. – She grabs a cookie from another jar and pulls Lily back from the macaroons – Make it three cookies and please, don’t ever sell her more than one cake without supervision.

Lily groans as she waves goodbye and Regina tells her to go home and she’ll catch her later. Luke smiles at them as he turns back to his bread and Regina goes straight for the nook Emma’s inhabiting. The blonde smiles at her as she receives her cookie.

- Cool! Thanks. What’s up?

- He will never ask you out. – Emma’s eyes open comically and her shoulders drop dejectedly

- I know, all my business is all over town all the time and we keep getting cursed and stuff… and I got the kid, plus all my girly clothing was ugly anyways I looked awful for months – she fidgets with the napkin and looks down – It’s ok, I just like to come sit around for a while.

Regina frowns – No, Emma – She’d never said the name so softly before and they both think it - He’ll never ask you out because he tries to operate under the old ways as much as possible and you’re royalty, he thinks he’s beneath you.

- But I’ve gotten him to not call me Princess and stuff.

- As a direct order, I’m sure.

Regina chuckles as Emma’s face goes through all her different stages of confusion to land on the one where she smiles lopsidedly – So you think that’s the issue?

- The only one

- So what do I do?

- You ask him out.

Her face crashes into despair again – Your wife told me I’m horrible at romance.

- My wife… I see. It doesn’t matter, I have a feeling you’ll succeed even with your usual clumsy approach.
Mal sits on the stool the nurse provided for her and smiles briefly as the woman does the same before leaving the room, Regina takes her hand and strokes the back of it reassuringly – It’s really a few pinches, nothing you’ll fuss over if you survived a sword through the chest.

- I don’t fear these vaccines – She pulls Regina closer until she stands between her legs, barely has to look up to continue talking to her – I might fear the nurse that has been glaring at me since we walked into this hospital. - she gives her a questioning look but Regina seems unaware

Regina laughs as she moves away for the nurse to settle by Mal’s side with the needles she needs to vaccinate her and to take some of her blood for testing, she doesn’t let go of the hand she’s been allowed to hold and she sees the woman smile softly at that. – Well, must be a very brave nurse if she’s openly glaring at a dragon.

They have not hidden their relationship or Lily’s parentage but still, The Evil Queen parading around town with her new, female lover seems to be news judging by the few bystanders that go out of their ways to catch a glimpse of them as they walk the halls to the desk where the paperwork is. Mal makes a joke about always wishing to be part of the official royal procession by Regina’s side and she lets go of her hand to fish for a pen in her purse but before she can find one Mal molds herself to the back of her body.

- Are we these people now? Must we start coordinating our steps? You will have to accommodate, I’m much shorter.

- Look at you, admitting you’re a small, little thing. That’s growth. – Mal chuckles behind her head and Regina can’t help to smile as she feels the sound by her ear and the woman behind the counter hands her the forms torn between smiling at them and daring to look in their direction. Mal traps her against the desk with her arms – But I’m just hoping proximity to the Evil Queen will force the woman to find another target for her attempted murder.

- Surely word has spread around, I can only kill if Snow allows me to.

Mal laughs behind her again and in their mirth, they miss the woman in question approaching them. She greets Regina, by name. And that’s when it dawns on her who Mal was talking about. Since the curse broke her rotation must have changed to include the upper wings of the hospital as well.

She gives her a smile – Amanda, how are you?

- I’m well. What about you? Henry? Is Everything okay? – she glances at Maleficent briefly, Regina thinks it can definitely be catalogued as a glare but then again, that is how she looks at almost everyone, including her.

-Everything’s perfect. I’m here getting Maleficent up to date in her vaccines, just in case – She motions to her with her head as she continues filling in the paperwork – And signing her up and our daughter in my insurance.

- Right, so they’re both staying around – The woman was well above playing dumb, Lily had been news a month before. – Is that legal? – Mal clearly wants to intervene but Regina taps her arm to be let out of the embrace and grins at Nurse Ratched.

- I suppose it isn’t but then again, what in this town is? – The woman huffs before her – Trust me
dear, if they’re ever admitted, I will pay the check.

- Yes, well.

They had first met when Henry was one and his fever had climbed high enough Regina skipped work to pass by the hospital and let the pediatrician in town appraise him. They had tests to run and Regina had breakfast to catch up on so she went to the cafeteria and had to line up after a mean nurse to buy something to eat. That night she walked out of the hospital with a healthy Henry and a dinner invitation.

Their relationship had lasted a bit over a year. It was strange, while in their proximity people could break their monotony to interact with Regina but still, the curse didn’t allow them to be sharp when it came to dates or details of what time of the year it was, distant memories, plans for the near future. So, in the end Regina had gotten tired of it and started seeing Graham under their more casual arrangement again. It had been the first major break in routine though, Henry and Amanda, in a way, came hand in hand that first year and after she cut it off she still had a taste for it. It was marvelous how people would comply with her wishes during the curse, all she had to do was ask nicely and she would fall right back, probably because her brain could never provide clear concise timelines to when they had broken up or perhaps even why, so over the years Regina would indulge once again for a few weeks and then they’d break up and she would loathe her for a less than a month to fall back into disinterest until Regina tried again.

After the curse broke just once they fallen in bed together, before Neverland, one night out of her own volition she’d knocked in her door and kissed her without any prompting. After, as the laid spent in bed Regina had reached for her hair and tried for a smile and she had huffed

- I hate you.

- Darling, it showed. – Regina winked as she motioned to her own arm short of bleeding with the scratches she’d made – But worry not, now I can fix it. – Her skin knitted together easily and the woman turned in bed to look at her, glaring, as always

- You know, I remember the whole 28 years of the curse, clearly. What were we?

- We were good. And then I couldn’t stand the way the curse fogged up your mind every time I tried to discuss plans for a weekend forward, or for Henry’s birthday party.

She turns to stare at the ceiling again – Well, that was your own fault, wasn’t it? And now, it turns out you’re a murderer and a tyrant.

- Never a tyrant.

- You kept coming back, and leaving me again, and again, and again. – Regina kept silent then, wasn’t big on apologies quite yet – And now what?

- Whatever do you mean?

- The curse is broken, what will be your excuse now?

Regina laughed – Do I need one? Won’t you walk away on your own after this? I am a murderer – She laughed again and stood from the bed to reach for her robe by the bed-side table

- I loved you… during the curse. And it hasn’t faded.

- Oh? – she sighed – Let’s never do this again then. You can see yourself out?
- Regina, fuck you.

- Yes, well. – She walked into her en-suite bathroom with a flourish of her hand.

That was the last time they’d talked to each other past the few times she’d gone to visit Zelena in the psych ward and she had been there, even Henry had been in the receiving end of her scorn since then, as an extension of Regina he wasn’t welcome either. She knows she should apologize to her and she trails after her down the hospital hall and pulls her into one utility closet nearby.

- Why did you approach us, just now?

- Everyone was talking about how cute you were, I wanted to see with my own eyes.

Regina nods softly - Amanda, I’m sorry. About the decade I kept stringing you along, and about that last time, I was callous.

- And you’re not now?

- I’ve gotten better. The brand new me who apologizes just hadn’t made her way to you.

She scoffs and Regina watches as her face falls - Congratulations. On getting better.

Regina doesn’t know if the nurse had finally gotten over her after the last time, she never bothered to check and unlike Sidney, she had nothing to gain outside vanity if she hadn’t. But now, she hopes she can do so. It was never going to be any more of what it was and Regina knows that now, having Mal, no one could’ve ever given her what Mal gives her.

She walks out of the small space and Mal peeks in – The good news is that it doesn’t sound like we will be forced to hold a melee over you, she clearly hates you. The bad news is apparently, I don’t have a blood type.

- You have to promise to be extra careful then, lest you prick your hand on a needle and have a hemorrhage we can’t control.

Mal chuckles as she holds out her hand for Regina to take, when she does she pulls her out of the closet and into a one-armed hug – Are you alright, my love?

- As long as you’re protected against the flu.
They’re the oldest of friends.

- Regina clearly you are biased. He does not have the vocal power for this, and I frankly believe you are only taking into account his sunny demeanor when passing judgement. – Mal takes a measured bite of her rare steak and Regina’s back straightens

- And you, my dear, are only favoring this girl of yours for her blonde ringlets, I am sure– She smirks at Mal’s outrage of being so blatantly called out – America will know what’s best.

- When has America known anything? You brought your peasants into a god-forsaken country and you know it. If my false memories are correct last year a group won.

Ruby snickers behind the bar – Holy shit, they’re discussing the X factor, very intensely. – Snow pouts on her stool as Ruby texts Emma and Lily about the new development in Regina and Mal’s shenanigans – She’ll come around

- She used to discuss the X factor with me.

- No way, Regina? Do you have footage of that? – She does have a few selfies of Regina and herself during various activities in which Regina appears slightly glaring at the camera besides her but not any footage, and not any of their most common conversations, so she shakes her head and sinks into her fries.

Before Regina can bite her head off for insulting her precious, patchwork of miss-matched voices forced to try and find barely one harmony per song Mal cuts her off pointing with her knife to the bar where Snow White was picking up her fries and contemplating each and every one of them before eating them – She’s sulking, because you choose to burden me instead of her with your pitiful opinions on the show.

- My opinions are just fine, it is you who does not know what it takes to be an artist in this land. - Mal laughs as she reaches for Regina’s hand on the table and she glares – And I forget there’s two of you in this diner, so no one has any privacy left I suppose.

Maleficent glances quickly at Ruby before she can make one of her comments and she makes a show of zipping up her mouth – You’ve told me of many threats to this town you’ve fought together, and she’s related to Henry and Emma… it stands to reason you’ve grown close, if you can forgive her you should.

- Will you?

- I already have – Regina raises an eyebrow at her and she smiles – I’ve made worse decisions than hers, and not even had the hypocrisy to find me a town-full of people to use as justification. If you were holding on to this anger on our behalf, you don’t have to.

Regina huffs – I don’t think Lily will be as understanding.

- It’s an awful thing, what they did to her and because of it she probably won’t, but you and I both know that misery doesn’t lessen with company. You love Snow White, we love you and we’ll tolerate you loving Snow White. Do not ever attempt to force me into dinner with her and her Shepard, though.
Regina follows Snow, at a distance, not enough for her to not notice she’s being followed though so when she crosses the threshold into her building and Regina tries to do so she finds herself pinned against a wall and with a pen held to her throat. She grimaces – Lovely weapon.

She releases her with a huff – Regina, I’m so sorry! It’s all I had in my purse.

She follows her up silently and sits on the coach as she goes to retrieve coffee from the kitchen, David nods at her after a second of surprise, his hair recovered, and he takes his lunch from the takeout bag and releases Neal on the ground so he can crawl happily up to her. Snow smiles at her when she finds her with the toddler pulling happily at her hair, he must miss it.

- Regina, I am so sorry, that I’m always the source of your suffering.
- Don’t be ridiculous, there have been plenty of sources for my suffering. – She stops to let Neal wrap his entire hand around two of her fingers and tug with all his might – You still shouldn’t come near Lily, or Maleficent but for all it’s worth at least the two of us forgive you. I apologise for the car as well.
- We only had to replace one door so, not as bad a that decade you chased me through the woods. - She nods – Henry’s told me everything’s going well?
- Yes, we’re adjusting just fine. - Snow’s head tilts sideways and Regina rolls her eyes – Fine, it’s great, we’re doing great.
- You and Maleficent!
- Yes.

She giggles – And a true love child!
- We do not know that.

She stays for about an hour, and they discuss not only Regina’s relationship but how it feels to find your daughter as a grown woman with trust issues, why they seem so fond of heavy boots, and of course, the X factor. They pass by Snow’s coping with Emma finally moving out and across town with the help of Regina’ more than generous raise, and how they’re dealing with Emma’s state of mind, how close she came to hurting Lily and how downtrodden she’d been before kicking Hook to the curb.

Regina smiles as Neal’s crawling takes him to a corner where a few of Henry’s old toys he wanted his uncle to have lay mixed with newer models of themselves and back to her to hand her one of them, Snow manages to snatch a picture of that too and as she glares at the phone her expression softens because, in their own way, they’re the oldest of friends. Of all the people in their lives none of them had been there when they were teenagers and she had stopped a horse hurtling down a hill with Snow on it. They outdate any relationship by a good few years.
Lily kicks lightly at the wooden wall under the bar without really thinking about it as she sips on her beer and the tap tap tap tap might be rendering Ruby insane where she is across the diner trying to remember how it is that Granny likes the books to be kept. She rolls her chair right out of the small office and into the main area ignoring the few customers that look at her amused. She pokes Lily on the leg – I can bite that foot right off, don’t test me.

- Oh yeah? ‘cause I have magical mom and two wings that say I can take you anytime anywhere so.

Ruby narrows her eyes and leans back in her chair – I was kidding, you?

- Oh, shit. Yeah. No. It’s cool. Sorry. I’ll stop kicking – Ruby’s lips form a grin slowly and as always when she feels she’s being thought of as cute Lily should intervene – So dude, are you hiring here? I need a job.

- Dude? – She frowns - do I suck at flirting? Because I really have been flirting with you and you just called me dude.

She drinks the rest of her beer in one go and swipes the back of her hand across her mouth after, Ruby decides she doesn’t need to comment on how Regina would die if she saw her doing that and Lily sniffs – No, you’re pretty fucking straight forward with it. I just need to have at least a six pack in my system to flirt back, or fuck you or let you see a dragon in real life or whatever it is you want from me

- Dark. – She rolls back her chair into the office and comes out after, locks the door behind herself – C’mon I know someone in the fancy place by the woods that can interview you for something in the kitchen maybe.

They ride silently in Ruby’s red car, it purrs delightfully under the hood and Lily had been wanting to inspect the motor for as long as she’d known it was around in perfect magically sustained condition like her mother’s vintage Mercedes, but she can’t enjoy the experience fully with the uneasiness she feels next to Ruby now. Not only had she tried to pick a fight, she had accused the woman of trying to fuck her in the span of ten minutes or less, after chugging a beer like a hick… that was why she didn’t have nice things, she had been doing well, she really had, even Snow could say that Lily wasn’t openly glaring at her anymore when she saw her in public but it seems that if she doesn’t coordinate her little playdates with Emma at least once week or if she’s left alone with her thoughts for an hour she goes right back. She growls under her breath and doesn’t consider she’s a foot away from one person that could probably understand that noise she’s always been able to make.

Ruby turns to her briefly before focusing back on the road – Hey what’s up with you? Is Regina kicking you out? Why do you need a job anyway?

- Look I am not gonna just sit around and let mommy pay for my shit for the rest of my life – It comes out harsher than she wanted to, like everything ever, and she breathes remembering her
dragon training and thinking about the fact that she has dragon training – I’m sorry. Something’s up, I am f*cked up today, obviously. But don’t know why, I never do.

- Maybe there’s a cycle? – Lily frowns and Ruby shrugs – Us wolves are ruled by the moon, one week all you want is to sleep, the other one we eat like the animals we are, the next one we’re filled to the brim with energy and the wolf itches under our skin at night time, and the other one we… mate I guess. Point is, I’ve had my whole life to figure that out. Plus, I also get PMS sometimes so…

Lily chuckles at that – Must be a real bitch

- Ha. Ha. Mommy also makes dog jokes, it’s all been done.

She flips her off and settles into the silence again, more comfortable this time before she wants to share, actually wants to – Maleficent is very calm, all the time. I mean shit, she doesn’t even blink a lot or quickly or anything. Henry talks right over anyone and she takes it all and answers like nothing. When I lash out she doesn’t react, when Regina is mad ’cause we don’t load the dishwasher well she calms her down with her voice. She’s an iceberg. So, I don’t think it’s dragon cycles, and no periods… Doctors used to be so confused about me, I think even my blood type is weird.

- No periods? Fuck you.

- Yeah.

The restaurant opens for the night-time or pre-booked events only so not only is it empty, the guy that greets them is more than willing to interview her right there for a low level job working under a chef that claims to not be the guy from Ratatouille but has red hair and a hat he won’t take off so…

She gets told to make something simple to check she can work the kitchen and she moves around easily remembering her time in one of those working with a certificate in food manipulation she’d made in photoshop at a library, and that they didn’t even bother to ask in this place. Halfway through both guys seems content with her and with Ruby’s approval and she’s told to wait for someone else to come by with uniforms or something and they leave them in there, hours before opening with no one around. Lily still finds weirder and weirder stuff in that town every day, outside the magical things.

She plates the simple steak with steamed vegetables she had produced and carries it to Ruby where she sits tapping at her phone in one of the tables – Check it out.

Ruby doesn’t need to be told twice, she hums as she starts cutting – Smart, making me dinner before you drink that six pack you mentioned earlier?
Lily grumbles – Sorry, again.

- Look. I’m not gonna lie, you’re hot as fuck and I am trying to get in your pants, and I am not used to this kind of resistance – Lily rolls her eyes and Ruby grins – But I’m from your fictional medieval ages, where you either lived a shitty life and were married off at thirteen or you were one of the lucky few to be written into books and the authors gave you all this mushy lovey-dovey stuff. I don’t know if you’ve noticed but the famous ones, we date to marry. If you wanna give that a try… if not, my Prince Charming awaits.
Lily watches as she eats her steak and hops she’s not breathing as hard as her brains seems to be telling her she is. She’d never been talked to, at all, it had always been people that she found attractive enough to drink the six pack with and then once or twice have sex with them before they ran for the hills. She’s friends with ruby, well friendly at least. And she’s attractive, ad nice enough to drive her up a mountain for a job opportunity. Henry and Regina and Emma like her well enough, she has a nice car, she understands things about her other people might not, she makes jokes about her outburst instead of avoiding her after. She’s good.

- I can give that a try.

She smiles mid bite and shifts her face in a way that make her eyes shine gold reflecting the sun coming in through the giant window – Sober?

- I might suck at it.

Chapter End Notes

    Hope your wait was worth it ;)


They all hike up to a hill in the outskirts of town where Mal and Lily had been practicing their
dragon-related things to show Regina now that Lily knows how to manage the transformation back
and forth and a quick flight with a smooth-ish landing. She has not managed any fire just yet but
still, Maleficent loves to proclaim every single advance as a feat.

Apparently, she has to do it alone this time and her eyebrows hike up on her face when Mal
suggests she do it. She’s only even tried after Mal explained and demonstrated what she had to do,
every single time. It’s not easy for her to admit to fear but the way your bones enlarge and your
skin both stretches and hardens for one moment had rendered her scared enough that she wasn’t
able to hold the dragon form at all until the fourth try, she’s grateful for the mist that surrounds her
when it’s happening, otherwise she guesses it won’t be pretty at all, she’d find out now looking at
Henry who’s giddily mounting a camera too expensive for a thirteen year old boy to own on a
tripod.

She steps back from them and starts lowering her heart rate as she sits down in preparation, she
knows she’s not much of an useful dragon if she has to meditate to get it right and if they are
attacked or whatever evil won’t stop for her to do her yoga but, it gets her up in the sky for now
and up in the sky is where she belongs. When she managed to spread her wings, and fly for more
than a few meters before landing on her belly down in the forest again it was the single greatest
moment of her life, the few minutes she trailed after Maleficent seemed to silence her mind like
nothing else had before, up there there’s nothing to rage against and no one to appease.

Henry shifts from one foot to the other as the smoke starts to wrap around her and by him, Mal
molds to the back of Regina’s body pressing her lips to the top of her head with a smile, they all
watch as she’s replaced by a dragon surely the size of their house at least in height and covered in
purple-green scales shimmering with the light. Henry’s eyes grow wide as saucers as he moves to
unmount the camera and hold it up to catch her in all her glory as she pushes of the ground and her
wings arch up and down making the wind lift their scarves and almost pull Regina’s hair out of its
usual perfection. Henry is close to dancing in his spot and Mal laughs at him

- A fan huh?

- You have no idea Mal! This is so cool – he turns from seeing Lily sweep over them to grin up at
her – Will you join her?

- Do you wish me to?

He nods excitedly and his smile has made Maleficent weak already, Regina shining through him.
She won’t ever deny him much she’s sure. She puts her hand on his shoulder and kisses whatever
corner of Regina she can reach before stepping away and in front of his camera with a funny face
he knows is as much a gift as the magic happening before him and without any more prompting
she goes up.
- They look alike! – Regina smiles softly and notes that they do, color and shape if not size, surely her genes at play. They fly up drawing circles around each other and Maleficent dives down only to right herself as she’s about to hit the treeline making Henry gasp – How come, of all of everyone ever, I’m the one with no magic?

Regina pulls him in by his shoulder with one arm, while she still can she thinks bitterly, and that makes him miss a perfectly good shot of Lily gliding over the trees. He smiles up at his mother regardless and she shakes him a little – You’re the truest believer

- Mom, that’s crap.

A moment after Lily returns to them, exhilarated and her eyes trailing Mal who still sweeps over them in a dance that looks much more graceful than hers feels just yet. But even then she finds Henry grinning up at her and chatting a mile a minute about what he got on video and Regina gazing softly at them both. She can’t quite keep the smile out of her face while the effect of the magic pulsing through her fades so she imagines she looks as dumb as she feels standing there with her mouth wide open and her skin all flushed, fighting her urge to babble just as much as Henry.

- So? Cool, right? - she thinks it was aloof

Regina puts her hands around her face – It was magnificent. I loved it, Henry loved it, I am sure you’ll have an edited movie of it. And you looked so in sync with Mal up there. – She hugs her briefly and when she pulls back Maleficent seems to be descending and Henry jogs to find her landing place. Regina’s gloved hands settle on her shoulders again and the exhilaration doesn’t fade as Lily locks eyes with her. - You hold so much inside you, you are so powerful Lily, you’ve been living half a life, you’ve been crippled. But now, that you are where you belong I am sure in time you will be in complete control of everything you’re capable of and it will be a sight to behold.

- Thanks, mom – She exhales it, the kind of positive emotion that she’s only ever felt after these sessions filling her with the urge to hug Regina again, after all she said, after the pride shining in her eyes. She draws her in and Regina gives as good as she gets.

- You called me mom.

The high abandons her body abruptly. She tenses on Regina’s hug and behind them she can see Mal and Henry coming closer and quite suddenly she wants the ground to swallow her up – Um… shit. I mean, yeah no, cool. Yeah. Sorry ‘bout that.

- No, I love it, I love you. – Regina gives her the space she need but she keeps a hand on her arm – I would love it if you continued.

Mal reaches them and places a hand on her other arm – And I would love it if we acknowledged that at the very least her dragon form resembles me. Maleficent one, Regina approximately a hundred or so, I’ve lost count on the little quirks you two share.

- Yes darling, you’re both very fetching dragons.

Lily turns to Mal – Look since we got the mushy ball rolling. Thanks for teaching me about all the dragon stuff – she points to the sky and Mal follows her finger before chuckling but Lily has decided to power through it – Thanks mom… dragon mom… Ma? – She glances at Henry and he shrugs

- I already have mom and Ma, so I’ll just call you Mal.
- Of course, Young Prince. Lily you can perhaps call me mom –

Lily frowns, is that not the issue? if she screams mom and two heads whip at her it gets nothing done. She tells her so and Mal smirks at her as Regina gapes – You are born understanding that gibberish?

- Henry takes out a notebook out of his bag hastily – Secret dragon language?!

Lily frowns as Regina pushes a chuckling Mal off her and swats her in the arm – I spent months trying to make sense of it, I read tens of tomes. Could I have ever learned?

Mal shakes her head and Henry scribbles away, and Lily interjects – So what did you say? How did I translate it? Can I speak it?

- You can be taught – she nods and Henry finds a suitable rock to prop his leg up to support his notebook, Mal smirks - but not by Regina. – the woman huffs.

- You insufferable lizard.

- You have kept this lizard’s books, yes? Give them to the baby lizard when you get a chance.
Regina passes a hand through Mal’s hair, draped as it is over her chest while she nuzzles further into the space by her neck. One of Mal’s legs shifts and it brushes her own just right and she believes it was enough, they can’t possibly want more, they cannot, should not, must not have the energy. Her breath hitches without her permission anyways and she sighs berating herself – We need birth control.

Mal hums against her neck and the vibration, if she wasn’t so spent Regina would change rooms so she could at the very least get some sleep. Mal’s hand ghosts by her side – for Henry?

- What? No. What?! – if there ever was a mood killer. Regina tries to push Mal off herself but her arms don’t have the strength either and she settles for a shake that makes Mal shift only enough to be able to look at her face and its horrified expression - What do you know?

- Nothing. – She really doesn't know anything past Henry’s admission of a female acquaintance he would like to drink a soda with, and she’s been sworn to secrecy to all blood-relatives and Regina, Lily had told him to buy her a root beer instead. She chuckles when Regina’s face doesn’t turn back to normal – I just spoke without thinking darling, it was the obvious connection

- He’s thirteen.

Mal gives up then, meaning she moves further up Regina’s body to be more comfortable and disregard her claims of being crushed and whatnot – In our land he would be halfway into a bar wench by now and we both know it.

- Into a bar wench? – Regina’s outrage makes Mal laughs fully by her ear and she turns her head, pulling her hair with it

- What did you mean then, Regina?

- That we need birth control. - She catches a glimpse of a breast and has to clench her teeth – We have a daughter. Unplanned child. And I have seen her fraternizing with Red, an untrained magic-wielding wolf-dragon hybrid is the last thing my town needs.

- The wolf is no sorceress.

- She has your kind of magic.

- Well that doesn’t get anyone pregnant.

- Besides yours, Lily has my kind of magic.

She stops to consider that - As always darling, you see all the rest of us cannot.

- You’re deflecting.

- I have not yet known the beauty of soiled diapers. - She tries for a joke but they can see right through each other most of the time.

Regina turns to face her then and tangles a hand low in the hair that curls out of the nape of her head – You want another child?

- I don’t know if we can. I don’t know what it was that created Lily that time, I don’t know why it
hadn’t happened before, I don’t know why it hasn’t since and I don’t know if it will. – She sighs and closes her eyes as Regina pulls her in closer – but I always liked to imagine three little dragons flying around the castle.

- We could probably accommodate one – Mal blinks up at her and her smile grows wide, Regina chuckles and Mal starts laying open mouthed kisses on any place of Regina’s face she can reach – Not in this instant. At the very least we know we can’t do this while we’re both thinking about diapers, it seems obvious. - She manages to extricate herself out of Mal’s grasp and she stands up, heading for the en-suite bathroom – Find me a method of birth control and we can start discussing babies.

Mal watches her go, intentional sway to her hips and all, and lets her weight fall back into the bed with a smile still wide. She was not one to admit to daydreaming but more than once Regina had been stumbling through cooking a meal in her castle and she’d sat around picturing three children waiting for breakfast with her, eager to fly like she had done with her parents once upon a time but also playing with the little balls of light Regina liked to conjure as a lazy practice while she lounged around. She longed to live simply, books and a family was all she could think of some days. Perhaps it was that what had made Lily one night. She can recognize her smell settled in the bedding surrounding her, mingled with Regina’s, and that’s more than she had ever had. No one and nothing would stop her yearning now, to be a mother that was there for her child throughout it all, and with the way Regina dresses in the land without magic, perhaps they do need birth control.

She comes out of the bathroom and Mal enjoys the view without moving a muscle, she had suffered quite a lot to have the view so she knows to take nothing for granted. Regina sits by her on the bed and she smiles up at her – The crones used to brew a tea out of some herbs.

Regina reaches for the glasses she keeps by the book on her nightstand, she takes out a notepad and a pen too – Okay, which ones? We can see if we have the exact one, or if they’re magical we can replicate the effects with a spell perhaps, or something from my vault or Gold’s shop…

- You sit here wearing nothing but glasses and you think I will want to devour you any less if you start prattling off about potions and trinkets – Regina huffs at her and Mal reaches for the notepad and tosses it on the floor – Well, you are wrong.

- Maleficent… – Her tone is reticent but her body betrays her to accommodate Mal’s between her legs

- Once – She leans in to kiss her slowly and Regina melts into the bed, Mal comes up with a smirk, already tangling their legs just so and using her hands to pull her closer by the base of her spine – And I promise tomorrow we will have a day of strenuous, thorough reading.

Well, Regina can’t say no to that.
You want some of my illegal brownies, mother?

Regina is dutifully at work, Maleficent decided to go have a day of peace in the far-off edge of the beach and Henry has one of his whole learn-how-we-lived-in-the-forest days at school that apparently lasts well into the night time so the house is Lily’s until she leaves for her new job. She’s been through much more nerve-wracking first weeks, with her falsified identities and enemies on the prowl, but this is the first one she feels she needs to excel at and dealing with the uppity clients hasn’t been easy, even when she’s restricted to the kitchen she still hears everything. And she has things now: family, Swan, Ruby, dragon powers that don’t work outside the town, she can’t afford to fuck things up… so she decides what she’s been saving for a special occasion might as well be used now.

As soon as the click from the door reaches her ears when Mal finally leaves she digs through her one box of belongings to find the few grams of weed she has left and dashes down into the kitchen to prepare her culinary pride and joy. Lily had always been sure that if her metabolism wasn’t so fast or drugs weren’t so expensive she would have become a drug addict, outside of Emma, a few hits here and there mixed with booze were the one thing that could always manage to give her a bit of peace, but alas, a dragon she is and a whole platter of brownies she has to eat to get high for a decent amount of time; especially now that she has none of the harder stuff on hand and doesn’t know who to even ask in that town, Swan is a cop for fuck’s sake.

After going through Regina’s blissfully stocked pantry and preparing the batter to perfection she pushes the platter in the oven and retrieves her phone to set a timer and connect her metal with the in-wall speakers she’s sure she has Henry to thank for, she scrolls down the family plan Spotify premium account she’s been added to by the little shit as well and settles in a stool while she waits, hands hitting the marble countertop with the rhythm as she looks at the oven, it’s the first one Lily uses that doesn’t have the bulb inside busted. She can’t believe people live like this all the time, and some even without magic to fill their bank accounts.

When they’re done she pulls the glass refractory out using Henry’s ridiculous pacman glove she’s trying not to be envious of and sets it on a cooling rack because, of course these people have cooling racks, plural. She cuts them whether they’ve cooled or not and sits to gaze at her creation lustfully, almost slumped over the kitchen island while they stop steaming and look ready to be devoured in an alarmingly short amount of time for the prep they require. That’s when Mal shows up in her peripheral view smirking, she sits up sharply but schools her face - Sup?

Maleficent laughs at her and moves closer to stroke her hair with a love Lily can’t return easily sometimes, she drops a kiss to the top of her head and it makes her close her eyes and smile, at least when she knows the angle doesn’t let other people see her reaction. Mal motions to the brownies and Lily watches her just grab one, of course she doesn’t have to wait for them to cool down… they’re dragons… dumbass – These smell positively illegal.

- Oh? – She was hoping it would fly undetected, dumbass – So what happened to the beach?

- I believe I have lost the power of sitting around with no stimuli. These pesky modern memories. – She puts the brownie back in its rightful corner and goes to sit on the stool next to Lily’s – Were you planning to eat those by yourself? Or is there company expected? I will leave again if necessary

- I guess I was gonna eat all of ‘em… It takes a lot to get really high out of weed for me.
Mal chuckles and starts letting down her hair from the complicated braid it’s on and Lily wonders, not for the first time, who the hell has straight hair in her family tree ’cause Regina has curly hair no matter how much she tries to hide it and Mal’s head grows this thing Swan wishes she had without all that curling iron expenses. – Would you loathe sharing? The effect would last less but if I’m correct you have a job to get to tonight so perhaps, it is for the best? – She levels her with a look that screams accountant and Lily can’t help but look down, and lower the volume of her music too, before she realizes she was still asking for drugs
- You want some of my *illegal* brownies, mother?

Mal’s eyes move up to the high ceiling and Lily guesses if the stools had backs and Mal wasn’t Mal, she would lean against it and put her hands behind her head to hold it up as she spoke - I seem to be German here. I flew all the way to America for university and had the time of my life, so much I stayed in the country and eventually moved to this tiny coastal town that, outside the coastal bit, almost reminds me of home… so as a German I was well versed in alcohol but some very dedicated friends had to introduce me to other poisons.

- Very detailed semi-curse – She jumps up on the counter to reach the brownies now that she knows it’s okay to consume illegal substances in front of this mother at the very least, and then can’t help to lean down to check she didn’t damage Regina’s woodwork when her boots stomped against it, she sits right back up and grabs two brownies – What’s the craziest shit you did on drugs then?

- Mallory Feuer? One or two topless fiascos. Me… I had once taken some magic-infused something with your mother and in our madness, I convinced her to race me, her in her steed and me in my unicorn. I was winning of course and Regina was losing her pretty little mind about it and so she started pushing us towards the nearby lake in the hopes my unicorn would lose concentration, her devious plan worked and as soon as it realized where we were it started rearing up and hit a sudden stop that catapulted me into the lake – She pauses to chuckle and Lily can’t barely process what she’s hearing after your mother or unicorn – Lily when I tell you I *cannot* swim, I mean it. Your mother had to jump right after and pull me out like the dead weight I am, I sobered up immediately, near death experiences will do that to a woman.

- I can’t swim either – Is all she can manage and Mal nods as she reaches for a brownie as well

- It is unnatural, water was not meant for us to move through I tell you. – She passes to grin over a bite- Regina will laugh, and she will engineer ways for you to be thrust into water but you must stand your ground, and if you must, drown to prove a point. – she laughs again and pats Lily’s leg where it sits by her on the counter

-There’s no way that happened. No way. – She’s done with her two pieces and goes for a third, she tested her tolerance once, five is living on the edge of getting dragged to the hospital and then released by very confused nurses, so her dosage is four every couple hours – No fucking way. Regina mom? No way.

- Everyone thinks Regina so prim and proper – She holds a finger before Lily can comment that of course the woman is prim and proper, she can afford a family Spotify account where she downloads opera only - I once saw Her majesty The Queen inhale a crushed dried mushroom and then proceed to act out Snow White’s most amusing antics while doing different voices for all the characters involved, it was quite riveting.

- Holy shit. Mom? Regina mom?

Mal smiles as she nods lost in thought – Oh to be young… her, not me- She clarifies as she reaches
for a napkin to take another brownie - I’ll save her one of these just in case. What about you Lily? Any good stories you might want to share with your mother? I won’t chastise.

Lily shrugs and lays down on the island, ignoring the voice in her head that tells her Regina would kick her out if she ever found out – Nothing good really, fights, one-night stands, few hours really stuck looking at walls.

Mal’s heart aches for her daughter, always, but her mother pitying her is not how Lily had planned her day to go and she would hate to be the one to ruin her mood by asking these awful questions – How tragic to hear. My own daughter, wasting her few hours of reduced inhibitions to watch cartoons.

Her tone is playful and Lily picks up the cue laughing a bit - You know about sitting around watching cartoons?

- Mallory does. – She goes for another brownie, she follows Lily’s pace since it’s the closest she’ll have to experimental data – Why don’t you use your reduced sense of shame to give the wolf a call? Many a drunken indecent proposal is what led to you being here today

- God, mom, no. – She lays in silence for a moment as Mal chuckles and then shrugs in her odd position followed by her feet kicking against the cabinets under the island – I don’t think it’s like that anymore, she mentioned dating but we just talk about dumb things a few times a day, she was fucking annoying with it before and now? nothing.

- Do you want my sweet moves? – She lays her head in one of her hands and chuckles as the world turns sideways, this drug obviously making her much more agreeable and simpleminded than most she’s ever tried

- You gotta pick one, Mallory or Maleficent. It’s too weird like this.

Mal laughs and it fills the room like no other laugh can – Darling, who wouldn’t want a cool mom with knowledge of Microsoft Excel macros and forest witch brews?

Lily giggles at that too and her hands toy with each other over her stomach - Right. So, what are the moves? Maleficent’s. I don’t know what kind of women Mallory was pulling.

- Mallory was always found in the company of very nice-looking gentlemen. – She snarks and her mind trails off concocting memories of the one blond smiley boy she left back at Germany, of some cutesy dates on the college campus, and of a lawyer much like a certain mayor that took the same train she did to commute to her first job; the curse seamed to weave itself as she needed it, beautiful work Regina had accomplished, as always

Lily snorts in her direction though – Very nice-looking? Ruby’s hot as fuck, I need to do better than that, try the ones that got you Regina and weren’t drunk booty calls.

- Yes, well. – Her mouth stars feeling odd and whatever comment she was preparing fades away as she loses herself thinking of the early days, she sighs softly with a small smile – I can’t speak for how I got her, but when you have her you can come ask me how to woo the lady with your daily actions.

- How’d you get her? – Lily turns to lie on her side facing Mal, her interest piqued, and her eyes take in the marble of the island, how polished and clean it is, and how she hasn’t really picked up anything of what she used to bake, she should do that, she should stand up and clean up, yes, she should… she tunes back in in the middle of Mal’s sentence
and utter mess, and she’s always wanted to fix everything she can fix. So, in the end she got me, by being there for me and being lovable. I just grew tired of being smitten without as much as a kiss and had to take action.

-Damn. That’s how they operate huh? – Lily guesses she’s been gotten too by now, with the whole How are you?’s and I remember your order from the other days, seeing how Ruby faces the world makes her want to do better by herself and by others, is strange really, other do-gooders only ever made her want to vomit.

– You lost the battle the minute she decided to befriend you.

She sighs and rubs at her face, she has absolutely no experience in romance and the whole thing makes her anxious in a new way, she doesn’t want to punch anything and yet, she’s wired to the point she overthinks every single text she sends Ruby. Talking about it with anyone could probably only make it worse – Shit. Let’s never discuss this ever again.

Regina used to wrangle a nine to five day out of her schedule when Henry was home only to make up for it when he was spending his night with Emma or his grandparents but now that there’s more people in her life, and her house, she tries to be out of the office at five daily no matter what the town requires. So at 5:30 sharp she gets home to find them in the same position with only one brownie wrapped in a paper napkin. She doesn’t see it though as she takes in the scene, scattered baking supplies and Lily sprawled over her kitchen island with Mal slumped down on the counter as they laugh over some nonsense, with metal playing loudly over any sane person’s thoughts. She grinds her teeth as she drops the contents of her hand in the kitchen counter roughly – There are several perfectly fine beds in this house you two can use if you’re tired.

Mal sits up languidly and turns to smile brightly her way - My dear, how we’ve missed you so.

- Yeah, hi mom.

She will not fall for it, long gone were the days a ‘Hi mom’ would appease her and this one didn’t even bother to pout, Henry would find it disrespectful to his craft she’s sure – Why are you on my kitchen island? Why are your shoes on my kitchen island? – she pushes one of Lily’s feet of the surface where she had it propped up to act as support for her other leg, they both clank against the woodwork beneath them and Regina takes a deep breath to stop herself from lashing out

Mal sees her tensing up and, even as relaxed as she is she can see danger looming her way so she uses the counter to make the stool rotate and a soon as Regina’s in reach she pulls her in and holds her in place with a leg– Your Majesty, we will remove ourselves promptly.

Regina takes her head in her hands and frowns as she takes her in – You’re drugged. Mildly, but still.

Lily jumps down from the counter checking the watch only now that Regina’s home. The brownies worked past her wildest expectations if they lasted this long and she has to go to work in one hour – Hopefully only before we take a good nap. – She leaves the room without any more prompting and trudges up the stairs, the Bluetooth connection falling as she goes.

Mal laughs as Regina looks around the place still in disarray from Lily’s baking with a raised eyebrow fighting the throbbing vein for her forehead space. Mal uses her other leg to trap Regina and kisses the side of her head – How was your day darling?
- Not as good as yours, I gather – She tidies up what she can reach over Mal, putting spoons into bowls and gathering crumbs with discarded napkins, missing as Mal reaches for the brownie and stills her hands to dangle it in front of her face– Wherever did you find marihuana in this town?

- I believe your daughter had it all along – Mal releases Regina to her small cleaning spree and she goes willingly if not anxiously to at the very least clear the counters and run the dishwasher

She scoffs - My daughter? Look at you. – Mal approaches again and kisses her nose and in her confusion Regina can only scrunch it up making the other woman chuckle as she hands her the brownie – I can’t. Henry will be home soon.

- Henry will be home late at night when the good sheriff deems him stuffed of Granny’s food after his day of roughing it up in the woods with the shepherd, and I will be able to look after him then. Let this take your mind off things for a while- She lays a kiss on the side of Regina’s neck, moving the collar of her blouse to do so – You’re stressed, Madam Mayor

- You want to take advantage of me. – Still, she takes a bite as she punches in the button for the dishwasher to start and moves away from Mal – I haven’t had any of these things in over three decades and in a few months, you corrupt me again.

- Yes, I want to hear all that Princess Snow has done these years that you have been keeping to yourself. Sometimes we play dirty.

Lily rushes down the stairs a 6:45 and pauses to see Regina with her sleeves rolled up and her heels kicked out, sitting on the floor between Mal’s stretched out legs and laughing at a commercial for SpongeBob playing on nickelodeon. Mal catches her eye and winks holding thumbs up and she hates that she’s kinda late and can’t stay to see the rest of that

She keeps going fumbling with her bike keys - I’m telling Swan!
Mal’s unemployed, not because she can’t get a job or because Regina hasn’t offered to make up a completely new position for her with an office close to hers but because she is a dragon, and any self-respecting dragon (that didn’t grow up thinking they were human) knows that working is the shortest path to absolute madness. They feed off game and gather the trinkets they desire through barter and dealings, it’s not necessary for her to sit in an office all day (and she’s sure Regina can and will pay her her way through life just fine). She’s a lover of the arts; poetry, music, theater, beauty, love. And with the vast collection of things she’s yet to consume in this new land, she has more than enough to occupy her time.

That morning the sun decides to come out from behind the perpetual clouds that cover Regina’s town and Mal decides to take a stroll, after three decades underground one really begins appreciating sunlight and general greenery. She walks by the shoreline with her phone, still going through Regina’s Spotify collection and knowing there’s more she’s yet to listen to, a lifetime won’t be enough, not even a dragon’s one. She hums as a piece she thinks she’ll enjoy begins and loses herself in the sensation of the sand under her feet for a moment only because her nose picks up Emma Swan and she braces herself for the onslaught, she takes off one of the earbuds and the blonde does indeed catch up to her.

She puts a hand on each of her shoulders and jostles her – Malificent! What’s up?

- Sheriff. Out in a run, how lovely – Emma flexes an arm for her to see and Maleficent can only smile at her childishness as usual – If you’re doing night shifts this week perhaps you should sleep in the mornings.

- I’m okay mom. We, as a town, need me to be absolutely ripped anyways, this is a public service. Who’s Regina gonna ogle if I lose my shape y’know? – She laughs boisterously and leans all the way into Mal’s space, apparently there’s much more Emma to prepare for when she’s exercising. – Jesus Christ, you’re a tough cookie to crack.

A young man comes towards them then, panting and pushing brown curls out of his head forcefully, the thin tank top he’s wearing almost see through with the amounts of sweat it’s had to absorb. He comes to a halt by them and puts his hands on his knees to catch his breath, Mal chuckles as Emma finds a moment of quiet to smile at him, she tries to push the other blonde away from her – Miss Swan, what a surprise to learn you torture your paramours.

He glances up and shoots up to stand straight, his feet stumbling under him – Lady Maleficent, I apologize, I didn’t see you firstly – He bows his head

- That is hardly necessary. I’ve never been a lady of any court.

Emma grins at him and takes his head in her hands, after having wiped her brow and adjusted her ponytail and thus comingling sweat in the least attractive way possible – Yeah Luke, she’s obviously official court pet dragon Mal or like, Mrs. Mills.

He nods, the lack of oxygen clearly affecting his thought process – Good Morning, Mrs. Mills.

Maleficent laughs at him then – Boy, Emma Swan is going to eat you alive.

- That’s why I have him running, I need to build that stamina up – She winks at Mal and he groans by them, his face reddening even over his dark complexion. Emma jostles him a bit unnecessarily
if anyone asks Mal and his face turns into a smile for a second before Emma yaps again – Welp! Let’s keep going then! C’mon! We’re gonna earn these bearclaws Luke!

His head drops dejectedly but he starts jogging away from them and Emma follows clearly gearing up to pass him again – Bye Mal! Tell your wife she’s getting her Tupperwares back anytime now, no need for late night texting!

Mal watches them go and chuckles as she relays Emma’s message and Regina answers back with her plight of missing Tupperwares that force her to eat her cut up fruit out of a colored plastic container like a third-grade child.

She makes it out of the beach and walks peacefully by the streets that still receive some of the wind coming from the sea, Regina’s playlist on its last legs and the threat of having to listen to Henry’s suggestions before he decides to interrogate her about them always looming over her head. She enters a shop specialized in candles and starts browsing the shelves before a nun comes up to her

She grins up at her, small as she is – Hello, may I help you find something? – Mal looks at her closely, a fairy, she concludes. But before she can either answer or comment on that something else gets her attention.

- Someone actually came in? That can’t be good – a gruff voice comes from somewhere behind the wall then there’s a creaking noise and heavy footsteps – Must be an outsider, you know what that means, start dialing the savior Astrid.

The man, smaller than the nun comes through a doorway she had not noticed holding a pickaxe and huffs when she sees her – Close enough – She eyes him, must be a dwarf.

- Don’t be rude! – The nun, Astrid obviously, turns back to Mal with a smile and she touches her arm – We have no problem with you!

- Speak for yourself.

Mal ignores him as she keeps perusing the shelves in front of her and the nun stands by her patiently and politely, making faces at the man who refuses to let go of his pick axe. She spots a candle on a deep red and moves towards it, her nose pulling her – Are these all the scented candles you have?

- Oh no, what would you like?

She hums – Me? Fire and brimstone, scorched flesh perhaps – She locks eyes with the stocky man over the nun’s head and he huffs at her – But maybe my family will enjoy apples and cinnamon more.

The nun chirps happily like nothing happened – Well this one is only roses! But I do have something for you then! That I’m sure the mayor will appreciate.

Mal raises an eyebrow then, she wasn’t expecting to be unknown and she supposes that with the way Regina and herself handled the news, which was in no way at all, it was bound to spread by itself effectively; but by the man’s reaction to her any show of goodwill from his companion is a surprise – The mayor? Not the Evil Queen?

- God, no! – She lays a hand on her arm again and Mal rewards her with a small smile that makes her beam, she doesn’t see how this woman can stand that angry little man – I voted for Mayor Mills in the most recent election! She’s been nothing but good to us here. And even back in the old
world, as a fairy, I knew what it was like for her. She’s not to blame completely for any of it. - The man drops his pickaxe and mumbles something not even Mal’s ears can hear – Forgive Leroy, he knows this and he agrees. I don’t know what’s wrong with him today.

He drops himself in a stool that renders him even smaller and Maleficent would smirk at that if she wasn’t taut waiting for whatever reasoning he was going to spew; whether it was an issue with Regina, with Lily, with her, with them both being women, with dragons… there was no good outcome out of this confrontation and she had been trying hard to cause no harm to any of Regina’s constituents, she even had Cruella behaving. The dwarf crosses his arms – I bet they’re plotting against Snow is what’s wrong with me.

- That’s all? – Mal does smirk then and turns around to pluck the candles from their spots, well out of Astrid’s reach without help from the stool the man was occupying, most likely – You believe after all this town has gotten through with her help Regina would still hurt your precious princess? And that either me or our daughter would care enough to plot against her. We could’ve burnt her to a crisp the minute we arrived here. – She watches disinterestedly as the nun swipes her card and finishes the purchase before turning back to him – Before, at least the peasants bothered to come up with entertaining theories.

The nun smiles at her one more time and waves unbothered – I look forward to seeing you at the festival, Ms…. Maleficent.

- Ms. Feuer...- she chews on that for a second and corrects herself-Maleficent is just fine... or Mrs. Mills too, I don’t mind. – She nods at her and turns to leave the store - Hopefully our paths will never cross again dwarf.

She passes by Granny’s near lunchtime to pick up something new that catches her eye in the menu, most things Mallory had tried and as much as she recalls the flavor better to taste them again, lest Mallory have different tastes in food like she did in many other things. She leaves the diner, bags in her hand and Spotify left to its own devices, as long as the algorithm doesn’t take her to the noise Lily enjoys she will trust it and she will commit the names of the songs she likes to memory. Henry promised to teach her how to store her music separate from Regina’s, Mallory wasn’t an avid phone user, at least she can drive now she guesses. She reaches the fence but Eugenia stops her from leaving, sitting in a chair outside taking a break

- Dragon.

- Wolf. - She removes both earbuds this time, and throws them over her shoulder hoping whatever it is will pass quickly

She smacks her lip and leans back in her chair - You wanna act like we have nothing to talk about?

- I don’t see how it is any business of ours. They will do what they want and that’s how it should be. – Mal’s unimpressed with whatever this is, at least Regina has the decency to fidget when she asks if they should intervene in Lily’s tragic attempts of asking Ruby out

- My girl is soft. – Granny holds her hands up – I’m just asking, as a favor, make sure she doesn’t hurt her intentionally

Mal nods – Then I ask the same. Lily’s had a lot of bumps in the road as well.

- Yes – she stands, grunting a bit but still full of vitality – I love Snow to pieces but she can be a
bull when she wants to be. Someone should’ve knocked some sense into her in that castle. - Mal chuckles at that and Granny joins her, adjusting her apron as she starts retreating inside – Maybe your people want to come by for dinner sometime, let me know.

- You want to bring Henry into your house? To be fed? He will bankrupt you.

- I would sacrifice a lot for sweet-talking Regina into sharing that lasagna recipe.

They stare at each other pointedly again for a beat before bursting into soft laughter, Mal likes the woman already. Ruby dashes in from the street and Mal thinks she can hear that bike of Lily’s start and move down the street further away from them. The young wolf frowns as she sees them there chuckling - Granny! What did you do?

- Relax, girl. Mrs. Mills and I were just discussing dowries. – They laugh again as Ruby frowns and looks just ready to stomp her foot on the ground.

She enters Regina’s office and lays down the takeout bag in front of her before Regina can protest to taking a break. She smiles up at her from the spot on the chair and Mal uses her now free hand to move the strands hair out of the way and kiss Regina’s forehead before settling against the desk by her side and pulling out the candle

- Red apples.

Regina groans – If I get one more apple-themed gift…

- What? You’ll poison something and feed it to us? – She dodges out of the way before she can be pinched, kicked or slapped and grins as Regina unbuttons her cuffs and throws her hair behind her head with her eyes formed into slits. She holds it for a few seconds and then starts eating – So, how was your day of shopping for candles?

- Very eventful. – She digs into her own meal with gusto – I have finished the one hundred opera classics and I must say most of them were delightful! I particularly liked L’Amour est une osieau rebelle. Mallory had clearly heard that one but not like I did this morning, of that I can assure you - Regina smiles at her over her salad but before she can reply her phone lights up by them, she frowns

- Why Does Snow White think we married overnight? – Another chirp – You started using my last name? – A third chirp – We have to pay a dowry? – One final chirp - You love to smell charred flesh?

- Why won’t they ever tell you about me interacting successfully with the Dalmatian? Now that’s big news.
Emma! Focus! She’s on fire!

- It’s not a double date. – Emma says as soon as she opens the door for her, before Lily’s even had the chance to come in and spot Luke and Ruby laughing at something on Emma’s couch. She frowns and pushes past the blonde to watch the scene and she follows – It’s just four friends, having a Netflix hang out, watching people kill each other and stuff, nothing romantic about this.

She scoffs - Wow, well fuck you Swan. – Lily knows Emma knows how much she hates to be backed into this kind of thing, and that trying to be open and reciprocating Ruby’s advances has been a fucking challenge for her but then again what’s a fucking Charming without little well-meaning murder-inducing fucking shitty ideas.

Lily trails into the kitchen before she can be spotted and chugs two beers as Emma pours some chips in a bowl and takes out some other snacks that float around her ready to follow her to the living room, it’s the only kind of magic she’s perfected, food-related magic. They walk in together and Emma drags Luke into a corner of the couch so she can sit by him and use him as a body pillow, and leaves only the space next to Ruby for her.

It’s fine, really, as soon as she sits by Ruby the wolf slips an arm around her and strokes her shoulder for a moment before settling her arm on the couch’s back and everything feels all right for a moment, as Emma starts the show and magically turns off the light with some resistance.

Half-way into the second episode though she hears the distinct sound of lips pressing against flesh, and she doesn’t trust Emma a lot but Luke’s an okay guy, surely, he wouldn’t start some shit while there’s two other people in the room, even Regina speaks highly of him. Lily turns as subtly as she can and it’s worse than starting some shit, he’d only kissed Emma’s forehead but because the way she was sitting has her head close to his, their hands held and above her heart as she uses his arm as a pillow, the couch allows her to fold her legs up comfortably and they’re bending towards him, it’s just the kind of wrapping around each other that her mothers tend to engage in and it makes her even more uncomfortable now.

She turns back to the screen subtly but her peace is gone, she’s suddenly aware of the odd space between Ruby and her, a kid could fit in there, not Henry but some less well-fed one, shifting closer would be too fucking obvious and staying where she is feels like she’s some dumb kid that can’t take a hint. Lily’s aware of all their heart-beats, Emma and Luke’s just slow and steady, done with the sweating palms phase of their relationship, and Ruby’s strong one, her own heart getting agitated by the second and sounding like Xavier and the horse Regina urged her to name as hers and she hasn’t.

She tries to do some of Mal’s breathing exercises but as soon as she shifts her pattern Ruby leans in, but manages to keep the space between them – Hey Lily, you okay? You sound a little… out of breath, heart racing. – Ruby’s polite enough to know when not to mention that kind of stuff but she’s worried, it makes no sense in this context.

- I’m good. Shit’s good. Let’s keep watching-

Ruby, that doesn’t have the same issues of overthinking and stupidity as her, puts her hand on her shoulder and tugs her in so they’re sitting closer -Are you sure? We can pause it if you’re scared of the big bad murderer – she chuckles a bit at her own joke and Lily turns to defend herself at the same time Ruby turns to grin at her and they’re suddenly face to face much closer than they’ve ever been, she drops her eyes to Red’s lips and traces the grin, Lily’s treacherous heart picks up the pace even more. Red chuckles – Oh, so that’s what’s happening to you?
She leans in and Lily can only sit still as a statue and open her eyes wide – shit.

She suddenly catches fire.

Not figuratively, quite literally.

She knew it was coming, somehow. She was never a blusher but her body heat temperature always got very very high, in middle school, when she still felt this kind of thing, and right when Ruby leaned in her only though was well, here comes fire.

And there she sits, whole body covered in flames as Ruby shrieks and stands to shield herself, Emma jumps out of the couch too and Luke stands to shield her before whispering in awe – It’s like jack-jack, from the Incredibles.


- Emma! Focus! She’s on fire! – Ruby snaps her fingers repeatedly and Emma shrugs

- Fire cannot kill a dragon?

They both growl and Emma shifts apologetically – Right, sorry. – She kneels in front of Lily and immediately starts sweating, she puts her hands on both sides of her on the couch and hopes magical fire doesn’t burn magical saviors – Hey um, magic is emotion so like, whatever you were feeling when you got you know, the flame suit on, what you gotta do is recognize it and make your peace with it.- Lily growls again, she know why she’s on fire, and she also knows she won’t be making any peace with it anytime soon, and that she’s probably dying alone. Emma stands and shrugs -that’s really all I got. Regina would say the same thing

- But better. – Luke adds before trying to pour some of his soda on Lily’s shoe to no result – Call The Queen.

Ruby nods, still standing by Lily’s side of the couch and as Emma goes to find her phone and Luke busies himself with figuring out the controller to pause the show, she sighs – So I read that wrong?

- No, I’m just stupid is all. Maybe if I was drunk or something.

- We’ll keep trying.

Emma comes back in with her phone and watches as her couch keeps on dying before her very eyes, it wasn’t new or anything but it was hers, she’d be sad to see Kathryn’s-old-couch-that-she-didn’t-want-any-more-and-sold-to-her-for-ten-bucks-she-didn’t-even-need go.

Regina picks up on the second call and Emma realizes she’s now responsible for a situation that made Lily so uncomfortable she set herself on fire. Regina greets her amicably and she sighs, once again ready to disappoint her. She might as well get a laugh out of it. – Um, Mrs. Mills, hi, can you come get Lily? … I think she wants to go home – There’s a pause while Regina answers and she ignores Ruby’s glare and Luke’s sigh – Look Regina, she’s fine… just come by to my place asap yeah?

A cloud of purple fog forms before she can even hang up the phone and Regina takes them in, and then Lily slouched on her seat, seemingly unbothered by the situation.

Luke is the one to address her first, head bowing as usual – Majesty.
- Unnecessary as always Mr. Baker. How are you?

He nods his thanks at being acknowledged - Just fine.

- Would you mind clearing the room for me and Lily?

He swiftly moves around the couch to usher Ruby and Emma out and the blonde chuckles – Do you just obey her? Regina ask him to clean up the apartment! - Both Ruby and Regina huff as they leave.

Regina sits by Lily, taking no visible precautions against the fire but avoiding contact with any of the spilled liquids seeped into the couch’s fabric. She raises an eyebrow at the snacks on the table and even manages a distasteful scoff at the TV screen before turning to Lily – Would it help if we discuss it?

She shrugs and stands up – Can you just put me out? - she flings her arms around for good measure

- I could, but it wouldn’t help with whatever it is that set you on fire in the first place.

Lily points at her ear and then motions around the room and Regina casts a spell to keep their conversation between them. Lily drops herself on the couch again making ash and blazing fibers fly around for a moment and keeps quiet, sharing with Regina and Mal has been good so far, it still makes her skin itch but she never set herself on fire after one of their conversations – Ruby tried to kiss me. I like her but… it’s too much.

Regina hums – The first time your mother tried to kiss me she took me by surprise and managed to but the second time… I disappeared. I was not good at disappearing yet and even still, the second she leaned in I was somewhere in the forest instead.

- So, we’re definitely related.

- Yes, your looks left me doubting but this… now I’m sure- They both laugh for a moment and Regina looks at Lily, still covered in flames, quite impressive – I know you struggle with thinking you deserve happiness if you don’t take it hostage, and with knowing a doo-gooder like Miss Lucas wants you. It won’t get easier quickly but it should in time, start off by being a little selfish and taking what you want even if you don’t deserve it and then every day earn it.

- Fake it ‘till you make it?

Regina nods – And since it’s painfully obvious you need to learn to control this magic, let’s start with your very first lesson. Calm yourself and get rid of these flames.

- Is it cheating if I just meditate them away?

- Just a bit.

- Good enough.

They walk into the kitchen where Emma, Luke and Ruby were a few minutes later and Lily smiles apologetically at the latter as Regina tells Emma that sadly her couch was unsalvageable but she managed to restore the singed spots on the carpet, and that she’s the one that will drive Henry to his friend’s house the next morning. Meanwhile Lily checks out the integrity of her jacket to avoid eye contact, but just as they’re about to leave she tugs on Regina’s arm so she will hold for a moment and she can and lay a kiss on Ruby’s cheek quickly before they disappear.
Emma laughs when they’re gone and Ruby glares – I can’t believe she would literally rather be set on fire than kiss you

- One of these days I will kill you and tell Snow another rabid wolf did it.
Henry Mills was every bit her mother’s son, he had waited until Regina had gone to spend her morning with her friend Kathryn, and had made Lily sit with her to watch a very accurate documentary on dragon lore, while he made a show of cleaning around by his own volition; only to then inform her that Granny’s was having two-for-the-price-of-one pizzas and they could easily go and just eat one and a half so Regina could think they ate half and stop pestering them about their triple servings for a day. And it made sense, truly, how could she deny him anything with his sound logic and his mischievous smile?

So, they walk into Granny’s dinner a bit after noon and he rushes in to place their order, bypassing every single costumer that wants to say hello to the young prince and ignoring his own mothers sitting in a booth by the end of the establishment. Maleficent and Lily both pause though knowing Regina is in there as soon as they cross the door, it’s a dominating scent, it always has been intoxicating in Mal’s opinion, they both turn in sync and see her sitting in her table with what seems like a horde of friends.

– Huh. That’s some weird shit. That’s the table I avoided like the plague in high school. - She claps Mal in the shoulder before retreating to join Henry in crowding Ruby and Mal sighs, they had a plan and she had spent every single minute of the day playing the perfect victim, it was a text-book scam they’d run.

She debates sitting in the bar by them while they get the giddiness out of their system but surely, it would be rude to ignore Regina. It’s that, and only that that drags her to the booth where she’s sitting and interrupts her mid-joke – Darling.

Regina’s gaze shifts from the blonde sitting closest to her, Kathryn, she recognizes, and turns to her with a beaming smile – Mal! Some of you don’t know Mal, right? This is Mal, my… Mal. – She motions with her arm towards her and she nods softly, dragons don’t wave.

Heads turn towards her while Emma cackles and tacks on – She’s your wife and you know it. Some of them laugh and Mal can only tilt her head as Regina disappears from her seat and appears next to her, touching her arm – Yes, I suppose so. – Mal wants to smile at that, but she’s still dumbfounded at the sheer number of strangers looking at her. Regina starts pointing at one of them sitting in a chair clearly dragged from another table when they didn’t fit in the booth of which Regina would never have been able to extricate herself if it weren’t by magic – This is Tink, we’re old friends – Mal nods again, smells like fairy – This is Ingrid, the local ice cream queen.

- Oh, fuck you, I could hand you your ass any day Apples– That one really gets a response from the group and Regina hums

- Henry would loathe me melting you.

Emma pipes in again after answering a text – My money’s on Ingrid. We’ve all seen you burn things already, she has the element of freezing surprise.

So, an ice witch, interesting. Regina keeps going though, after the space she left on the cushioned seat are Kathryn and Emma and then, in another mismatched chair, she points to another one – and
Cruella of course – who she hadn’t recognized because, mysterious as ever, she was completely still facing in the opposite direction and now blonde, apparently. Maybe she didn’t find white dye in Storybrooke.

- Lovely to meet you all – They all answer accordingly and she manages a smile – Mind If I steal her for a while?

- Well you already have! – The fairy, she hates fairies.

Regina spots Henry on the bar and walking towards him, and Mal follows closely behind, forcing herself to not turn back to see these women interact to each other when Regina’s gone and after Henry tries for a lie that Lily dismantles accidentally she recovers from the shock before she can be chastised and pulls Regina away again

- I must say, when you claimed you loved my hair I felt as if we had something special. Now I don’t know where we stand.

Regina laughs and leans into her – How quaint, the ancient dragon, jealous.

- Ancient? How dare you? The fairy is older than me, I’m sure. – Regina chuckles and kisses the corner of her mouth like this is a laughing matter – This is not unjustified behavior, you have a harem!

- Yes of course, I have six houses across the town for my six wives.

- This is a pattern, Regina – She turns back to the table, they mingle just fine without Regina, although it looks like a special event, blonde women across the realms have gathered to discuss their experience – This is the behavior of a serial killer.

- I am a mass murderer, there is a difference – She laughs again as Mal frowns at her and she gets a kiss in what she hopes is an apology for something, but it’s more one of the ones she gets when she tries to explain why the man in the discovery channel is going all wrong about surviving in the wild, she cannot be thought of as cute, not in public. But Regina smiles brightly at her and she knows she’s going to hear about her endearing jealousy for at least a week – Would you like to join us?

- I cannot inflate your numbers, we will resemble a cult.

Regina starts retreating to her table then with one arm outstretched and the other one between them puling at her hand –one by one, without prompting, they felt the call and joined the table.

- Is there one more blonde woman in this town?

- I do not know, but if there is, she too will come.

- That is terrible wording.

- You’re the first testimony, write something good for mass tomorrow?

She huffs, forcing herself to keep a straight face, at least this time she has the wolf as witness to Regina’s childishness – I am going to make sure our children don’t eat themselves into a stupor.

She turns to leave but Regina pulls her by the hand -Henry knows better than to eat anything more than two slices of pizza and a soda. Join us. – Mal huffs but Regina smiles at her again like she’s oh so amused – please.
Ruby might be close but she’s not paying attention to anyone outside Lily though, laughing at some joke while many clients frown on the bar waiting to order something quick, Granny comes out of the kitchen to serve them and Henry, and they get to work on their meal without a care in the world about her whereabouts and with the way Regina is looking at her… she might as well.

She pulls a chair from a nearby table and wedges it between Emma and Cruella, Regina looks at her oddly for a second but disappears from her side and back in her assigned seat as the center of the table and Kathryn starts chatting with her almost immediately. Mal steals the dry martini right out of Cruella’s hand, she takes a sip and then returns it – You’ve joined the groupies? I’m surprised

- And you know the word groupie. – She takes a sip – I suppose I would know how you came to learn that one if we were still in touch.

- Oh, the harpy sounds hurt – She fishes the drink again and drinks it on one go before motioning for another one to a nearby waitress. If she’s gonna interact she should do it fast so she makes eye contact with Kathryn first, a friendly face that won’t snark back - So if today was the annual convention of Regina’s friends, where is Snow White? Is this indeed about hair color?

Emma snorts over her glass of soda well before Kathryn can explain – Regina, the blonde whisperer.

- Miss Swan, do remember who pays your salary. I don’t think you’d fare well rationing your meals to only one burger per lunch.

She rolls her eyes – Okay everyone, let’s go around the table and share why we hate Snow aka my mom aka the world’s worst baby namer – She pauses for a moment for the dramatic flair perhaps? And then explains - David named me.

- Your name was supposed to be Emma Ruth. – Regina replies

- I told you that in confidence, Regina Catalina. – She smirks and Regina rolls her eyes

- it’s hardly a secret if it was proclaimed in every ceremony held in a castle in front of hundreds of people.

They can do this for hours, Mal knows, and everyone on the table seems to as well because Kathryn clamps a hand over Regina’s arm and they sigh in relief - It’s not that she wasn’t invited, it’s that this was supposed to be Regina and me, and everyone else just sat down fortuitously. Calling her seems unnecessary. I’m sure there are other friends of Regina’s absent as well.

Mal nods at her, if only she could go back in time and see Cruella approach them, the ice witch laughs to her right – Oh please, you hate Snow White. She stole your husband, is it?

Mal’s eyebrow shoots up at that, that’s a new tale for her. Kathryn takes a sip of whatever is in her glass – He was not mine, Regina Catalina’s curse made a mess of things… but I do not approve of her approach regardless. Whatever did she do to you? Everyone knows you don’t serve her the good ice cream but no one has the heart to tell her.

- Well I happened to know Emma before all her angst and suffering could turn into a sense of humor so no, I’m not a fan of the people who chose their subjects over their child. And I reserve the right to make a bad batch of Ice cream for people who don’t deserve the good kind. – Regina laughs by herself at that.

- Aw… thanks Ingrid. – Emma jokes again, as always. Mal had never seen it as a coping
mechanism but now that it was mentioned she supposes it’s what she does, it’s more positive than Lily’s humor most of the time as well – If you hadn’t said all the weird magic-is-real things, I would’ve loved to be adopted by you when I was 12, best foster mom hands down.

There’s another story there that Mal should ask for later; her eyes meet Regina’s across the table, she always looks conflicted when it comes to Emma Swan or Lily, even about Henry himself… she pipes in –She did steal an egg from me so her absence is appreciated.

- She’s an obnoxious do-gooder with a terrible sense of fashion, Miss Swan herself is more elegant.

The woman in question nods solemnly – Wow holy shit Cruella, to hear that from my favorite puppy-pelt coat designer… I’m honored. I really feel like we, Regina’s blondes, are bonding this afternoon.

They all laugh, even Mallory watched 101 Dalmatians as a child in Germany, locked inside after a big snow, school cancelled for the day. Who knows if they had that wherever the fairy is from but she enjoys Emma’s quip nonetheless and Cruella huffs and drinks Mal’s martini this time around.

They settle for a while and easily chat some more for a few moments, turns out Cruella was living in the cabin still and had decided to drop her pretense of finding the author. She would’ve never accomplished it without Ursula and Mal had never intended to do anything else but find her daughter, she was doing well though, it seemed Storybrooke was where villains found peace and odd assortments of friends at last. Regina locks eyes with her again after a while and they hold each other’s gaze for a few seconds with warm smiles before she speaks again softly, maybe only Mal can hear her, or maybe she’s reading her lips - I believe Henry is going for a third slice.

She laughs low in her throat and moves to stand but Emma tries to stop her – Hey I’ll talk to him, he knows he should pretend to know better when Regina knows how many slices he’s had, you know?

Emma had heard too, and she’s smiling amicably at her, Mal doesn’t laugh at her jokes easily but the savior can be particularly charming when her audience is willing so Mal rewards her with a chuckle but shakes her head no – It’s fine Emma, I’m the one who had to sort out lunch today and I let myself get lured into his trap. I will face the consequences and drag the children home.

Mal stands and Emma cheers her on – All right, three moms! We should annoy him in a triangle formation now. – That one was weak at best so she only looks at her unamused, better to give her something to strive for. She’s distracted anyways and tacks on - Wait… am I Lily’s mom too? Are we consolidating this union?

- Dear, you’re one more of the children.

Mal chuckles again and turns back to Regina, who’s smiling softly at her no doubt loving someone else reinforcing her dietary limitations on a wee boy in his growing stage. Mal smiles brightly right back at her and nods softly – I will see you at home, then.

- Yes, darling.

A cacophony of noises comes from the table but only the fairy’s one sounds like it has a negative connotation. After they all stop their teasing and as Henry packs up his slice on the pizza box, right before she manages to pry Lily’s attention from the wolf, Mal can hear the fairy add on – honestly, why did my fairy dust fail?
I re wrote this like three times and it still felt off... Sorry if it's off.
Hey guys! When I uploaded the chapter before this one It didn't show up first in my search sorted by recent-ness, so maybe It didn't show up to you guys either so check if you read that one (you have a harem!) before you read this one! Happy reading!

Emma worried they were regressing back to their teenage selves when Lily texted her to come over to play with the PlayStation 4 that Henry had -ever gracious- claimed as theirs instead of his, (it’s not like he didn’t have other consoles to enjoy when she was using that one) but still, she got on her bike and drove to Regina’s, no, Lily’s house to play videogames on a Friday afternoon after she had done all her homework aka the Sheriff’s station paperwork. She gets there with at least two bags of chips since they live under Regina’s totalitarian regime and all the junk food they have in storage is the healthy variety and she will be damned if she’s forced to consume sea-salt chips from organic sourced potatoes or something like that.

They have been sitting for maybe an hour or so before Regina comes in and motions the crumbs right off her couch and into Emma’s lap, Lily chuckles and Emma frowns – Rude.

- Lily, I think you can learn some basic magic to clean after Miss Swan.
- Rude.

Lily pauses the game and stands – What like, now? – Emma looks up at her for a moment and then turns at whiplash speed to look up at Regina nodding – I mean, shit. – Lily finishes, her leg fidgeting nervously

Emma knows Regina’s mostly used to Lily cursing for what seems like no reason but she doesn’t believe Regina’s lip will ever stop the minute downturn at it, she wants to laugh but Lily starts hastily collecting their glasses and the bags of chips like she actually intends to straight up ditch her for this magic lesson – Can I watch?

- No!
- No.

They both turn to her with matching glares and she grins in her seat – Okay. This is so a fantasy, now one of you slap me while the other keeps glaring. Regina, you gotta call me sheriff.

Lily kicks her where she can reach – Don’t you have any other friends? Thought you were adored in this town

She makes a show of thinking for a few seconds – oh, Ruby! we can go talk about how you’re not giving it up. – She laughs boisterously at her own joke, as she does

Lily groans as she exits the room with their mess and Emma burst in laughter again when she looks up to see Regina’s eyes close into slits – You’ve grown bold. I liked the Emma who only looked me in the eye to fight me much more.
- Your daughter is transferring her bad-ass attitude to me via Bluetooth as we speak, remember?

- I need her to be focused for this. You can’t watch. – Emma nods, understanding that and just trying to mess with Regina, as she does – And you haven’t managed to turn your hair any other color, so maybe you can work on that.

She groans at her magical shortcomings – Look, we all know you just want me to do that so you can stop dreaming about me. It’s fine. I’m sure Mal doesn’t know. – Regina gives her a slow once over and turns back to inspect the couch without a word, always denying Emma the satisfaction of a laugh, Emma stands up to dust her pants – Did I ever have a chance?

- Nor you, nor Snow, nor your grandfather before you. – Emma raises an eyebrow at that and Regina pauses – Not a great deal of appeal in your bloodline. David with a gag in his mouth, perhaps… lord knows I tried.

She pauses for a second to frown but recovers quickly - The Evil Queen did look kinda like she’s into weird stuff when I went to the past. Kinky.

She hums as she sits instead – Imagine what you too could be doing if you ever learn to fully control your magic. You won’t ever find handcuffs that strong.

- So, you’ve thought about the handcuffs? This is where you start calling me Sheriff. – She grins and puts her hand on her belt, patting the badge for good measure, she can almost see Regina struggling to keep her smile at bay. – Safe word yellow bug ‘cause I know that’s a fantasy of yours you’d never admit to out loud.

- Sheriff Swan, - Mal passes by with a wave and a plate of food and Regina watches her go, in a very fixated manner – believe me when I tell you, your handcuffs would be a quirky afternoon occurrence in this house, at best.

Mal cackles halfway up the stairs and Emma turns towards the sound quickly while her brain that hadn’t yet given up does instantly at that, she turns back to see Regina smirking at her in a way that always reminds her this is a woman that has killed people with her bare hands. And her now girlfriend-wife as well. Emma nods – Right. Yeah, I lose today. I mean, fuck.

- You’re always a worthy opponent.

- Yeah? What’s the consolation price? I’d settle for footage!

Regina tuts at her but she still watches her, finally with a smile on her face, the wrong kind of smile, the smug amusement smile – Now what would your boyfriend and your very good friend Lily say if they heard you make this kind of requests? -She waves her hand and the crumbs fallen on the floor start levitating right out of the window in a show of powerful laziness.

- I’d say - Lily coming out of nowhere with soapy water still on her hand, pushes her right back into the couch – Dude what the fuck? You have a… dude you’re seeing. Stop flirting with my fucking mother

- She just admitted to trying to screw David and tying up your other mother god knows how, and this is what you’re focusing on? Focus on her thinking Snow wants her or something of equal what the fuck in this conversation.
You wanted to fight?

Regina plows out of her office after a day of absolute bureaucratical torture, her assistant sits as stiffly and quietly as possible but doesn’t manage to stay out of her radar since she glares when the phone rings and he doesn’t immediately pick up the receiver, and then dares to tell the person on the other side that she hasn’t left yet, she stops dead in her tracks and her hand fists tightly making the young man correct his statement and tremble as she leaves without a goodbye. It’s not always easy to work for the Evil Queen but the pay is great and she had been getting nicer every year if he’s honest, days like this aren’t that common anymore.

She marches down the building and tears through the doors all but ignoring everyone in her path, hoping that at the very least she could get home before the looming storm fell on top of her; she tosses her bag in the car and sits down, makes sure to slam the door just enough to make a point to the universe but not damage her car… but the universe gives her her message back when she turns the key and her car can only cough a bit before sputtering to silence for whatever ungodly reason a perfectly well-kept car does that on a Wednesday afternoon before a thunderstorm in an already-empty parking lot. Fuck the car then, she leaves in a cloud of smoke and appears in front of her door, clenches her fist again when she realizes there’s no keys in her hand, no phone, no wallet, no bag; she could leave them there she thinks, but then, some of the new hooligans that don’t recognize her car could be stupid enough to break the Evil Queen’s window to get at her leather bag and she’d be pushed to murder yet again. She goes back to her car to see if god forbid Henry left some of his expensive trinkets in the back seat as he’s prone to do and to pick up her bag and then back to the house with her bag in her hand, appearing inside this time and only a bit tired from the burst of magic she just used.

She lands with her eyes closed, mid-sigh and opens them to see a very startled Lily hurling down the hallway towards her with a coat in one hand and her helmet in the other one, keys jangling somewhere off view. She manages to miss her by crashing into the wall at the same speed she was coming with – Shit, Regina fuck! – She speeds by her and waves – Bye! I’m late as fuck. – She slams the door behind her and Regina’s hand closes again, the black scuff on her wall’s paint fixing itself and her bag’s strap crinkling with the force of her grip on it, she doesn’t even manage to finish her second sigh before she walks to the living room to see Henry doubled over hastily packing up a bag of things he’s sprawled on the couch – Mom! Emma’s got the game tonight, new TV you know, I’m going there.

- And did you plan on informing me? You’re halfway out of the door – She walks further in to see if he’s at least sheepish about it

- I sent a text? – Her phone is dead, had been since a few hours into the hellish day, a phone call so long the damned thing was heated by her ear before it simply died.

She would have told him so if he hadn’t surfaced from behind the couch, sitting up with only half a head of short hair sporting the team’s logo or whatever on it, dyed, bright red and yellow. Regina freezes – Henry Daniel Mills, what on earth happened to your head?! He freezes too, the couch between them. He had forgotten mostly, and Regina hadn’t been answering her texts but she had been much more light-hearted lately but by the look on her face… he’d fucked up – It’s the finals.

She grits her teeth at him like she hadn’t since he was insisting she was a fairytale character every night at supper - Where’s Maleficent? I asked her to take you to the barbershop.
- Oh – He swallows, torn but knowing whatever he says Maleficent will somehow undo, the woman doesn’t lie – She took me… she just thought it was all right.

Regina drops her bag by Henry’s and takes off her coat – Leave. And you better come back tomorrow with a haircut a son of mine would have. You should know better.

- Got it, I’ll google medieval royal family haircuts. – She doesn’t crack as much as a smile in his direction when she turns to look at him when he speaks, he swallows and moves in for a hug that gets reciprocated with as little enthusiasm as he’s ever felt from his mother, he plucks a beanie out of his bag and covers his hair – Sorry mom. – He’ll have to wait for Emma to come and transport them magically outside, the wind biting at his skin. At least she’ll think it’s awesome, before he has to ask her to shave his head in the morning.

Regina marches around the first floor in the house to find it empty, but the disappointment doesn’t make her lose any of her steam. She takes on the stairs slowly, making it to the master bedroom where Maleficent is simply lying around with a book and music coming from the speakers, some piano concerto Regina can’t pinpoint.

She smiles lazily from her spot when she sees Regina but the woman doesn’t even try to be civil. She shuts the bedroom door behind her – Why did you allow the barber to do that to my son?

She barely sits up at Regina’s anger, being well versed in it as she is. She raises an eyebrow - Well hello dearest, my day lacks any emotion or grandeur unless you’re here to gift me your company, thanks for asking.

- He could have gotten there himself - Regina moves towards the bed, the attempt at a joke doing nothing to her - but I specifically asked you to go with him so this kind of thing doesn’t happen.

- The boy won’t die over a haircut, Regina– She dismisses the issue with a flourish of her hand and goes back to her novel –Seems like you’re being dramatic for the sake of it. You do let him choose his own hair styles at the very least, or don’t you?

- Do not tell me how to raise my child. – The mere accusation that she somehow cages Henry appalls her, so she raises her voice and Maleficent sits up sharply at that but she goes on – There are things you won’t understand.

- Oh? Because I am yet to raise any child, you mean? – Regina tenses for a moment but doesn’t have the decency to stammer out an apology, Mal stands from the bed then, book forgotten in the middle of it, she approaches Regina slowly – I suppose It’s not all bad, I would’ve loathed having this conversation about the child I do share with you.

She scoffs - In this alternative universe you deemed necessary to include me in any decisions? What a refreshing change since you were planning on taking Lilith’s existence to your grave in this reality.

- Three decades locked in a cave make for a few good daydreaming hours, many Maleficents have had handled things in many ways in my mind. – Mal pauses the music from her phone on the nightstand and the big drops of water start rattling the windows over the bed, they stare at each other for a second or two before it seems like Regina decides that yes, this is what they’ll be doing for the night

She chuckles dryly – So you ran a few hundred scenarios and realized I would find out eventually if you brought her here, and that’s why you decided to cozy up to me so this would go much more smoothly for all of us?
She walks past Regina then, towards the bathroom, her back turned to her as she hums – The only hitch in my masterful plan was that I didn’t have any frame of reference for your child rearing abilities, but I believe neither did you when you decided to adopt Henry… I wonder, did Cora’s little princess have a lot of say when it came to her hair styles?

Regina marches up to her and Mal turns just in time to halt her advancement a hair breadth away, she holds her ground though, her eyes blazing and thunder resounding far away to back up her stance – Don’t you dare-

Mal interrupts her – You wanted to fight? This is what you get. I know you Regina, and you should know me by now. I am not your punching bag. – She snakes a hand up to her neck and pulls her in slightly – Go find a peasant to scold instead if you want to see someone quake and roll over before you.

Back in the Enchanted Forest all their fights reached a stale point, in which neither of them wanted to back out, one of them always disappeared for a while then. Running isn’t much of an appealing choice now, they’re both home in a way they weren’t before, she didn’t intentionally pick a fight but maybe she could’ve handled it more calmly. Regina huffs before her – I don’t want to fight, nor do I want anyone quaking.

Mal smirks her victory and tightens her hold on her neck, pushing her backwards towards the bed – What do you want then? Did you have an oh so terrible day? Are you stressed? Perhaps you can talk to the cricket about it. – Regina grits her teeth, still angry even after she forfeited the fight and Mal chuckles and uses her free hand to pick her up and carry her the rest of the way and tosses her in the bed – Let’s pace ourselves then, lest I fall asleep when you start bitching about it later and I end up a corpse because of it.

Mal turns a second to resume her music and she grunts when she turns back around to see a sharp heel aimed at her neck. – You are talking too much, taking too long. Maybe you’ll end up a corpse sooner than expected. – Regina rolls her ankle and Mal obliges slipping off the shoe and taking the other leg to do so as well.

- And who would entice young Henry to explore new haircuts then?

Regina hooks her feet under her arms to pull her in, in days like this she used to hack at trees with an axe deep in the forest back when the curse was still in place, then she moved on to burning them, she guesses hacking at Maleficent will do the trick now; not that Dr. Hopper would appreciate her still looking at things to hack at.

- I’m sorry – She looms over Mal’s form, laying on her chest as Regina looks for the scratches and blooming bruises and does her best to heal them all. It isn’t always like that, especially these days, and it has been worse, but sometimes it leaves a bad aftertaste in her mouth, she’s never dared mark anyone like she marks Mal.

Mal laughs under her and the movement causes her magic to lose track of a tender spot somewhere up by the ribs – You did nothing I didn’t thoroughly enjoy. But I am surprised small-town politics can be so stressful, darling.

The bites and scratches over her own body need attention too but she chooses to ignore them to press a kiss to Mal’s shoulder – I should’ve never talked to you as I did. Henry chooses to see you as a parent, we’re lucky, he’s not just my son anymore, – Mal turns to be able to look at Regina and she uses her finger to trace her collarbone – And I know keeping Lily a secret was the best option
at the time, I’ve made my peace with it.

- I don’t recall this kind of encounter ever being followed by heartfelt apologies – She takes Regina’s hand from her chest and squeezes softly – You’re not your mother, Regina. I was a fool to even imply it. I would choose no one else to fight about my children’s hair with. – She sits up slowly leaning towards Regina – And to be honest that cave was one of the nicest caves I’ve ever been held in, eight out of ten, my wing-span fit comfortably. We should visit one of these days and I’ll show you the little scribbles I made in one of the rocks. - Regina cringes before a laugh escapes her, Mal snakes a hand around her waist and pulls her closer to lay a kiss on her cheek as she does – Now that I fucked the tension out of you, we can make slow sweet love, your turn to be on top.

- Oh dear, I didn’t have lunch. I’m starving. Reschedule?

- Regina! You couldn’t at least find a snack before coming up here to pick a fake fight with me?
Lily's scared, there had been four courses to dinner already: Lily’s favorite meal handcrafted by Regina with artisan ingredients, a designer bacon cheeseburger she calls it, she had two of those, hell she had been served the two without having to ask. Then Regina had followed with Henry’s favorite dish, some lobster-based thing because he had been rich his whole life so he knew about lobsters apparently, and the poor fool had been blindsided by that, already full with his burger he opted to have only two of the small thingies as Lily downed five. She wanted to goad him, more than once he’d sat there in awe as she ate three times what he had and had told her he wishes he could eat that much, but before she could he put on a smirk as his gamble paid off and Regina went in the kitchen and came back with pie. He had looked conflicted, like he was making a very hard choice, he chose to have half a slice only, a smart kid, that pie wasn’t his favorite but Lily’s moan let him know it was hers, so something was coming for him. and It did, Lily watched as Mal stood briefly and came back with a red velvet cheesecake topped with cocoa, beautifully presented, and Regina followed suit with a wine bottle, and even served Henry a small bit. He was ready, he had been playing his human cards right and he knew he could get at least two servings in before his jeans started pushing at his stomach and he dug in with much more self-constrain he usually had, drawing every bite and already eyeing the rest of the lobster things for later.

So, she sits watching Henry savor every bit of his cake as she skims the cocoa off her serving and she dares a sip of the wine, even she has to admit shit was crazy good. It’s probably one of the good ones, the ones Emma doesn’t touch. She resists the urge to swallow it in one go – Is it Henry’s birthday? I’m sorry dude, when were you born?

He can’t talk around his mouthful of cake and Regina sips at a coffee cup materialized out of nowhere while Mal side eyes her, her eyes say These are your kids while Regina’s say my what a lovely chandelier I got up in the ceiling where I can’t make eye contact with you. So, Lily knows something is up by that exchange. Henry swallows and smiles up at her – I’m an August baby! – Gross, January all the way. – He pulls a face at her and she snatches his wine cup and pours it on her own making him squeak, she laughs at his noise and turns to watch Regina, who usually gets misty eyed anytime they interact but doesn’t do anything but drum her fingers on the table

He’s oblivious to it - Hey! Not fair.

- You wouldn’t even be getting any wine if I wasn’t here, this was pity wine, mom didn’t want you to cry wine, you’re the only kid in the room wine – She tips the glass to him and winks

- Speaking of which… - Regina’s voice breaks into their conversation and Lily turns to her again, gleefully drinking the wine in one go, making Henry huff and shove another forkful of cake into his mouth – Mal and I have been talking about our family, that we have here, and the time we were apart, and we have reached an agreement, that can seem beneficial to us but would also be enriching for you both, and we hope it won’t be cause for trouble or discontent… of course if it is, we want you to be frank and we will re-asses-

- We would like to have another child. – Mal cuts her off and then drops her hand on top of hers on the table.

It doesn’t ward off the sigh besides her, though -Not like that. Jesus Christ, Mal.
- We had a small window, before Henry goes into a coma after the meal you used to stall for the last hour or so.

He stops to consider but turns back to his cake, although with much less enthusiasm than he had a moment before, Lily stays silent as well, doesn’t do anything but pour herself another cup of wine, a tall one. Regina fidgets slightly – It goes without saying, we would not be trying to replace either of you in any form. And if it’s something you don’t agree with, or you don’t want… we can talk about it.

- Is it like an actual baby that’s yours? Or an adopted one that can be like… three?

Lily has always liked the kid even if she resents him a little for his continuous stream of lobster meals that should’ve been hers, he makes smart questions. She watches Regina stand from her seat and move to the one closer to his to take one of his hands on hers. - Henry… you are mine, ours... and Emma’s. It’s not all about blood.

He shrugs – Yeah, yeah, I know. But still, like nine months from now on baby or one month from now on baby, or eight-year-old you’re sending letters to online…? I just want to know.

- Since we know it is possible, we’d like to try for a baby- Mal turns to her, looking at her like she knows all her secrets and she sees right through her silence, or some shit like that. Lily hates when she gets all ancient wisdom, it raises her shackles, Mal continues holding up involuntary eye contact with her – if we all agree.

- It’s okay I guess, we have another room. – He pushes his cake around and Regina looks at Maleficent over his head, it doesn’t bode well if he’s given up on cake; after a second he takes another bite though – But you have to convince Emma to not have another baby because that’d be too many siblings too fast, plus you know, Uncle Neal… Can we adopt a kid kinda my age? Way cooler, plus Emma says that’s when they get really sad they’ll never be adopted so any one of them would be thrilled.

Regina smiles at him softly and glances at Lily quickly before looking at Mal, who bites the bullet – You know Henry, dragons are quite numerous back in our land, but we’re rarely seen together in colonies or things of the like, we’ve only family to keep us company. So, we’re prone to want to procreate. I could easily adopt a kid your age, even more so if his mother is beautiful and cooks wonderfully, in fact perhaps I’ll find a warm cave nearby and invite you into it, but I would prefer to also raise a child, and children your age are already mostly raised… although some are luckier than others sadly.

Lily makes a noise between a scoff and a chuckle and they turn to her, she stands – I don’t know why we’re doing this, you don’t need our permission to fuck.

Regina deflates on her seat – Lily…

- Sorry, language. Some of us were raised shittily – She motions to Mal with one hand as if to concede her a point and starts moving away from the table – Put me down as a none of her business in your poll results.

She’s halfway out the door for what seems like no damn reason when she hears Henry regaling Mal with the tale of how sad Emma Swan was after their year in New York when she found out her parents were having a new baby and how he thought maybe that’s what was wrong with Lily too, her bike keys tear into her skin with how hard she’s closed her fist around them, always being compared to Emma fucking Swan. She reaches the spot in the driveway where she usually leaves the bike and finds Regina leaning against it, looking grim. She huffs – What? I can’t leave now?
- We are talking about this. We knew it might be hard-

- Yeah yeah, Because fucking Emma couldn’t handle it. I'm good. - She has a limit, she can’t snatch the bike from right under Regina’s ass. But her car is parked outside in the street so she starts moving towards it and Regina appears right in front of her again, forgoing the dramatic mist and just popping into existence in her way – Look. I get it. It’s probably not even you, you had a kid already, who wants to do that shit twice? But Maleficent wants to and it’s okay. I’m good.

- Your hand is bleeding. – She takes it, heals it and doesn’t let it drop from her grasp so Lily snatches it again and Regina sighs – You know, my sister, Zelena… Mother didn’t deem keeping her worth it because she wasn’t of royal blood, I didn’t know about her but she knew about me. Would you like to meet her?

- What for? I was kidnapped, not given away. Different shit. I promise to never try to kill your baby.

Regina ignores that last part - She’s your aunt. Come meet her just for the sake of it.

She exhales slowly, and the minute she shows a hint of defeat around Regina she knows she’s gonna end up giving a mile instead of an inch or however the saying goes, like the afternoons she’s spent cleaning muck in her horse’s stall. She named him Puppets, so she’s the master of puppets, Henry didn’t get it. Regina puts an arm over her shoulders as best as she can and she fights the urge to smile at her, it is much harder to be tough around this one that around Mal. She guesses that’ll change if they do get a fucking baby and she learns to be as soft as this one can be.

They appear in a dark hallway and some woman looks up from her magazine, immediately glaring at them – It’s far from visiting hours. You can’t be here.

Regina hums - For old time’s sake, what’s one more after hours visit for a lowly civilian like me?

- We have rules for a reason, Regina.

- Don’t make me put you to sleep and wipe your memory, Amanda. Be a dear and open my sister’s cell. – The woman rolls her eyes and pushes a button, before going back to her magazine.

Lily follows Regina down the hallway and they peer into an open cell to find it empty, she leads her further down to a common room with some couches and coffee tables where they find Zelena sitting primly, expecting Regina at the very least

- Oh sissy, glad to see you! And who do we have here? Mother didn’t have any more offspring I hope, not like she would’ve made it past childhood with the way she’s dressed… could it be your child with the dragon perhaps?

- Who told you that? – Regina moves further into the room and sits across her sister, Lily follows and chooses a chair between them

- My mirrors saw a lot more than yours, you’d do well to remember that. – Zelena smirks and turns to inspect her face closely as she does the same to her, an aunt, The wicked witch of the west, how fucked up.

- You knew? For thirty years… and you didn’t think to inform me as a torture method before or as part of our new truce.
She laughs - You didn’t think to inform me, now did you?

Regina rolls her eyes and motions between them – Lily, meet your delightful aunt, Zelena. – They nod at each other and Regina turns to Lily – Do you want some privacy? – She shrugs and Zelena whistles

- Oh, are we here to bond over how horrible dear old sissy is?

- Thought you were older than her – It’s the first phrase she chooses to say to this particular family member and her eyes darken, she forgets sometimes, tough as she is, these are people who’ve actually committed murder more than once, this is an unofficial jail visitation she’s in. She’d beat the crap out a few people but nothing else.

Zelena cackles, though – Oh, I already like Lily more than the charming one. Do your magic, Reggie.

Regina rolls her eyes as she motions for the silence spell to envelop them and moves away to tinker with her phone meanwhile, Lily and Zelena get acquainted but small talk isn’t their forte at all, as she explains to Zelena why Regina thought it was time they meet, almost at 10pm on a Thursday a little over half an hour goes by in comfortable conversation. It seems Regina got bored of texting because suddenly Mal appears with the cloud of purple smoke Regina favors so much and sits by her on the couch she’d moved away from them, putting an arm over her shoulders and using the other hand to pull one of Regina’s to lay a kiss on the back of it.

Zelena gags on air and motions with her arms so Regina would see her putting a finger into her open mouth to gag again, Lily laughs at her antics but stops dead in her tracks and raises an eyebrow as Regina gives Zelena a middle finger back. – Man, what the fuck was that?

She smiles at Lily - You’ll see, siblings aren’t quite as bad, even if your mother raised them after she didn’t have the decency to raise you. Don’t tell her I said that – She flicks her hair back from her front – My reputation would be ruined.

Lily turns to look at them again, they look exhausted, probably because of the kitchen extravaganza; she’s catered four-course meals before and it ain’t easy. And the way Regina leans into Mal and the taller woman uses her head as support for her own, resting her lips by the side of her hair, they look like someone died but they weren’t close enough to them to cry. She did that, probably, Henry’s reaction wasn’t excellent but at least he was only worrying about the space a baby would take up in his life, she slumps against her seat, eyes still on her mothers – You know I was just gonna disappear a few hours while I processed. I can’t ask them not to have a fucking baby. Who am I, Satan?

Zelena looks pointedly at them too and sighs a long, suffering sigh – Mrs. Dragon doesn’t let people do that in peace anymore, it’s all about discussing feelings and emotions now, and you’re very clearly not convinced, yet… Does that happen often? – Lily nods and Zelena’s eyes narrow – And to think I was going to seduce that Robin fellow if my original murder plan didn’t work out. What a waste of time.

Chapter End Notes

Anyways, did we all hear them say that Lily's dad is El Zorro in that series finale or was I hearing voices out of desperation?
Mal shuffles into the room quietly, her feet socked and headphones in her ears, she sits on the couch, sideways, her legs settling across Regina’s easily and she sinks into the couch, without sparing a look to the movie Regina is watching she goes back to her playlist and closes her eyes, that is until Regina pulls up her sweatpants and settles her cold hands on her skin, Mal hisses and Regina chuckles and starts massaging

- Why? I did nothing to you, I did not deserve that.

She laughs again and pauses the movie, turning as much as she can under Mal’s legs – This is a strange level of silence for this house. - Now that there's more of them, Regina can still recall the tomb-like silence that used to dwell the house the year before or after the curse broke, at least in her vault the birds cackling outside kept her company.

Mal returns the gesture by removing one earbud and burrowing into the couch further, bending her legs a bit and pulling at Regina with them – Lily’s on a date with the little wolf, Eugenia just messaged me – She shakes her phone in the air to make her point – Apparently Ruby sprinted out of her place in a, and I’m quoting, skimpy dress to get in a blue muscle car that must be our hooligan’s.

- Hooligan? – She slips her hand up her calf all the way to her knee and Mal huffs again – Granny texts you about our hooligan?

Mal nods – She’s also stated that Henry is currently sharing a meal with a redhead girl and I happen to know it’s their third date, confidential source- Regina moves her still cold hands under her socks at the speed of light and Mal kicks at her – I have been sworn to secrecy. Telling you this much is a breach of privacy.

Regina tries to shuffle away but Mal traps her and she gives up after a few minutes, henry deserves his little secrets too she supposes – Well, Miss Swan texted me getting some tonight, please keep the kid, finger gun emoji, ok hand emoji, water drops emoji, then no, really, I shaved, can you keep him? I suppose that romance is in the air. – Mal smiles at her and she runs her hands up and down the length of her calves again, at least warming them a bit this time. She speaks after another moment of silence – Do you want me to take you out?

- I’m perfectly content here. Well, if you could warm the icicles you have for fingers… then the night would be perfect. – Regina pinches her leg and she smirks both at the pain and at Regina's expression

- Is this what we are now? Local mothers of two fall asleep on their couch at – she checks her watch – 9:30 pm on a Friday night.

- There’s no one I’d rather become. But if you want me to put you on my back and drop you from a dangerous height to pick you up before you hit the ground, playfully of course, you are always welcome to ask.

- That’s why I locked you up for three decades. Attempted murder.

- You loved it. In fact – She moves quickly and picks Regina up easily standing with her in her arms, she yelps and Mal’s phone falls off her lap, the one ear bud holding on for dear life. – There’s a few, elevated sights of the forest around this town I’m sure not even you have seen. You
better summon a coat, darling.

She starts moving towards the back door and Regina saves her phone for her – We are not leaving this house in our pajamas. Maleficent! – She summons the coat and a pair of boots when they make it outside and there’s no sign of stopping – Is this honestly what we’re doing?

Mal puts her down only to turn into a dragon, straining some of the trees that stand on the edge of the property and tilts her head Regina’s way, she nudges her with a wing and sets it down on the ground for her to step onto, to help her up. Regina’s fighting her grin, it’s always been like this, she says she’s not that keen to dying a few leagues up in the air and then she’s telling her to go higher and faster. She finally steps up and Mal raises her wing slowly to let her settle onto her back comfortably, when she’s found the spot she likes to hold on to she pats Mal and they’re off in the air.

It takes less than 10 minutes, and the wind whipping at her face is both the best and worst thing of the flight, they reach someplace over the mist covering the town and they come out covered in droplets, it’s calm up there, the wind carries them without Mal making any effort, that is until she dives through the clouds again, suddenly, the drop making Regina’s stomach churn.

Mal drops her off in a mossy rock and turns right back with a smirk – Darling, are you all right? You look flustered.

Regina tries to regulate her breathing, her hands in her knees and her head down – I could kill you. Lily’s learnt most of what she needs from you, I could end your life. – She takes deep breaths and stands upright again.

Mal laughs at her, wet hair finally out of place and curling way beyond control, pupils blown wide and cheeks red from excitement… or frostbite, her chest moving frantically under her long coat that gives place to red pajama pants and snow boots, it’s ridiculous. Mal pulls her to her with a wide smile and kisses her, for a few seconds, feels her calm down under her touch, before dropping to a sitting position and pulling Regina down with her to sit between her legs – Look.

There’s a big expanse of forest before them and far away the entire town can be seen, the clock tower barely visible as the highest structure in Storybrooke, they can see further away as well, Regina guesses that well over the orange line they can cross freely now. The town is cornered against the sea, surrounded by the thick greenery up to the shore, and over to that side, the moon reflects on the water. She’s only seen it on the small model that rests in Town Hall, no flights would provide her with this view and hell, she’d never even been in a plane.

She leans back into Maleficent and summons the woman’s slippers to cover her socked feet, she laughs and kisses her neck, moving the sopping hair out of her way – Thank you, it is bad form to get dirt on your fluffy socks.

- The big, bad dragon; mistress of all evil… saying the word fluffy.

- Only in front of the Evil Queen, who makes me feel fuzzy– She encircles both arms around her – And who can tell no one without me revealing we bought matching fluffy socks and slippers and that’s why you want them intact. Mutually assured destruction, love.

She huffs without taking her eyes off the scenery, Mal’s warmth reaching her through her clothing, the part of her hair in contact with Mal’s cheek drying up faster than the rest – This is amazing Mal, thank you.

- You’re amazing. To build all that from nothing… to make Lily out of love even when you were
so broken, to obtain Henry out of material coming from Snow White and the Dark one… - Regina chuckles – You’re extraordinary.

- Me? You forgave me, after I stole from you, cost you your child, your sanity for three decades… You’re the one that amazes me daily. – She keeps quiet for a while and Mal sits peacefully behind her, they’ve gone over all that so many times she doesn’t feel the need to reassure Regina that it’s not her fault anymore. Mal’s head rests on Regina’s and her heartbeat calms to a lull, she’s just about to doze off for a minute when the brunette moves and drops her head so she jerks away to see Regina turned slightly, smiling at her startled expression, she puts a hand on her arm in an almost awkward angle – Mal, will you marry me?

- Oh? – Regina holds up her hand and a ring appears, in a small ornate box sits a pristine gold band with a red stone that reflects the light of the moon both inwards and outwards somehow, Mal’s not a fan of wearing jewelry but by the gods she loves looking at it. She pries her eyes from the ring and looks up to Regina’s hopeful smile and melts a bit, leaning closer – Are you sure? – She nods – I don’t need you to marry me, Regina. I know you have a bad history with it. – Regina shakes her head dismissively and smiles wide again – I told Henry I would consult with him when it was time for this

Regina laughs and turns even more in her arms – Just say yes.

- Yes. Christ, of course!

- You’re a catholic now? Maybe- She doesn’t get to finish her sentence. Mal kisses her soundly pulling her closer by the waist. When they part Regina opens the small box again and slips the ring in her finger, adjusting it as she puts it in. It glows brighter for a moment and Mal moves her fingers as if testing her hand with its new accessory.

- This cannot be from this land…

Regina takes her hand and lays a kiss by the ring – It’s my father’s, it was his mother’s before him. He proposed to my mother with another one, he said this one was born to be given out of love, not obligation.

Mal fixes her eyes on the ring again with a bright smile, watching the rays of light play inside the stone – I can assure you, no date tonight wound up better than this one.

- I sure hope so, because if we get home and Henry’s engaged I’m holding you personally accountable.
One hour of this, half an hour of spells.

- Wow a lot of shit happened huh? – Emma hovers the small dandelion around and around her head like some annoying bug and Regina hums. -So, you’re getting married, like really married

Regina nods, sitting on a garden chair close by – Eventually.

- And you’re trying for a baby? Like, real out-of-Mal’s-vagina baby?
- Eventually.

- Am I the maid of honor AND godmother?

- Shut the fuck up! – Lily’s own dandelion, still squarely rooted on the ground catches fire and she sighs, a long sigh and drops to the grass by it, putting her arm above her eyes.

Regina glares at Emma from where she sits, the blonde has the decency to drop the dandelion and sit by Lily’s head silently, and the woman huffs and sits up – Are we done with this shit for today?

- Not until you lift something. – Regina speaks firmly but gives her a soft look that Lily hates even more than straight up disappointment

- Well we’re having a sleep over in the lawn then! – she takes what’s left of the dandelion and yanks it off the ground to throw it far away, but it barely makes it a foot forward.

- Do you want Emma to go?

Emma bristles – Hey hey hey, why is this Emma’s fault?

- Miss Swan, your presence is a distraction Lily initially asked for but, as we all do, she seems to be regretting that now.

- How dare you imply that people don’t like me after a while? With my issues-

- Emma, - she starts off softly but turns back to her firm voice, the mom voice -either take practice seriously or go. You need to be doing glamours, not displacement spells.

Emma huffs and drops to the ground much like Lily had done a few minutes ago, summoning one of Henry’s forgotten action figures and flipping it over and over – Fine. But this one stays glamoured and you explain to the kid why.

Regina rolls her eyes at Emma and Lily takes the moment to stand but Regina holds a hand up - Lily, I know how frustrating this can be, but it is important. Besides like fire, levitation should come easily to you.

- Well, it doesn’t. – She flops down to lay besides Emma and Regina sighs above them both, why would she even agree to give them a joint magic lesson? Regina Mills has always been her own worst enemy. - Why can’t we be doing that? – Lily jerks a finger in the direction of David and Henry sparing with their swords, they’ve moved onto steel with dull edges, it was quite exciting for Henry - Shit looks way cooler… no offense, mom. Plus, we already have horses, do we really need another thing we do? I think we’re good.

Emma laughs – We’re not risking my dad’s life like that. No thanks, nope. Wait for Henry to teach you.
- This isn’t about having things we do, this is about your magic being a part of you that you need to have control over as much as you do over… an arm or a leg, or the dragon. Lily you set yourself on fire the other night… - Regina hums, having an idea suddenly - I’ll teach you. But for each hour we do that, we practice magic for half an hour.

- You can do the sword swoosh slash whatever? – Emma sits up quickly – How come you never offered to teach Henry or me?

- Henry and David needed to have things they do, they needed their male bonding time. And you… I’d rather die than teach you more than one thing at a time, Miss Swan.

- How fucking rude.

Regina stands as she laughs at her and her clothes turn to tight brown riding pants, a black tank top and calf-high leather boots, and a hair-tie appears in her hand. – See if you practice your magic you won’t have to waste ten minutes of your hour by changing clothes Lily.

- You can just change them for me.

- Now why would I do that? Run along. And call your mother, she might want to watch this.

Lily takes a record-breaking three minutes changing her clothes to an outfit similar than Regina’s, daily you could almost ignore how much they look alike, since they were on opposites of the personality spectrum; but there it was hard to tell them apart outside of hair length and height. A sword appears on Regina’s hand just as Mal sidles up to them, she rolls it in her hand, getting used to the weight.

- David!- She steps forward - An exhibition match?

He grunts as his concentration fails and Henry lands a blow to his side, before seeing his mother with a sword and dropping his own – Mom?

David recovers quickly, though – Her Majesty, come to play. Nostalgic, are we? – He starts moving towards her with a smirk, his own sword drawn easily.

Regina’s wrist rolls the sword again, this time much more quickly and they all drop their eyes to it, wondering how it does that without breaking – Yes, I did always enjoy seeing you on your back, pleading for your life. And my, what a nice shade of red your blood was.

- Hopefully that’ll fly right over the kid’s head huh? - Emma shifts her weight from one foot to the other

- No magic. - David barks out a laugh – Let’s see what you can do with nothing but your hands, witch.

Emma cringes - What on god’s green earth is going on? – At least they all seem just as confused

Regina raises up her arm and points her sword towards Mal – Your favour, m’lady? – She laughs and reaches into her hair to free it and grab the tie there, slips it carefully over the sword, all the way up to Regina’s bicep, which, has it always been that ripped? Emma wonders, not like she had ever seen Regina’s arms now that she thinks of it. Regina winks at Mal when the hair tie is secured and moves her arm steadily to point the sword at David, without lowering the blade at all, Emma notices her triceps’ strength as well and tilts her head to see if the woman has abs also, it wouldn’t surprise her. Regina smirks again and doesn’t move a muscle – Shepherd.
- You will fight a man without a favour? Princess will you do me the honor?

- Oh sh…oot dad, I don’t have anything… Do you want like a shoestring?

He looks at her and her boots briefly before deciding it isn’t worth the trouble and charging forward. Regina blocks his first swing easily, holding her ground even when it looks like he’s not regulating his strength at all. The blades make a horrible screeching sound as they slide against each other and she moves out of the way of his second lunge gracefully – David! Do you really want Emma to know this is the best you can do? – She uses one of her dodges to maneuver her sword to her left hand and hit him flat in the stomach with it, making him winded.

Emma hisses and turns to watch their expressions, Henry’s thoroughly entertained and Lily’s flat out impressed by the display, Mal’s ever neutral expression only budges for a smirk and Emma leans to Lily – I feel like this is foreplay and that baby sibling of yours is being made tonight.

- Swan…

- This is definitely foreplay. – Mal turns to her for a moment before turning back to the show

- Thanks for confirming. I wouldn’t have slept.

Emma turns back to the show as Lily sighs between them and in that moment David lands a hit by a rib on Regina’s back that sends her to the ground on her knees, they all pause for a moment wondering if they’re letting it go too far but Regina uses her arms to hold her weight as she kicks out both legs behind her to make David stumble back and she stands swiftly to follow him, she starts swinging her sword at him, and he blocks blow after blow. That is until she backs him to where the garden chair is and he loses his balance when he stumbles into it, with one swing he’s on the floor and she has her blade pointed at his neck, boot squarely on his chest. She tuts – Charming, every time.

He laughs – You just dance around me, of course you win like that!

- Brains over brawn, is it? – she smiles at him and moves her sword to her side

- Or trickery over honor. - She holds out her hand and he stands up with a jovial smile, shakes her hand for good measure. - One of these days Emma will avenge me. An equal match.

- That is a lot of pressure to put on Emma – Emma says as she struggles to pick up Henry’s discarded sword, hers is much lighter.

Lily snatches it easily off her hands – C’mon then! – She swings the thing strangely and Emma moves three steps behind to avoid death.

- Basic drills today Lily. And remember: one hour of this, half an hour of spells.

- Yeah, yeah.

Mal motions to the chair with her head and Emma summons it on instinct, she takes it and sits obviously settling in for an hour of Regina swinging a sword around. Emma summons another one and sits by her – Can you sword-fight too? – Mal shakes her head slightly – You don’t like horses, and you have no magic, ‘cause otherwise you’d fly your own chairs around… what cool medieval activity can you do?

- Turn into a dragon.
- Right. Yeah. Sure.
If you want to stay.

Chapter Notes

Kinda longer than usual. But a good one, I hope.

Over by main street Ruby holds up her iPad with the 50th puppy video for Lily to watch, she’s paid attention to maybe ten of them, the good ones, otherwise it is much more entertaining to watch Ruby’s face split into a grin every time one of the dogs does something remotely amusing. The low battery warning shows up and Lily exaggerates a sigh – Oh thank god. I enjoy seeing your family pictures and videos, but It’s about to rain out here

- Ha. Ha. – She looks up and surely, a drizzle is coming down on them seemingly out nowhere when they day was sunny when Lily stopped by to sit with her for a while. She enjoys rain though so she just turns to her with a grin – Do your thing. - Lily rolls her eyes but tendrils of steam start rising from her body, Ruby hums – You’re Smokin’ – Lily laughs at that and Ruby moves in to kiss her, she has an hour of break and she’s gonna make the most out of it.

They’re still kissing, with the iPad shielded from the rain between their bodies when Granny comes out and flicks them with a dish rag – Hey! Don’t you hear all the ruckus?

They snap out of each other, Ruby blushing and Lily watching her blush, and look up to see a tornado approaching from what looks like the beach. Lily gasps – Don’t we have CNN here? How did we not know it’s hurricane season?

- Babe, I don’t think this is the kind of storm CNN could tell us about. – She stands and moves towards the hurricane instead of inside, where it’s safe and dry – Call your mom.

Lily tries but it goes to voicemail immediately - It’s off. – Before Ruby can suggest getting Emma then, the storm reaches them and patrons spill out of Granny’s to see the new catastrophe happen, Lily fights all her instincts to go inside, if this is where the people are. Just as swiftly as it came the swirling vortex of water and debris dissipates and drops a house on main street. The cruiser screeches to a halt before them without having to call anyone and a dog wobbles out of the house, and straight to Ruby.

Emma looks at the scene unfold for a minute, she scratches her head and turns to Lily as if to say yup, that’s this town. She approaches, slowly and Ruby goes closer as well carrying the battered-up puppy, they peer through the windows and they spot the sole occupant inside, passed out. She motions to Ruby with her head – This better not be Zelena’s fault. Get Regina here and deal with whatever Dorothy reincarnation this is – She disappears in a cloud of white, sparkly smoke before they can tell her they don’t really know where she is.

Zelena beats Regina in chess yet again, three times in a row, without any mercy whatsoever and the brunette sister slumps against the couch. She lets out a sigh as Zelena goads her as she does, munching on a green grape and giving time for Regina to flick her hand and send the pieces back to their starting positions, it was usually at least five wins before Regina gives up but this time she holds up her hand and stands dusting her skirt.
I am engaged.

- Oh? I don’t see a ring… To the dragon, I hope – Zelena’s nonchalant tone is followed by another grape, she spits the seeds into a bowl from her seat accurately, as if by magic. Regina has never been able to eat anything that needs spitting afterwards.

- Obviously. – She sits again and eyes the grapes before deciding that no, she won’t start fishing things out of her mouth now – If there’s a wedding any time soon I would like you to attend. So, we should see about getting you out of here, yes? – Regina smiles at her, it’ll never be sweet and lord knows the world love has never left either of their mouths but they’ve reached a certain level of snark that can be interpreted easily by anyone who’s been in contact with any relative of Regina’s.

- And you’re sure you, a lowly mayor, have the authority to do this. What does the lord saviour think of this? Don’t go breaking my heart sis. – She’s allowed music, films and TV, it’s sure to become a nightmare soon.

Before Regina can retort a skinny nurse rushes in the room, Regina checks her watch before complaining, their visit is far from over and even then, no one would dare kick her out. Both Zelena and her turn to her with matching glares, their moment interrupted, but Emma Swan walks in a few seconds after.

- Zelena! – She pauses when she finds both Regina and her target looking up at her - Cutting to the chase, a house fell out of a tornado, girl and dog too.

The nurse scatters off, and Emma and Regina both turn to Zelena who’s caught off guard by the whole thing – Do you need advice on tornadoes? – She’s refrained of watching anything she’s supposedly in.

Emma gears up for a fight but Regina holds her hand up again, halting even her advancement into the room – Dorothy, is it? – Emma nods – Zelena?

- I don’t know her, if that’s what you’re asking. – She pulls the lapels of her cardigan around herself, frankly offended with the way Emma Swan stands off to the side staring at her.

Regina turns to the blonde and Emma nods, she turns back after that to look Zelena in the eye – She’s from your… story.

- And did you know every dwarf personally then? Can you name all seven? – She has watched many a Snow-White adaptation, and is also insulted on her sister’s behalf. Not one of the stories deemed the whole Daniel-and-Cora debacle worth mentioning.

Regina smirks – I understand you might not know who she is. The sheriff was only being precautious. But still, are you sure this won’t put a dent in our plans? There’s some manner of magical shoes involved I believe?

- Ruby slippers. C’mon Regina, you got a kid.

- You’re lucky I even knew the name, Sheriff.

Zelena sighs – I’ve heard of them. I have no interest though, where would they take me?

Regina stands and pauses to look at Zelena briefly – I’m dealing with this now, I suppose. We’ll speak tomorrow? – She puts a hand on her shoulder, as close as they get to hugging.
- Looking forward to hearing all of Dorothy’s adventures.

They barely make it out the door before Regina gives Emma a look that sends her against the padded wall – Miss Swan, I don’t appreciate you coming here to badger my sister without informing me first. How would I have found out if I wasn’t here when you barged in?

-I’m… I’m the sheriff. I have a right to follow an obvious lead-

She tuts – Miss Swan, I thought we were well past bullshit. – Emma bristles but Regina stops her easily holding up a hand again – I’m releasing her, soon as this is resolved. Under my responsibility.

- Cuff stays on?

- Until she’s adjusted. She’s family.

After that one-sided decision they walk briskly up the hallway, Emma trailing Regina’s thunderous pace. They’re silent all the way up the stairs and well past the tunnel that connects the psych ward to the main area of the hospital, it’s only until they reach the parking lot that Regina looks her way again.

They walk into the dinner to see everyone milling around the newcomer, who seems to be retelling her story to the always nosey constituents of Storybrooke. Emma shuffles to her mother, filling Dorothy to the brim of good intentions probably and Regina stops by Lily’s stool when she sees her, passing a hand over her hair and summoning a pastry and a cup of coffee for her, Granny eyes her for a second, she winks and the woman huffs in her spot but doesn’t move to stop the items mid-flight. – The house did not fall on you, did it?

- I’m fine, and mom has Henry at home. I’m just waiting for Red. But yeah, what the fuck? Whole fucking hurricane.

Regina closes her eyes and lets out a contented sigh, she turns to find Red in the crowd, Snow leaning into her as they listen to the girl – I don’t think Miss Lucas will be free anytime soon, ever the lapdog.

- You don’t like her? – her tone almost hesitant, neither Regina or Mal had said anything about them going out… but Lily is kinda fond of Regina, and she doesn’t want to have to pick eventually.

Regina passes a hand over Lily’s hair again – We’ve grown civil, friendly even. But still, Snow whistles and she wags her tail – She holds up a finger and moves it side to side as if to illustrate her point. Lily chuckles and Regina steals a sip of the coffee before leaving her to go to the group.

In Ruby’s defense, as soon as Regina arrives and Snow is distracted with her she slinks away towards Lily. The puppy much better thanks to Emma’s magic still follows her around much to its owner’s chagrin, not that it bothers Red of course. If Toto and its owner want a friend she’s willing to be one, the girl was very nice and it wasn’t going to be easy for her to adapt. Red finally reaches Lily and sits by her, running a hand over her shoulders as she does - So Dorothy is from Kansas, fell asleep woke up here, shiny shoes don’t work because well, magic isn’t real in Kansas… whole family dead. Guess she’ll be sticking around until we figure that out.

Lily looks up a Red, we? – Sounds shitty, why doesn’t she just get a plane ticket back? – Ruby only shrugs and Lily takes a bite of her free pastry – Hey, so you’re gonna be busy?
The dog yaps at Red’s feet and she smiles at it, wondering how long it has before Granny makes it go outside - Yeah, my shift is back on. Sorry… sneak me into your room later? – She winks

Lily barks out a laugh – There’s some weird symbols scratched onto the driveway, I don’t think you can sneak in or out of that house without mom finding out – Ruby rolls her eyes, of course there would be runes. Lily stands to give her a quick hug, and she presses a kiss to the corner of her mouth out of respect for Regina, who looks at them out of the corner of her eye over Snow’s incessant chatter, probably thinking of more runes to keep her further away.

She takes her hand and starts moving away – You’ll call me? I’ll plan us something good for next time. No dog videos. - Lily nods and drops her hand to wave goodbye.

It’s an eventful couple of days for them, first Regina moves Zelena from the psych ward to the house and in her attempt to cram every member of her family into the manor she manages to make everyone revert to their prickly state easily, except Henry of course, who’s a Charming too and can go stay in Emma’s apartment a few hours per day. Zelena announces that she either goes somewhere else or back to the peace of her cell; and Regina obliges and buys her a flat that’s a few minutes away if they drive, even she was dreading becoming neighbors with Zelena it appears.

They take her shopping too, and the woman in the Gucci store is now very interested in the siblings Regina keep revealing to her but takes their made-up story with aplomb and shows Zelena many a green blouse to Regina’s chagrin. Regardless, it’s not Gucci she ends up loving the most, the trip to Levi’s changes Zelena’s outlook of the world and Lily ends up being the one guiding her the most when it comes to boots, jackets, scarfs and t-shirts. By the time they’re done Regina rolls her eyes at her sister’s outfits, taken straight out of a hallmark winter movie where the down-to-earth woman works in a lodge and carries kindling for the fire at least once every act of the movie. You can take a peasant out of the forest… At least the cuff doesn’t clash wildly with that aesthetic.

Zelena needs to pick up how to exist in the new society though, so as much as she enjoys having her own furbished apartment she still spends the whole day in the house, trailing them to learn how to work the many appliances, Lily sneaks her a few hours of driving classes in her own car, and then decides to live and maybe just steal a horse for her, surely people in that town could allow her to ride horses through the street. Turns out Zelena can’t ride horses either, hell she can barely read and write. Regina serves her a glass of wine and lets her know she can teach her, or curse a little bit like they did Mal but Zelena refuses and promises to let herself be taught with patience. She does not sound like someone who knows patience either.

And then, the one day, Regina decides that they should get officially homogeneous, and drives everyone down to the Mayor’s office to file her very fake paperwork with their new names, which somehow end up backed up in national databases. The way the curse works, they exist, the town of Storybrooke is in Maine, they could register to vote and they’d count, they are all American citizens… but no one really wants to check on them, or their eternal mayor, or their strange budget for natural occurrences repair. So, Zelena signs easily into her new Zelena Mills persona, she’s handed a driver’s license she knows better than to try to test and her birthday is set to April whether she likes it or not, Regina fabricates other papers she deems necessary, and as someone who’s forged her way into an adopted baby, she’d know. Lily, real on the outside world decides that a second identity can’t do her any harm and promises to let herself be taught with patience. She does not sound like someone who knows patience either.
solidarity to them, to hug Lily close as she does, and so does Henry, who asks if he can be renamed Henry Daniel Swan-Mills to what Regina sighs and answers if you must, he gives it a minute of thought but then he decides he’s fine the way he is, he’d have to invent a fake marriage and divorce to justify that if anyone outside of town ever asks.

They go to a sea-food place to celebrate their recent last-name extravaganza (before the wedding when Regina and Mal are joining theirs as well, so two sea-food dinners at the very least) and they want to deny them for a minute before they see the mayor standing shortest among the crowd, Henry included. They move a few tables to accommodate them in a corner and it’s only as they walk in that Lily realizes she has not seen her non-official girlfriend in almost a week, and probably only because there she is, ordering food with the woman that fell out of a tornado. Yep, that’s why she can’t have nothing, she was supposed to call and she had forgot and texted the other day and Ruby had replied a few hours later and now that’s what they did, they became people who texted each other every few hours. She really sucks.

She leaves her family to go say hi real quick and Ruby turns around before she even reaches her, Lily smiles at her – Hey wolfie.

- Lily, smelling all kinds of happy… to see me? – She winks and lifts an arm up for Lily to get under

She obliges and Ruby lays a kiss on her temple as Lily chuckles – You’re looking at a Mills, legally.

- Oh that’s nice! – She turns to the girl, reading the menu and pokes her on the side – Hey Kansas, this is Lily, the mayor’s daughter, legally and all. – Lily frowns by her side, the mayor’s daughter? That’s it? Ruby goes on – Remember them?

She smiles at Lily briefly and then turns to Ruby again - Yeah, she was there when Toto and I fell out of the sky… the mayor too. Scared you right off when she came to grill me.

Ruby smiles at her as she pulls her arm away from Lily – No, no. She doesn’t scare me. She’s just the only one Snow gets stupid about too, so we take turns. – The girl laughs at her joke, easily, already acquainted with Snow’s brand of crazy behavior by the time they’ve spent together and Lily stands there feeling… lost.

- Hey, I’m gonna head back – she jerks a finger in their table’s direction – Nice to meet you.

The girl nods and Ruby tears her eyes away to say a weak goodbye – I’ll see you later Lils!

She sits on the table by Zelena, they are explaining what each plate is and how the meat is cooked and Zelena leans to whisper at her – The dog isn’t joining us? – Lily shakes her head no and her aunt turns then and nudges her with her shoulder – As a newly anointed Mills, you can do better.

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Lily can barely sleep that night, she can do better? Why would she need to do better in the first place? Ruby and she had been doing just fine right? Although she was introduced as the Mayor’s daughter so… her finger hovered the screen between Emma’s name and Ruby’s, before going back and settling on Netflix. Across town Ruby climbs her stairs as silently as possible but she doesn’t manage to pass Granny’s room without the woman coming out of it to glare at her, this time though it’s different, she comes out and takes one whiff of her and her expression turns dreary – Child, you’re playing with fire. Both thrown and exhaled.
- I was just showing her the docks, she had never seen the ocean – Granny huffs at her and she looks down – Nothing else about it, I swear.

- Don’t become another bad reminder for that girl, Red.

Ruby does indeed plan a date better than the last one that was mostly an invitation to hang out for an hour that turned out to a session of puppy video compilations. This time around she makes Lily follow her up a trail in the woods, she’s wearing very thin-soled sneakers, skinny jeans and a red t-shirt, carrying a big backpack with her and her hair up in a ponytail that wags happily behind her and Lily follows her snapping branches and jumping over trunks with her heavy boots, her jacket long ago tied around her waist when she started sweating because of it. She tries to react as little as possible when a small fox? Comes up to them to seemingly greet Ruby and then goes on his merry way, Lily wonders for a while if there should be a fox in their latitude but plows on and eventually they reach a clearing. Ruby turns around with her arms stretched out and smiles at her as she pulls her closer for a brief kiss – You gotta admit, this is cute as fuck.

Lily looks past Ruby to see the sunlight filtering down in the flower bed that lies in the middle of the place, a few butterflies doing their thing here and there, the wind cooling them where they stand. She nods – As cute as you - and Red smiles at her as she goes further into the clearing, pulling out a blanket for them to lie on and a couple of beers, Lily’s already sipping hers when Ruby pulls out a bow and a few arrows as well – You brought me here to kill me? – Well, there goes cute as fuck.

- C’mon, let’s hunt our meal! – She sits on the blanket setting up the bow and the quiver on her back and she takes a sip of her own beer – Ok, you set up a fire and I’ll hunt our meal. Rabbit or something bigger?

Lily’s eyes threaten to bulge out of their sockets as she stares at Ruby, who is removing her shoes and socks swiftly – I’ve never eaten any… weird shit. So, you can choose whatever. – Ruby stands then and passes her hand though her ponytail, straightening and sending it squarely to the back of her head, she kisses her cheek and goes into the woods, it’s hard for Lily to hear where she is after a few seconds so she goes in the opposite direction and grabs a bunch of dropped branches and other wooden-looking things and carries it on a pile that tickles her chin to the clearing, drops it unceremoniously on the floor and sets fire to it with simply sending her breath its way. One of the many perks of being a dragon that she can now control easily, she can filter the sounds she wants her brain to count as background noise so she won’t go insane, she can lift the end of a car with a little effort for Henry to recover his ball and she can recognize the shirt she is wearing was much too expensive to have little holes and dried leaves stuck to it, Regina’s gonna kill her. Ruby comes out of the woods from a different direction that the one she went in and she’s holding two small rabbits in her hands with a grin.

- Easy peasy.

- I know you think that’s super attractive but…- She goes to the blanket rolling her eyes and Lily follows her, they both sit, the dead rabbits squarely between them and Ruby takes a small speaker out of her bag, hands it to Lily who fumbles with spotify until she finds a playlist with *date* in the title, hopefully it goes with whatever Ruby’s about to do to the dead bunnies. Red laughs at Corine Bailey Rae playing around them and sets up a few sticks by the fire, deep into the soil and moves to the blanket again.

- Okay so – She takes a swiss army knife out of her pocket and holds one rabbit up – To eat this in human form you gotta skin it, people also dismember them but my jaw can manage just fine so I’ll
guess yours too. – She makes one continuous cut and suddenly yanks at the skin of the rabbit and it comes out easily in one piece. She impales it into another stick and puts it over the fire. – I did yours so you’ll do mine, right? – She holds out the bloodied knife her way

- Oh hell no – she shakes her head and looks at the rabbit by her – Nope.

- Oh, her highness is above skinning a rabbit, I understand – She stalks closer and kneels before her with a smirk

- You won’t trick me into this. As your princess I order you to skin your own rabbit. – She nods resolutely and Ruby leans in closer with a smirk

- Your mother ain’t no queen of mine, I answer to Queen Snow White, and Queen Snow White only. – She presses a small kiss on her lips and takes her distraction as advantage to press the knife into her hands – I’ll teach you. – She sits behind her and takes her hands – First you do the front, from the neck down, straight. – She guides her down and then flips the rabbit easily and continues until they’re cutting high up and between the ears, she lets go of the knife and takes Lily’s hands again – And now, you yank.

- I’ll hate you for this until I die – she tosses the skin far away and Ruby stands to settle her rabbit over the fire as well.

For a moment they have the sound of the dragon fire crisping the meat and the speaker letting out mellow sounds to accompany them and Lily looks at her clothes, specked with blood where Ruby’s aren’t, she picks at her shirt and the wolf looks up from where she is with her head on Lily’s thigh and her phone in her hands – I can help you with that – she winks and goes back to her message and Lily stares at her for a moment and hey, what the hell.

She bends down to kiss her with a clear intent and Red moans, she tosses her phone in the general direction of her back and it clinks when it hits the bottles first but she couldn’t care less as she sits up and moves to loom over Lily, whose weight falls to her forearms as they continue kissing. Ruby remembers herself first and sits up again – The meat is probably done. Let’s eat first. - Lily looks flabbergasted as Red stands and plucks the stick up and away from the flames, taking a deep breath to gauge the blood left in the animal. She’s satisfied with it and turns with a smile – Can you put that out? – Lily can inhale it right back, she moves to do just that and Ruby gets out of the way, towards her bag to take out a couple more of beers and a small bottle of BBQ sauce. – Best of both worlds.

Red hands her a rabbit with a few napkins and Lily turns it over and over, not even knowing where to bite into that. Red tears at it easily enough with her hands and starts eating so Lily does just that. It’s not bad, she can see a life where it doesn’t suck to eat this, if you don’t know chicken nuggets exist, she tells Ruby just that and she laughs boisterously before settling down again with her rabbit. They eat in silence for a while and then Ruby is the one to speak – Hey, Page. What are we?

She swallows her bunny meat slowly – I am a Mills, I don’t know what you are. – Red gives her a pointed look and Lily swallows nothing – We’re… dating?

She nods – You and me, we’re exclusive, right?

- I’m not seeing anyone else. - Lily shrugs, nonchalantly – I don’t know about you.

Red turns to see Lily, she’s cute, her voice is cool and all but the pulse on her neck doesn’t escape her - Not at all. Exclusive. – She kisses her cheek and Lily can feel the distinct sensation of
barbeque sauce on her cheek, Ruby goes in a second time to lick it off her and sits back like that didn’t just happen, she speaks before Lily can make a dog joke –But I’m not making love to you in the middle of the forest, not the first time.

- Bold of you to assume there will be a second time.

- Bold of you to assume you won’t be the one begging for it.

They walk back into town shortly after, Lily choosing to walk with Red all the way to the diner to have a proper meal since rabbits were kinda small and their hunger was kinda mythical and all. Granny smiles at her when she sees her, she usually does, plus she’s apparently friends with her mother so that can’t hurt. The woman calls Ruby to her and she takes her hand to squeeze briefly before she goes, Lily doesn’t eavesdrop when she can avoid to, she focuses on the menu before her and when she’s decided she moves to answer a few texts she had neglected while they were in their date. In her utmost concentration to send the right sequence of emojis to convey the wizard of Oz in the family group chat she misses when Dorothy herself comes into the place, walking very determinedly, towards the counter looking for someone, then stopping abruptly, and without as much as a hello grabbing Red by the t-shirt to make her turn around and then kissing her soundly over the counter.

The light sweeping over her is what makes Lily look up in time to see Red push the woman back with a startled expression. She flounders like a fish out of water as Dorothy smiles up at her excitedly and her shoes shine enough everyone watching shield their eyes for a second while the light subsides. After the beam of light, it’s Granny who turns to look at Lily slowly, and that’s when she understands what just happened. Henry had shown her video of the last time the rainbow glowy thinghy had passed over the town, true love’s kiss. She’s sitting on her own bed before anyone can say a word to her.

Ruby jumps over the counter swiftly, Dorothy and her now shimmering shoes try to explain that Snow had told her- but Ruby growls at her and runs right out of the diner to look around, the dog yaps by her feet chasing her as she turns in her spot trying to find Lily but she can’t see her anywhere close and she sighs before she takes off running towards Mifflin, paying no mind to Toto giving her chase. Two blocks in her race he's gone but she sees Snow coming towards the diner with a bright smile and she stops to a halt before her, grabbing her by the lapels of her jacket and shaking her – Why did Dorothy just kiss me? What did you do?

Her smile doesn’t fade even with her confusion – Red calm down! Dorothy came to me describing how she felt and I explained all about true love and look! How do you feel?

- Snow you idiot! Why can’t you ever mind your own fucking business! – She pushes her away and takes a deep breath, looks at her and her kicked puppy expression apologetically but takes off running again before the woman can get another word in.

She knows she’ll be in Regina’s doorstep in 3 minutes and 30 seconds, and what then? What is she going to do, it wasn’t her who did the kissing in the first place, but she’d been overly friendly with Dorothy and her dog since she dropped out of the sky and that’s probably what had given her the wrong idea. She was a fucking idiot, that’s for sure. She could’ve driven, it would’ve taken her longer but she wouldn’t show up panting like a maniac. That’s the thought the barrier interrupts when she slams into it. She lands on the street, her entire body ringing for a moment before she stands up, shaking it off and both Regina and Maleficent appear in the doorway, the magical noise of the collision sending them into a defensive stance, they spot her though, and relax a tad
- Regina! Let me in, please.

- You’ve either come to harm someone or one of us doesn’t want you in the house, regardless, the spells know better than I do what the issue here is and I am inclined to believe them.

- What? You know me! I’m not hurting anyone! – She approaches the house again to find resistance to get past the open gate, her hand burns when she puts it over the threshold – Since when do you have these spells in the first place?

- If Lily is the one that doesn’t want you here, there’s nothing I can do. – Regina eyes her warily, they do know her and she poses no threat but the spell has been around years, effective in its simplicity, only the person currently keeping her out can have a change of heart and let her in. And, if they were on a date and someone found their true love, how could that have ended up in this?

Ruby paces the length of the house, feeling for a weak spot on the barrier as she dials Lily’s phone over and over again. Regina watches her with a pinched expression and Maleficent moves from her side for a while, to come back with a sullen Lily, who comes out of her house, past the barriers to glare at her – I get it, we’re done. You can leave now.

- No, no! – She grabs at her jacket – She kissed me! I’m sorry but…? No. – Red shakes her head resolutely and her ponytail whips at her head

Over by the door Maleficent takes two steps towards them, coming just to the few stairs that separate the house from the front lawn and Lily shakes a hand at her – Moms, privacy? – Regina snaps a finger and a bubble pops up around them she takes Maleficent’s hand and drags her inside almost comically, but Ruby pays them no mind as she tugs on Lily’s jacket again – Look Red, true love’s kiss, not your fault, you weren’t cheating, I won’t kill you or her. Leave. – She lists things off with her fingers and finishes reclaiming her arm

- I don’t know her! I don’t love her! – She sinks to sit on the stone pathway then, her long legs bent almost uncomfortably – This is not what I want, I want you.

- Tough shit. If we’re done…– She jerks her finger towards the house and Red grabs her leg

- No. Please, sit? – She looks up at her, pleading, and Lily has no option but to oblige, and sink to the floor by her, her legs stretched and her feet hitting the pavement in front of them. – Lily I swear, that was the first time it happened… I don’t… I guess she doesn’t know about you but I swear I wasn’t hiding you or anything, it just never came up? I don’t know anything about her either to be honest, we don’t speak or anything, I just play with her dog.

- I texted Henry, he’s at Emma’s so I texted him – She yanks the phone out of her pocket, tight jeans and all, and scrolls down to show her his explanation – He says true love’s kiss sometimes only comes when one of the parties, he said that, he said parties, when one of the parties involved is in danger and the other one realizes they want to save them over anything else. Or that it sometimes just happens at wedding’s and other important stuff, but that people already love each other when it happens.

Ruby shrugs and shakes her head again – Well I don’t know about all that but I don’t love her. It’s just probably friendship? There’s obviously non-romantic true love going around.

- Dude I don’t want to live like that, with that thing hanging over my head, what are you gonna do? ignore it? – She puts her phone back in her pocket – You gotta at least date her for a while.

- Don’t call me dude! We are dating. I have a choice. I choose you. She can go back home now that
her shoes work, woooo curse broken! – She stands to pace and the bubble follows along obediently, stretching in all directions – Your mother has a soulmate living on the edge of town and what is she doing? Getting married to Maleficent. Why do I have to date the stranger?

- She has a… soulmate?

- Apparently different than a true love, which only proves my whole ‘it’s bullshit’ point- Red nods – Robin, normal dude, real unimpressive, like Dorothy.

She drops her head on her hand, she's exhausted. Popping in and out of places is exhausting - But mom still dated him. And you still like her.

- What? Why? – She stops her pacing and sits again

- You were becoming friends with her and you love the puppy, she obviously picked up on something… it was a matter of time. I’m not too angry about it… or maybe the house swallowed my anger and bounced it on you when you came running in – She shrugs and Red takes her hand

- Lily, what do I have to do to keep this – she motions between them – us.

- Apparently, give up on your destiny. – She lets out a chuckle filled to the brim with self-pity and Red nods.

- Done- She doesn't stop to see if Lily heard, or to give her time to recant on her conditional yes - I’m texting Snow you’re my girlfriend so this kind of shit doesn’t happen again. You know what? this goes to Leroy too. Get ready, in an hour everyone will know.

- You’re texting… Snow? – She frowns as an arm loops around her shoulder for Ruby to press their heads together. She kisses her as she can to prove the point further and snaps a pic to send, they look quite smushes and one of her eyes is closed where Ruby’s kiss pushed her cheek up but it’s a nice one – So what? Snow-White didn’t know about me and she told Dorothy to try to kiss you?

- Long story short? Probably. – She takes her hand again after putting her phone away – I’m serious about this Lils, I don’t care about the kiss. I want to be with you.

- Are you sure? - This is a tough one to swallow, weren't all these fairytale characters looking for their own rainbow kiss person?

Red gives her one nod, pointedly, and stands swiftly, holding a hand out for her – As long as you never disappear in the middle of another date.

- My magic does whatever the fuck it wants most of the time. Plus, the date was over. – She takes her hand and Red hoists her up easily and sneaks her arm around her waist to pull her closer

- It was not. I was asking Granny for a special order, you were going to be blown away.

- Mom takes requests for dinner, if you want to stay.

- She takes requests from you. - Red smiles brightly at her for a moment and leans in a bit – But if the runes let me, I’ll stay.
So, you are not taking my side

Emma walks into the Mayor’s office shortly after being announced, she pushes the double doors with her back since her hands are stuffed with a pile of folders and loose papers that reaches her chin. Once a month she shows up in Regina’s office to hand in the paperwork, thing is, she also saves some to ask Regina for help, many magical happenings will do that to a town. The mayor has long stopped to fuss about her lack of common sense to do her job and they even have a good time while filling up the spaces in the forms. The doors slam behind her, the little gust of wind pushing her forward and she manages to turn around finally to find Mal in Regina’s seat, where Emma herself has never been allowed, and Regina in one of the chairs she keeps on the other side of the desk for visitors, some paper held in the air before her eyes, and one leg crossed over the other, her back ramrod straight and miles away from the back of the chair for whatever reason. Neither of them turn to greet her and she pouts over her documents at the lack of warmth, taking in the scene, the amount of paper carefully displayed in the huge desk, as organized in columns and rows as it can be. She shuffles in under the weight of her undone work – Aw are you guys planning the wedding?

Regina turns to her finally, the reading glasses perched low on her nose, her hair now long enough to be braided into a fishtail that curls low to her side and allows for some shorter tendrils to drop out of it, it would be cute if it wasn’t for the entire black skirt-shirt combo, matching black blazer draped over her chair where Mal sits, and the \textit{tension}. Regina turns back to her floating document quickly – We’re balancing the budget.

- \textit{I am balancing the budget. You’re reading.} – Mal’s eyes don’t leave the screen in front of her and Regina rolls her eyes.

She uncaps a pen she has on her hands and Emma watches as she circles something in the paper held in the air, and makes a comment in her neat script before letting the magic that holds it up drop it and putting it in one of the piles neatly. She stands from her chair – Then you won’t mind if I help Miss Swan with her paperwork.

It was hardly a question and Mal makes only a dismissive noise as she eyes the sheet of paper Regina just laid in front of her. Regina motions Emma to the couch where they can sit side by side, she lays the pile on the floor and drops herself on the couch with a huff – Hey I learned to make some fancy burgers, so I’m holding a dinner party tonight like an actual adult with wine and stuff, Luke’s baking the buns. You guys will come? On one hand my parents are gonna be there so, yuck, but also Henry agreed to invite his girlfriend so we’re really gonna, you know, embarrass him. That’s a task for the mom triangle.

Regina nods once and turns to look over her desk - Maleficent? – Emma frowns at that

- I have a previous engagement with Cruella.

- It will be just me then, Miss Swan – her hand turns in a flourish and the pile of papers splits itself in half and each new, smaller pile lands in front of one of them – Let’s get to it.

Emma grabs at a paper without a sound, confused as hell. When Regina turns to her she mouths a \textit{What the fuck?} At her that goes ignored and they get started on their paperwork, Regina using an invisible desk that lets her write comfortably and Emma bending well into unknown depths to reach the coffee table in front of them, her writing is sloppy on normal conditions but like that? Regina’s lucky she’s present and hears her muttering under her breath as she writes so she knows what the documents say.
It’s maybe a whole hour before Regina puts her out of her misery, she stands and moves to the door, Emma following quickly. Maleficent looks away from her screen and Regina stops by the door – Pasta okay for lunch?

- If we must.

Emma trails after Regina all the way through the hallway and into the old elevator that takes them down, only when the metal doors close she speaks again – If we must? Are you guys getting pre-divorced? I can’t take this, I come from a broken home.

- Your parents are famous for their stable and healthy relationship.

- I come from like ten broken homes and you know it. What the fuck was that?

Regina seems to appraise her for a moment and the doors slide open she decides her worthy enough and begins talking as she moves away – You’ve heard of the Dorothy situation? – Emma nods behind Regina and the woman goes on, like she saw her nod, like she cares if she nodded – While I don’t want to see Lily hurt, Miss Lucas seems to have made a choice and Dorothy left already, accepting her loss. Mal does not see it that way, she thinks they’re fated to fail. This lead to me mentioning how Robin is my soulmate, she apparently had not been informed of that. There’s some strange mating ritual shebang much more binding than a legal marriage, with magic stronger than any soulmate bond it seems. But I am reticent to do that so, she’s in a mood.

- Yikes. Why won’t you dragon-marry her? She’s blonde and tall. If you wanted someone better than me… this is your last shot

Regina orders for all three of them, one of the plates with meatballs on the raw side of things. The woman looks at her oddly but complies with the Mayor’s wishes and they sit in one of the tables, the sun warming them up in the patio cafeteria in Town Hall. Regina answers a text and gives Emma her undivided attention again – Tell me Emma, is your boyfriend okay with your obsession with me?

- Are you kidding? Right before we fuck we start listing our favorite Regina outfits, just to get in the mood - Regina chuckles at that and Emma’s sense of triumph allows her to put a hand on her forearm softly – It’s okay if you don’t want to dragon-marry her because of Leopold. Since you can’t divorce her if you do it that way, I think… she’ll understand.

- It’s not that… at least I hadn’t thought of that. – She sighs – It grants me longevity, to be with her. And I refuse to outlive Henry.

- Or me.

- You I must certainly will kill with my own bare hands eventually, to feel the life drain out of your body – She says it so casually, head tilted upwards to receive the sunlight, eyes closed peacefully

- Wow. – She takes her hand back in mock offense – After I remembered three of your outfits last night. – She gives her one of her looks and Emma sits back in her chair – I bet you haven’t told her all that though, and she’s hurt because she thinks you like her but you don’t like like her, and that you have a soulmate you’d be with if I hadn’t brought his wife back from the dead.

- So, you are not taking my side.

- I don’t know… You don’t wanna see us die but you’re willing to normal-marry her and make her see you die? Lily? Unmade baby number 3? Even Henry himself. Plus, what’s better than seeing your kid make it? Seeing him graduate college and raise a few kids and write brilliant books and
then get an award and then, very decades-later then die a peaceful death after we stopped all kidnapping attempts, being sure he makes it. All while maintaining your smoking bod. - It was a good little speech while it lasted, but Regina still rolls her eyes at Emma at the end and stands promptly to retrieve their food without another word, the blonde sighs and goes after her, the joke that ruins everything is always the joke she can’t keep from making.

Regina moves back into the building with the whole thing ringing in her head, how long had Maleficent been alive already? All alone, her parents long gone, siblings far away and all her flings eventually ending as swiftly as they start, thirty years spent apart from her first opportunity of a family. What would they have? Another 60, 70 years? In which Regina would grow old and grey, her magic perhaps finally taking a toll in a world not made for it? The thirty years of stasis rearing up and swallowing her whole until she was nothing? But on the other hand, Henry, Snow, baby Neal and sure, Emma Swan, they would all be gone and how long would it take for Lily to take off on her own like Maleficent once had? And then what? Just the two of them in whatever dystopian society the United States of America evolved into? Back to the Enchanted Forest? She’ll have to make a pros and cons comparison at the very least to get out of this one.

They walk back into the office, Emma halfway into eating lunch already, a woman of many talents: speaking and eating, channel surfing and eating, walking and eating, etc., and she makes a beeline for the couch so she can sip at her coke as well. Regina moves around the desk to clear a space to carefully set down Mal’s lunch without ruining the feng shui of the documents she needs to balance a budget. She moves closer to pull her chair away from the computer and Maleficent looks up finally, Regina stills her hand on the computer mouse as well – Borderline raw meatballs and sprite, a match made in hell. – Before Mal can spear her fork into the bloody meat Regina bends to kiss her temple and move a curl out of her way, tucking it behind her ear – Thank you for coming in today and helping me with this.

Maleficent, unable to be cold when spoken to so gently, turns to look at Regina briefly, eyes passing by her every feature quickly, taking advantage of how close they are – You’re welcome.

On the strangest move Emma’s seen in a while Regina’s thumb moves from her temple to pass over Mal’s eyebrow softly, if she was part cat instead of lizard the woman would purr probably. Regina smiles as Mal’s eyes close and she stands up straight again – I’ll leave you to brood a bit more, I love you. – Mal grabs her hand before she can move away completely and gives it a small squeeze that feels like a treaty being signed, most fights in Regina’s life could’ve been solved easily with being nice and a kiss on the forehead probably, Snow definitely would’ve surrendered on the spot.

Regina goes to sit by Emma’s side on the couch as Mal digs into her lunch silently, she opens her tea, grabs her fork and cracks open the plastic container holding her lunch, all while ignoring the stupid grin the blonde throws her way. Emma tries for one of her awful whispers and holds out her fist closed over her fork for Regina to bump – Smooth.

Regina points down with her own fork – There’s sauce on your paperwork.

And Emma scrambles to lick her fork clean so it can stop dripping onto the folder between them – ah, fuck.
Mal puts on a pair of silk pants and a t-shirt with a dragon on it Henry bought for her in one of their shopping trips, items Regina had deemed appropriate to leave their room in, opposite to most of her pajamas that had always consisted on barely there shifts she never even bothered to tie on properly. Still, when Regina sees her appropriately clothed and listening to her music she lets out an imperceptible sigh as she settles into the bed dressed in a similar outfit that Mal is the one who tends to huff about. She takes out one of the headphones when Regina lays down by her hip anyways, she might be upset but if she wanted to ignore her she would’ve just left to sleep in the forest or something of the like.

Regina wraps herself up in the duvet – I spoke to Henry about it. His friend’s mother’s health deteriorated last year, he seemed happy at the prospect of never having to worry about that.

- Which friend? – It’s hardly a relevant detail but it’s the first thing that comes to mind, Mal stops her music and puts her phone safely away on the nightstand, since it seems they will be having a discussion instead of curving the issue like they had been for the last couple of days. Whatever you say about Emma Swan, she has a way to get through Regina’s thick skull.

- Jeremy, the lanky one with the turtle. – She smiles up at Mal, fast friends with said turtle, but doesn’t say anymore.

- And? You spoke to him, he’s not against the idea, where does that bring us?

Regina squeezes herself further into the bed, the pillows almost swallowing her head as the sheets have her body – I’m just worried about him Mal… it’s been a few years and so much has changed, the entire universe as he knew it. And now in a few months we’ve sprung a 30-year-old sister, a marriage and the idea of another sibling on him… maybe we’re moving too fast.

- Too fast? Regina this has been happening for the better part of four decades. – She’s not trying to scold her, but still Regina looks up at her with a miserable look in her eyes and Mal sighs, takes a hand to pass through her hair for a moment – When you were young and in pain trying to hold on to you was like trying to hold on to water, no matter how much I clenched my fingers together or how much I willed my hand to stay still, every few months I’d tremble and you’d disappear for weeks, to have your trysts with the huntsman and whomever else you desired… and that was all right with me, truly. But now? You’re a woman grown; we have a child, you have more family, your small kingdom, your freedom, the people’s favor, even Snow White eating out of your hand. - She takes back her hand - What more do you need that I can’t give you?

Mal rests her head against the high headboard looking forward, but Regina’s eyes haven’t left her though – I’m sorry – She looks down at her – I never had all that, maybe I’m scared to live long enough to see it all go away.

- You proposed. Was it a whim? Were you not sure?

- I was! – She sits up suddenly and takes one of her hands – I am.

- Then, was Until death do us part only an option if death was soon? – She’s trying hard, to convince Regina, to not cry, but her voice cracks anyways. She can’t fault anyone but herself though, they tell them not to fraternize with humans and it was always in her stubborn nature to do exactly the opposite of what she was told.
- Yes! They will die, whether we do this or not they will die, even Lily can die anytime, so can I. And you can either make sure to be there until the very end or you can do nothing and hope you go first to spare yourself the pain but we undoubtedly will die. – She reclaims her hand and puts a little space between them, stops a moment to compose herself – Regina I will marry you, whether it is for a month, for 50 years, for more… I just had to ask. – Regina passes her hands through her hands almost desperately and Mal grabs one of them so she’ll stop, tries for as genuine a smile as she can muster – Let’s just go to sleep. I understand your reticence and I promise to never hold it against you. We’ll shelf the issue, yes?

Regina looks at her for what feels like a whole minute silently, but she eventually relents and moves under the duvet again, the fluffy thing swallowing her whole. Maleficent reaches over to her lamp to turn it off and lays down under the duvet as well, settling in for what will most likely be a night of absolutely no sleep; but Regina’s face emerges again – Are you going to sleep all the way over there?

- I thought you feared death by asphyxiation when I use you as a pillow – Mal wraps herself up better and wills her normal pillow to hold her head up just right, if only once in its miserable existence.

- Please, smother me – She reaches under the sheets to find Mal’s arm and pull it over her where it usually ends up and after a few seconds Mal gives up resistance and moves closer to cling to Regina, she doesn’t realize but she barely lasts fifteen minutes awake, she’s never made it to twenty.

Mal doesn’t know she’s fallen asleep until she’s woken up from her dreams, something stabbing her ribs. It’s most likely Regina, maybe trying to kill her? Who knows, she tightens her hold on her and dozes off again. The woman keeps poking her in the side, this time lower and her body contracts without her permission, that rouses her up just a tad. She moves only a bit and settles into Regina’s side again - Stop. Sun’s not out yet.

- Poor you, don’t like being woken up? – she pokes her again for good measure and the dragon rolls of her with a huff, Regina follows to the other side of the bed – This is important: I get it now. Do it.

Regina’s goose-feather-filled pillows are not appropriate to sleep on and she has been telling the woman since they met, but still she tries her best to settle down for the rest of her sleep – Ok dear.

She shakes her again – Maleficent wake up! – another tug at her shoulder and her full name do the trick and she opens her eyes groggily, but wraps the covers tighter around her – You love me enough to be willing to mourn me… back in the Enchanted Forest, when I disappeared for weeks… I feared having to mourn you like I mourned Daniel, so I took some space when I was feeling too much. But I’ve worked on that now, and I welcome getting attached, the possibility of mourning people and having to live without them is just… the price we pay to love.

- That’s cute. Why did this epiphany come to you in the middle of the night?

- You can’t sleep unless you’re actively suffocating me. I now see that with my death, I would take that away from you in a few, scant decades. – Mal huffs and pats down the pillow as if to find a way to prove her wrong and Regina smiles – You’re right Mal, this gives me more time with everyone. And I love you all with the entire quarter of my heart that’s not blackened beyond fixing,
I will treasure every second of our time together. I owe you at least a thirty-year extension. Do it. –
She nods resolutely

Mal looks at her for a few seconds with an unreadable expression in her eyes until she decides
Regina’s sure of her choice and she wiggles her arm out of the duvet and pulls her in for a kiss.
Regina goes down happily, it had been three days since they had kissed properly and honestly? It
was getting old fast. She tugs the sheets out from in-between them and moves to straddle Mal who
sits up while holding onto her and never breaking the kiss.

She wills it to happen, like they had been told in hushes by the old crones when they weren’t being
watched just in case they found someone and they weren’t dragons, it isn’t like there were books
on how to mate with humans or like their parents would answer any of the questions. It’s all about
really yearning for the person to be with you for the rest of your life, without a shadow of a doubt.
It isn’t a straightjacket and the union isn’t solidified in any other way but for it to stick both parties
need to, at least in that moment, believe they will be together until death.

Surely enough after a few seconds Mal can feel the fire tickling its way up from the center of her
chest and out of her mouth to Regina’s, who breaks away when it’s transferred itself. It burns
bright green just behind her teeth and her magic reaches out to identify it, her eyes glowing purple
for a few seconds and her mouth still open, when the purple tint is gone Mal uses her finger to snap
Regina’s jaw shut and the fire starts coursing her body from her throat, her veins turning a green
tint visible through the skin.

Regina rolls the sleeve of her sweater’s right arm hastily to see the magic advancing down her arm
– I was going to suggest we wait until the wedding so the whole thing is symbolic and whatnot but
this is not a good look for any dress I choose. How much does it last?
- I have no idea – She doesn’t, she knows basically nothing of the whole thing, she just did what
her instinct told her. Mal reaches out to trace one of the lines painted under Regina’s skin in her
arm and it glows green as the fire did when she makes contact

Regina hisses over her – Do that again. - She splays her hand on the side to Regina’s neck and
kisses the exposed flank, both spots glowing vibrant green again, and Regina throws her head back
to allow her more room and her hips grind on Mal’s lap trying to get closer to her. The dragon
chuckles at the desperation in Regina’s movement and pauses when Regina’s hand makes its way
up into the nape of her hair, her fingers pressing on her skull – Does this invalidate that tea you
take every morning?

Mal shrugs with a smirk on her face, still laying kisses on the base of Regina’s throat - I suppose
we will find out, my love.

Regina sits still for a moment, weighing her choices but Mal sneaks both hands under her sweater
and pulls her closer and she hisses yet again, already sneaking her fingers into the blonde bun to
loosen it - Let’s risk it.
I’ve been possessed with the aca-spirit of sleepovers

I need a man – Regina coughs over her white wine as Zelena enters the living room of her apartment and sits by her on the couch – I’m dead serious. I have nothing to do, all day, every day.

Regina takes a more controlled sip and turns to her sister – What about a job, or perhaps a hobby that doesn’t include plotting my demise – She huffs but relents anyway, nodding over her own glass – Okay then, what can you do? What did you do before… everything?

- I mostly kept wild animals out of the farm… our own inside, chopped up some logs.

Her tone is nonchalant but Regina’s learned that the more casual Zelena is when she mentions something the most likely it is to be a sore spot for her, and she is in her apartment after a reading lesson that stretched a few hours so a joke about her peasant activities won’t be well received at all. Regina knows all this so she smiles amicably at her sister even when she’s avoiding her eyes to find a suitable film for them – The animal shelter was never reopened… Robin noticed our forest was unprotected and decided to spearhead the foundation of some sort of official government body for that, I’m sure he’ll be happy to be coerced into hiring you.

- Second option, please allow me to be the one to persuade him – She settles in something called Pitch Perfect and as it starts she turns to wink at Regina

- He is married. – She finishes her glass of wine and stands to get the bottle; whatever Pitch Perfect is she’ll be damned if she watches it sober

Zelena’s voice carries over to her - If I recall correctly, so were you when your tongue first slithered into the dragon's cunt

- My god. – she stops dead in her tracks, wine bottle already in her hand – Must you be so crude?

She laughs turning to peer at Regina still standing feet away and raises her hands in mock surrender – Come. Sit. I will be nice and proper from now on, Majesty.

Regina sulks but continues approaching – I’ll still give him a call.

- And I’ll still give him a wank if he wants me to – Zelena nudges Regina with her elbow to get her to sit quickly, or at least pass her the bottle so she can top her glass up.

But she groans over her, before putting the bottle down and sitting again, looking squarely at the screen – I hate you.

- Sissy – she puts a hand on top of hers on the couch as she grabs the bottle from the coffee table with the other – You know it’s bloody mutual.

- Why are you British?

Across town Lily follows Emma into her apartment before she opens the door and doesn’t even stand still enough for a hello, the blonde putting a jacket on hastily and moving up and down the short hallway to pick up things from the shelves and tables she’s put in it. Emma stops for a moment at the end of the hallway and Lily catches up with her, both looking at the couch where Henry sits with his laptop. Lily waves at him and Emma claps her in the shoulder
- Right, take care of the kid. Bye Kid.

Lily grabs Emma’s arm before she can start moving, the grip of a dragon very much stopping her anyways - Wait, what? You’re leaving? – Henry looks up from his laptop too, almost pouty

Emma nods patting down her pockets, no eye contact whatsoever - Yup. You’re here to babysit.

- Mom leaves him alone all the time, even at night. He doesn’t need babysitting – She narrows her eyes at her – What the fuck is going on?

Henry nods in his spot, confused by the whole thing. He was certain Emma would stay for their Friday binge watch but apparently, she won’t. Emma tries to reclaim her arm – Hey, language...

Lily rolls her eyes - Oh come on, you don’t really care about that, do you?

- If Regina does, I do too. - Lily finally releases her at that and she sighs – Ok, truth. I forgot It was our Friday, Henry… and then I forgot we were gonna hang out, Lily. And I told my parents I could babysit Neal, I’m sorry… - she starts moving down the hall while putting a scarf around her neck – Do whatever you guys want, just don’t die. Regina would kill me.

The door slams and Lily stands there gaping for a few seconds, Henry just as disappointed in the couch, closing his laptop. She turns to him – You’re not a bitch, right? You curse sometimes.

He shrugs – Not really.

They spend an hour sharing space without saying much, Lily drinks a few beers and Henry drinks a few sodas, and they fidget in their phones. Eventually Henry blocks his and tosses it, finishing his can of soda in one go and putting it down on the coffee table harshly. Lily chuckles at him without tearing her eyes away from her phone – You’re Regina’s kid definitely.

He huffs and stays silent for a few seconds, before kicking off his shoes to bring them up onto the couch, turning to look at Lily - You like girls, right? You’re dating Ruby?

She blocks her phone, putting her texting with the very subject of conversation on hold – Yeah… you gonna tell me it’s genetic? – she laughs and he smiles at her

- Maybe… - He hasn’t done any research on why people are gay, maybe he should. He’ll ask his mom about that on Monday when he goes back home. He shrugs- anyways, you know my girlfriend, I think she doesn’t like me.

Lily frowns – She showed up for dinner with us the other day. We’re all insane. She’s gotta like you a lot.

He shakes his head and crosses his arms – She never asks me to hang out just the two of us, it’s always me asking, and she keeps mentioning my moms… plus I’m always buying her stuff she says she wants. Do you buy Ruby a lot of stuff? Like Ice cream and things?

_His moms? Ice cream and things?_ Oh, to be thirteen, not that she got to buy anyone ice cream at thirteen. Lily kicks out her own sneakers to put her feet in the coffee table, takes a sip of her beer – It’s a little different when we’re both women, the buying is mostly split in half

His shoulders tense - But you have way more money than Ruby, I mean mom gives me a lot of money and after Mal taught us to manage it… you should be paying for Ruby’s ice cream, Charming says it’s chivalrous.
Lily laughs at him for a few seconds and makes a soda float its way to him from the kitchen, magic powers have become handy – I think you’re dealing with a gold digger.

- Like Kanye said?

- Kanye? – That’s when she really loses it, clapping a hand over his legs a few times before he joins in – Henry, I think she just wants to be a princess and you’re the only one in her age range that can get that done.

He stays silent, drinking his soda, and Lily worries she’s broken his heart. Maybe she’s being too cynical and this kid is just strange. She relaxes when he looks up at her – That’s fucked up.

They both laugh at that and Lily reaches over to grab him by the neck and shake him a little – You can do better, wait for a girl that makes things feel mutual.

She lets him go when he nods and reaches for his phone, before Lily can warn him against breaking up with anyone over text he dials a number and smiles her way as it rings – I can order a pizza with my money instead.

Emma takes Neal from Snow’s arms and the baby happily smacks both his hands on her cheeks immediately and yells Mma! He can manage mama, dada, uby, ina for Regina and eny for Henry, they all lose their mind when he does and he loves the attention. David breezes past her laying a kiss on the top of her head and heading for his jacket long before Snow is done with the speech; when he’s dressed and he has his keys he reaches for Snow’s hand and Emma knows it’s time to cut her off

- Mom, I’ve done this before and I have Regina’s memories with me. If anything, I’m overqualified. Go on your date, we’ll be fine – She blows a raspberry kiss on Neal’s pudgy cheek – Won’t we little man? – The baby giggles his contentment at her and Snow nods happily, letting herself be dragged out of the door by David who waves goodbye over her hat-covered hair.

Emma gets to work as soon as the door is closed, all furniture being magically pushed to the wall. Her secret is to conjure up a plush carpet she bought on Amazon and let him run wild for an hour or so before he just crashes. Surely, he wakes up on Mary Margaret hungry, cranky and needing a new diaper, but by that time she’s long gone and her brother can only remember her being there for the absolute fun times, win win situation.

She finds the most ragged toys in his nursery and sets him down to speed off on her as she flicks the channel until she finds a good cupcake wars rerun and settles on the floor with a decorative pillow from the couch that Snow can’t ever know has been used as a normal pillow. She informs Neal as much – Dude, we die with our secrets. Mother can’t ever know. – He stops his circular running when he hears her and gnaws on a teddy bear she’s almost certain Henry owned – Good. It’s a spit pact. – She quickly puts her thumb in her mouth and reaches out to draw a line in his forehead, making him giggle and take off again.

Neal loves a cupcake just as much as she does, so after a while he stops by the TV screen to paw at it every time they have a close-up of one. Emma laughs at him as she takes video of it on her phone, that is until one of his pushes makes the tv wobble on its table, her sharp intake of breath the last thing recorded, why would they keep a TV so low with a little kid in the apartment? Why not just hang it on the wall? Her questions are interrupted when the thing almost hits the ground.
Her magic the only thing holding it in place mid-fall. Neal giggles at the unnatural state of physics in his world and Emma lets out a breath – You’re lucky Regina passed on her mom reflexes

That was absolutely the wrong thing to say. He screeches - Ina! – His eyes tear away from the spectacle in front of him and his chubby legs start working again as he rushes to find the love of his life and Emma sighs as she puts the TV back in place

- Relax, your girlfriend is not around.

Still, he completes three whole circuits of the floor perimeter she’s allowed him to have until he stops by her and turns disconsolate at the sheer lack of Regina he’s found, Emma knows he’s about to cry, they don’t mention her around him unless she’s gonna make an appearance, and as his lips wobble Emma tries for a facetime call but it goes unanswered. This is it, the end of his world, he knows only pain and desolation as the first tear leaves a trail down his cheek and his wail starts, when will Regina return to him with her sparkle shows and her apple treats? When will his best baby sitter be back in rotation? Emma rolls her eyes at him, torn between handing him her phone and rocking him until she can find a printed copy of Regina’s face in that house, there must be at least one. A quick scan of the walls and the mantles returns nothing, not even Henry is around, cold. There’s a pile of copies of the mirror that should have a pic of Regina and an album somewhere in her parents’ closet but she doesn’t have the time. It’s DEFCON fuck. She finds a video in her phone and surrenders it to his brother and his grubby little hands.

It grants her a few minutes of stillness, she makes the most of them, reaching under his nose to clean up the mess his crying made, taking each hand in hers to clean with a wet wipe, she even manages to heat up his bottle as he scrolls side to side to reveal even more pictures of Regina and Henry and her. But for a minute he lets the screen alone and the phone blocks itself, whatever had him mesmerized was his downfall and Emma swoops in to grab him and feed him before he can realize what he’s lost, her phone landing somewhere with a thud that makes her heart stop.

She rocks him right into his nap mood and sets him in his playpen, with one plushie to keep him company. Cupcake wars long over and by the way the clock moved her parent’s date as well. They deserve a nice night occasionally, and now that everything had settled down significantly they’d started even driving out of town for a meal every once in a while, an abundance of babysitters will make that possible. Emma gets to work putting everything back in her place and hiding the carpet in its very clever spot in the back of the utility closet they don’t use, the curse filled it and only another curse would make them dig around in there. Her phone appears, only the tempered glass broken and she unlocks it to see a few texts from Luke, nothing to worry about… and one text from her dad urging her to stay the night. They had a flat tire and the mechanic would only look at it in the morning.

She looks at Neal, sleeping peacefully, and starts dialing Regina’s number frantically – Fuck.

Zelena’s almost confused by the ending of the movie, how could they have won? They were a mess of a team for most of the film. That land was obsessed with that kind of undeserved victory - Are we going to watch the other two?

Regina serves her the last of the wine bottle and stands to find food - We absolutely are.

She does her best attempt of inviting her sister to stay, if she wanted her gone she wouldn’t have even asked if they were watching the sequels - Don’t you have to get home?
Does she? Henry’s with Emma, Lily’s well past needing parental presence and Mal can sleep in the forest somewhere, since she refuses to sleep on their pillows, she makes a mental note to buy at least one firmer pillow - I’ve been possessed with the aca-spirit of sleepovers. Find me some pajamas. – As long as Zelena is wearing that cuff any magic that’s not matter of life or death is unnecessary.

Zelena stands to comply and as she does Regina checks her phone to let everyone know she’ll be staying at Zelena’s apartment for the night. She takes Emma’s second call, it usually means it’s important but as her own sibling throws the greenest monstrosity of a sweater her way she informs her that she cannot help her watch Neal that night and at least Henry likes Nickelodeon just as much as him, so she should be all right if she sits them both in front of a Jimmy Neutron re run. Zelena takes over making a few sandwiches for them as Regina goes change.

Her voice comes from the bedroom – I’m grabbing sweatpants as well

- Seems unnecessary, for you any sweater will double as a dress.

Henry holds up his phone in the air – Ma says she’s staying with Neal the whole night. - They both jump when a pair of sweatpants disappears with a pop and sparkly smoke from the unoccupied chair

Lily matches his gesture – Mom says she’s staying with Zelena, dragon mom is going to a cave? So, I guess we each get an empty house. Don’t do anything mom wouldn’t want you to do. – She stands to pick up her bottles and his cans but he only sniffs and doesn’t say much as he reads the Mills family group chat as well, which is entirely out of character for him – You all right?

He shrugs and gathers his laptop and phone in his arms moving to his room - I stay alone at the house sometimes, I’ll be fine…

But that place feels like a fortress, and Regina has spells in every entrance anyways, meanwhile Lily could get in and out of this apartment in half an hour, no one would realize anything happened to the kid until morning. And he’s been taken and almost murdered a few times. Lily ruffles his hair and he ducks – Wanna watch something scary so you’ll sleep even worse?

- You’re not leaving? – His voice betrays his false bravery from earlier and shit, he’s only thirteen.

Lily shakes her head at him - We’ll never get another chance to watch the entire Michael Myers saga with no moms nagging, ever. – She carries their trash to the kitchen and lets the group chat know Henry and her will stay at Emma’s then – start firing up Netflix, I’ll call for another pizza.

Emma alternates between watching Neal sleeping and re-reading a very strongly worded text about the fact that apparently if it wasn’t for Lily, Henry would have stayed alone in her apartment. They told her he stayed alone all the time, it seemed fine… maybe she was being played by Regina’s spawn. Her brother gurgles something in his sleep and panic seizes her body before he goes straight back to sleep and she sighs in relief – Hey Siri

- What can I do for you, Emma?
- Remind me to ask Dr. Whale about getting my tubes tied tomorrow

- Ok, I’ll remind you.

She blocks her screen and puts her phone inside her sweatpants pocket, breathing in and out slowly and putting her jeans safely away on a chair in which jeans shouldn’t be put away probably, this is what that year in New York trained her for. She puts on The Office and sits on the couch, waiting for Neal to wake up any minute.
Regina steps out of the closet wearing a dark red dress that clings to her front like a glove and goes down to mid-thigh, revealing there’s not much else to the dress when she turns around and Mal trails her eyes upwards to find it ends on the small of her back, leaving the rest of the skin exposed. Regina turns back around checking herself out in the closest mirror – Well?

Mal gives a thumbs-up from the bed - Sinful. Carnal desire made flesh. Mere mortals will scorch upon seeing you enter the room. – She reaches up lazily, doubtful she’s even close enough to grab her but Regina makes sure she doesn’t make contact anyways and slaps her hand away

- Perhaps it’s too much… – she goes right back into the closet and Mal nods, sad to see the dress go but already continuing her scrolling down the podcasts list, she will understand electricity through any means possible.

Regina comes back out with a dress that’s snug to her torso and flares out into an unassuming skirt at the hips, navy blue with a few golden touches here and there it goes up to her breastbone and down to her knees, she turns and the skirt twirls. Mal hums – You are the preacher’s daughter, a sweetheart but very strict with the boys you date. I like it.

Regina turns to appraise herself and frowns at that, how could she look sweet in anything? – With dark make-up and stilettos?

Mal doesn’t give her a positive answer – This woman that got engaged, you’ve never met?

- Not in person… - So maybe it is her last shot at looking sweet – Skype. It’s just that whenever we tried to plan anything someone in the group couldn’t go, we’d cancel so they wouldn’t feel left out. But since this is her engagement party if someone can’t go that’s no excuse for the rest of us.

She goes right back into the closet and Mal’s chuckle filters in – How very wholesome of your group of online moms.

- We really helped each other, Henry owes his life to some of their tips – She comes out wearing a black dress, long sleeves, ankle-length, a slit in the side that reaches her hip and makes Mal wonder if Regina is wearing any underwear as she is twisting before the mirror and on top, from the neck down what looks like, but surely aren’t, diamonds encrusted fading into nothing below the ribs – This one?

- You look delicious but that’s what you wear to bury your ex-husband knowing damn well you poisoned him before he could amend the will that gave you access to your children’s shares in the company you helped keep afloat when he was out whoring his family name away. – Regina harrumphs looking at herself in the mirror for a moment, and then goes into the closet one more time

- What are you wearing?

- Well I need you to choose first, we are a unit.

Surprisingly they make it to the party only half an hour later than the invitation stated, fashionably late Regina calls it, and she leaves the car in her first dress not rushing but already shrugging out of her coat, that’s longer than the dress itself, and passing it over to Mal who opens the door for her
with her available hand. She follows her inside in a tamer cream-colored dress with a pattern of red roses that finishes above her knee and nude pumps high enough for Regina to huff about before selecting higher heels for herself.

After finding the appropriate room to leave their coats in Maleficent scans the room for a moment before someone squeals and she follows the sound to see Regina engulfed by a stockier woman in a hug that looks painful, the squealer she hopes. She reaches them and the hug breaks of its own volition, Regina stepping into her side – Susan, this is Mal.

- Congratulations on the engagement – She holds out her hand but the woman pulls her into a hug with no expectation of getting one back apparently, since both of Mal’s arms end up trapped under hers

- We’ll have to compare rings! - She steps away after a moment winking at her and then smiles – Boy you are tall! Are you a Mallory? My daughter’s name is Mallory too, think she’s gonna be in the wnba like you? – The woman picks at her dress and Mal looks down at her hand and tries for a laugh as genuinely as she can.

Other women come to their side before anyone can say anything else and Regina’s easily taken by the mob, both her and the man that appears to be marrying Susan left behind. He chuckles and looks up with a friendly smile - Hello, I’m Fred. Congrats on your engagement. - He offers a handshake and she’s glad to take it smiling back at him as he stops one of the waiters walking by with two drinks in his trays – Whoever these were from can wait. To us.

She clinks her glass of her strange orange concoction to his glass of whiskey softly and takes a sip - So I share a name with your daughter, I’m delighted. Wasn’t too popular in Germany. I’m German. – She sips her drink again, it’s quite good, and she will be just fine answering any questions of her fake identity.

- Yes, but honestly? She will tell you I’m only the step dad. Like a dad, but not a dad dad. – Mal lifts an eyebrow at him and he shakes his free hand in the air - Oh, she likes me just fine… but her dad is a fun dad kinda guy, so I’ll never live up to that if I’m gonna be asking about homework Monday through Friday. – He shrugs - It’s ok though. I’m from New Jersey.

Great, where the hell is New Jersey? She nods at him and they both drink, he looks like the kind of guy who’d love a clap in the back, so she gives him one – Henry, Regina’s son, has a biological mother as well and she too is a child, but Regina found that giving her a bit more of responsibilities made her grow past the fun mom. This other father can oversee school projects and laundry as well, he’ll see he must rise to the occasion if you two aren’t there to bail him out every time.

He nods – Yeah! I’ll tell Susan! – and holds up his glass for Mal to toast with him again – So are you a psychologist?

- I’m an accountant dear. I mostly just stay at home. I help Regina when she needs me in her office but outside of that? I just read. – She laughs and finishes her glass in one go, already signaling the waiter for more – You?

- I’m an electrical engineer.

- Oh, tell me everything.

Fred eventually is forced to go mingle with the rest of his friends and family by a look from his
fiancée from the other side of the room, even if they don’t find electricity as fascinating as Mal does; and Regina maneuvers herself back to Mal, making sure they move in one strategic formation in which her back is almost pressed to Mal’s front, she tries to step away a few times and Regina snags an arm out to hold her in place, so then she lays her chin on top of Regina’s head and she snakes a hand back to poke her until she stops making her look as short as she is. Mal chuckles behind her alternating her torture methods as they tour around the room making more introductions, she shows these people footage of Henry and Lily, now a cousin, and their newfound love for swords and she coos over their children that have much more normal hobbies like soccer and YouTubing. Regina even makes a couple of dances work in their strange position and when Mal tries to twirl her she only relents once, backing her against a table as soon as that’s done. Mal motions for two of her colorful drinks to the waiter that knows what she means and puts a hand on the exposed skin of Regina’s back – My love, wishing you’d gone with preacher’s daughter?

- The invitation said cocktail – she shudders as Mal starts stroking her back – Maleficent! Stop that.

- How dare you? My name is Mallory. I’m insulted by this terrible nickname. - She does not stop, in fact she leans forward to kiss the spot where her shoulders meet her neck – How does this dress hold itself up? One would think a simple tug can take it out of the way easily. My scientific curiosity is itching. – Regina shakes her off and Mal laughs, sweeping Regina’s hair to the side closest to her so she can pass her fingers through it softly, Mal waits until she relaxes and the waiter comes by with the glasses – The dads and I love the dress.

Regina yanks her head out of Mal’s grasp and counters her grin with a glare, before dissolving into a groan – It was too much. I probably look like a… harlot. This was my first impression.

Mal uses her heel to pull Regina’s chair closer and pulls her into a one-armed hug – Regina, they’ve known you for a decade, after all that kid-related bonding I don’t think they will care you absolutely overpower them in sex appeal. Trust me, it’s an adjustment curve of a few hours but eventually everyone accepts it and we get to live another day to see you look like candy wrapped in a dress. Besides, they knew they lost when they allowed you to bring a woman. The dads love that, I’ve been told.

Mal tightens her hold, kissing her in the temple a few times and Regina laughs – Shut up, stop. – She relents and Regina settles against her again – You look beautiful as well, it says if this extends into brunch I’m prepared, classic.

- The dads loved my look too, they said if I was ten inches shorter it would be game over for their wives. But then who’d reach the cereal in the high cupboard? We could never survive. – Regina wants to find her optimal glaring angle, she squirms as much as she can but Mal resumes her kissing and Regina’s forced to give up and settle for lipstick on her temple as she tries to find these dads in the crowd. When Mal’s done Regina takes out her phone and opens the front camera to inspect the damage and Mal’s eyes squint at her through the screen – Did you know Fred has Susan and himself as his phone background? And what do you have? An Apple. Before this breaks our relationship, take a nice picture of us. – Still, she glares and Regina laughs at her, she stands her ground – Take this one first so you’ll remember how angry I was about the apple.

There’s a resultant of five photos, and as she sets the best one as her phone background Mal downs another of the fruity concoctions and motions for another – Dear how drunk are you?

- Very. But as soon as you say so I stop, sober up and we go to the nearest, cleanest hotel so I can peel the wrapper off you. – Regina laughs at her and her sloppy wink while their glasses clink and she takes a sip of the drink, grimacing when she tastes the thing that must be at least 98% hard
liquor, the dads must be in the ER if they were trying to keep up with Mal.
I’ll need therapy about that speech anyways

As she does sometimes Saturday mornings since the neighbors got used to seeing her outside the house in anything but power suits, Regina sits on the steps that separate her porch from the path that crosses her front lawn absorbing the sun and this time leafing through one of the many bridal magazines that Snow mails to her regularly, even though each booklet that appears on her desk taunts her to sign a marriage certificate in the middle of one of her work days without a lot of fuss she soldiers through because Mal deserves better and eventually, they’ll have to plan that wedding.

She spots a nice enough bouquet, lots of red, and before she can think of saving the place in the booklet for later reviewing Pongo runs into her property. The closed gate didn’t stop him somehow and Regina only sees him as he runs right across the lawn and towards the side of the house to go to the back before his nose catches up with his legs and he realizes where he is, he makes a U-turn that sends him against the hedge but he recovers swiftly, galloping to Regina’s side to put his entire head on top of her lap wagging his tail in greeting.

Regina chuckles at the dog and drops the magazine to welcome him properly, scratching under his ears and cooing for a moment; and Emma Swan comes chasing right after him, bounding over the fence as if it’s not made of metal that could impale her at the slightest misstep, she should know better. The sheriff only slows down when she spots them both.

She sighs as she bends over her knees for one moment and then she stands straight again and starts walking towards them. She peels the leather jacket off herself and drops it on the ground, obviously too covered in sweat to care where it landed, the white tank top underneath clinging to her skin even more than usual, and her long laced boots long replaced with a shorter version; she produces a hair tie out of thin air and moves to pull her hair up into a ponytail and Regina smirks - Sheriff Swan - Regina eyes her up and down tilting her head to the side – Hot on the trail of a criminal? – Pongo perks up at that, so perhaps he knows what he’s done

Emma groans at her – This is exhausting police work right here. You got some cold water for an officer? – Regina obliges, does her one better and in her hands appears a cold glass of lemonade from her fridge and Emma moves hastily to take it from her and down it, half of it disappearing in one second or less. She groans again and looks down to thank Regina, who was apparently just watching her drink - Are you checking me out? – She puts her arms on her waist with a cocky smile - You just look so… - She trails just enough for Emma’s grin to grow wider – healthy.

- What the fuck? – she deflates with a frown and drops to sit putting the glass down, Pongo between them and her back on one of Regina’s pillar. The dog turns to look at her as if asking if they will continue playing, but Regina scratches his head again and he decides whatever Emma wants to say is not worth it and settles back down.

– You jumped over my gate, you’re filling your strangling jeans again, your arms and abs are toned, your hair has regained its shine and curls, and your eyes are bright. – Emma’s frown melts away as she looks at her and Regina goes on – Emma, it wasn’t long ago when you almost hurled Cruella off a cliff, you seem much better now.

- Fuck… - She looks down, at the step under her feet and Regina only hears her sniff – You had to be all mom about it. Just wait until the next evil wizard shows up, I’ll go right back to no breakfast and the lack of shampoo.
Surely, Emma Swan is not going to cry on her. She watches her put her head on her hands though and refuse to look up again, Regina raises an eyebrow, a bit thrown off as she is – Now that we know what it was, I promise to send grooming implements with Henry regardless of the number of murderers attacking.

Emma gives her a wet chuckle from where her head is buried and sniffs again – It’s so stressful… almost dying all the time. – Pongo moves over to Emma, putting his head in the crook created between Emma’s legs and her chest and she sits up a little, to pat his head in gratitude – How the fuck do you guys keep it together? Shit, I know you were always in war in fairytale land but damn, I would be bald after years and years of this.

- I’ve never looked anything but pristine dear. I don’t know if you’ve heard the stories… but I learned to externalize my pain early on. – Emma doesn’t look up at her but she does huff and pet Pongo some more, the tears at bay at the very least – Emma, perhaps a visit to Dr. Hopper every once in a while would’ve helped. It still could.

- Right. I’ll become his one and only patient – She turns then with a miserable look in her eyes – This is what Henry felt like.

Regina shakes her head – One and only? Trust me Emma, a lot of us are still going there at least once a month.

- So I failed at that happy endings thing too? Fuck. I understand you going… what the fuck are the rest of them going for? – She drags her hands over her face, wiping of the sweat - Jesus Christ, you’re telling me people got worse after I broke the curse?

Regina is constantly overcome by guilt, every single person in that town is a testament to her sins but none like Emma, it’s always seeing Emma distraught that makes her heart seize in her chest. She must know it’s not her fault, that she was only a piece of chess in their strange game – Emma, The Enchanted Forest was every bit as gruesome as a Game of Thrones episode, I need you to know that. The peasantry – she pauses to hold a hand up, they were peasants there- The peasantry used to freeze to death in the winter and rot with infection in the summer, Gold maimed himself and sacrificed his soul to avoid a war, the noblemen had no sense of morality and would rape, torture and kill whoever they desired with no repercussions, you can ask your mother how many of her cousins were assassinated for claim to a throne; and on top of all that, there was magic bestowed upon some with no apparent reason, magic that elevated people to the stature of gods that could be as beneficent or twisted as they wanted to be. Believe me when I tell you that besides my cruelty there was plenty to spare, most of these people were better off cursed… - Emma tries to shrug it off, Regina can see she’s close to saying it was just a different world, like her mother likes to do when confronted when any of her past misdeeds. Regina jumps in first - What would you do if you suddenly remembered selling your child as a slave to a King for a loaf of bread? Being a prostitute in a pirating dock, a fish for a lay? A simple cold killing your significant other? Losing a leg to a cut? Someone in this town had as sole mission in life to scrub my chamber pot free of shit, and I can’t even tell you who it was... How would you feel if you suddenly remembered all this knowing what you know now? – Emma doesn’t answer, not for a while and looking down away, and Regina pets Pongo to avoid her eyes anyways – You know, when I first made it here, after the novelty wore off, I once didn’t leave the house for a week because I realized here, mother would’ve been jailed for… all of it, and Leopold as well. And me? I would’ve died a prisoner in maximum security facility, in solitary.

She stays silent for a few more beats but turns to nod at Regina - Fine I’ll go. I’ll need therapy about that speech anyways. – Regina chuckles and Emma gives her with a small smile – You know what really has me fucked up to this day?
She makes a show of thinking about it - Absolutely everything that’s ever happened to you? – At least fate made suffering partners of Emma Swan and her

Emma nods - Yes. And, Walsh. I was going to marry that bastard. It was worse than when Neal disappeared. – Regina huffs and before she can laugh at her Emma stops her – No for real, I only said no because I had to check with Henry first but fuck, I was gonna marry him before Hook showed up. I even met his parents, how the fuck did he have parents?

- Oh Emma, you’ll have to ask Zelena. She’s much more approachable these days, maybe you can get some closure. – She reaches over Pongo to put a hand on Emma’s shoulder and after a few seconds of silence she nudges her – I must say you are not good at dating, are we sure Mr. Baker is sound of mind?

- Fuck if I know… he’s all right for now. Man, what if he’s poisoning me one cookie at a time? One dude tried that after I got out of jail.

There’s so much more to that story she’ll have to extract out Emma Swan but she shakes it off and leaves it for another day - Perhaps it's time you restrict the search to women.

- I knew you were checking me out, looking for a reason to leave Mal for me. - Emma sits up again and drops her weight against the column behind her using both hands to gesticulate - But I tried that with mini-you when we were 15, girls are not my thing.

Ignoring most of those sentences Regina opens her mouth and closes it again, her eyes doing quick scan of her. She leans forward - Miss Swan, are you telling me you’re straight? With this look?

- Are you straight-shaming me? – Emma points a finger in her direction

Regina sits there, for a second, before deciding whatever she’s just learned she’s gonna have to come to terms with it on her own. She stands swiftly, picking up the glass and her magazine from the floor - Dr. Hopper lets you know Pongo is loose as a courtesy not for you to chase him, he’s been running around this town as long as you’ve been alive, he’ll always win. Have a nice shift, Sheriff Swan.

Both Pongo and Emma stand after Regina and she turns without another word, moving to her door. Before it slams close Emma yells after her - This is reverse homophobia. I’m telling mom you prejudged me because of my boots.
I am still an animal

It had been a few months, but that morning a maniac had picked Regina up by the neck and tossed her a few feet down main street yet again and an hour later, when she’d come back to herself, she had been laying down on Emma Swan’s couch and everyone else had been fluttering over her like that was the current issue. Now that she’s gotten them to allow her to sit she demands the one single chair in the room and Henry perches himself on her armrest, his only choice what with the Charmings all crammed into the couch looking at her worriedly as they speak, Red sitting on a stool she took out of the kitchen and Lily still pacing, a line that goes from the door to the living room where she takes one look towards Regina and Henry and restarts her walking. One would think Emma Swan knows she needs to have a seating capacity of at least ten in the family she’s in but alas, she didn’t even buy a dining table.

Snow, Charming, Emma and Ruby entertain themselves posing theories as who he is, what he wants, how his magic works, whether they can call Gold or not… and Regina keeps quiet while her mind catches up, he’d barely looked at her when he picked her up as if she weighed nothing before tossing her like she meant nothing. Not everyone knew the Evil Queen by face and sure, a few had come along whose vendetta wasn’t particularly focused on her but none of them had taken her out one second into the fight like she was collateral damage, and she still does not know what happened after she lost consciousness and they’re all too preoccupied to retell anything that could be of any help. The important thing is that Henry is whole and blissfully quiet by her side even in the middle of the discussion, Lily is unharmed even when scared beyond her mind, and by the lack of tears, Maleficent must be fine as well; perhaps this one time the man didn’t want any of them.

The doorbell rings and Regina stands, patting Henry’s leg as she goes, to get some water while whoever that is on the door distracts them from coddling her; Snow is undeterred though and stands to help her, but they both stop when Lily opens the door and inhales so sharply they all hear her.

Her voice comes from the door - Mom what the fuck? – She backs up the way she’d gone and stumbles into the table, almost falling over in her haste to get away, but Ruby pulls her up by an arm mid fall and tugs her close to calm her down.

While they all look at Lily trying to mumble something out Maleficent enters with a charcoaled mess in her hands and drops it on the coffee table - I dealt with it.

Lily’s ragged breath is the only noise on the room for a moment before David stands to get between the coffee table and Snow – What is this? -, Snow puts both hands on his shoulders to pull him closer and Ruby reacts then, putting her arm across Lily’s back, more to keep her from running somewhere than for her own comfort – Charming, we all know what it is -. Emma takes one deep breath but recovers quickly, she had already been rubbing at her face nervously and now the gesture extends to her hair, for once she bites her jokes as she glances at Regina, and behind her at Henry. Henry who does nothing but move to stand behind his mother, although she is not much of a cover for him these days, the blackened body still in full view over her shoulder. Regina sighs as she looks at the cadaver before them, it is without a doubt the man that had attacked them earlier, but his face is not the indicator since there are no visible features, only a mess of blistered skin and clotted blood where his missing flesh wants to give way to the muscle underneath; his clothing had been strange enough to recognize even when most of it is gone, the lower in his body she looks the worse it is, there’s nothing but black, some parts burnt to the bone, one foot clearly missing.

Regina’s eyes finally move up to Maleficent and the fight almost leaves her when there isn’t any
defiance there, she finds Mal examining her and her scuffed clothing, it almost leaves her – You ‘dealt with it’ and you decided to bring a burnt carcass here, for my children to see. – She unfolds her arms from her front and pushes Henry further behind her.

She glances at Henry for a second and then back at Regina with a sigh - Your children were in danger, not anymore. – She tries approaching her, even if her injuries are superficial there’s a concussion involved, but Regina stops her with her eyes. – He has magic, someone must assess if it died with him. It was either you, Rumpelstilskin or the Blue Fairy.

Regina takes a deep breath, she’s still battered and doesn’t have energy to do anything but walk a few feet, but she has plenty of anger to spare – Clear the room. – and her tone shows it.

Everyone obliges quickly, taking their shot to get away from whatever it is that’s brewing on the living room, except Emma Swan of course who stays down on her seat, eyes in the general direction of anything but the body, while everyone moves without asking questions – Okay, I need to learn the ‘royal decree’ trick. – It’s David who holds out his hand to her under the pretense of helping her stand to stop her from talking anymore.

Regina waits until they’re gone, all tucked into Henry’s room. Lily goes down first, straight to the floor, head between her bent legs and her breath still all kinds of chaotic, she trembles in lieu of rocking and Ruby rubs her hands over her arms back and forth to calm her – I’ve never actually seen a... fuck. – She keeps breathing harshly and Henry sits across her on his bed, has he seen a cadaver before? He doesn’t quite remember, Neverland… he never knew if they were just sleeping. He’s quickly joined by Emma who puts an arm around him while her free hand tugs at a loose thread on her sweater, she had seen bodies even before fairytales bodies, burnt too, although with common fire, important distinction. Snow takes his computer chair and Charming stands by the door with his arms crossed, one more death can’t do much to people who’ve been through wars. Red moves to sit against the wall too, one arm around Lily – Deep breaths, Babe. We’re all okay, Regina’s all fine and… now he’s gone. – She looks at Snow and Snow looks away.

When Regina hears the door close she knows it’s as much privacy as they are going to get, she is not strong enough for any spell and both Emma and Lily are unstable to say the least. - Maleficent what the fuck? – It’s a harsh whisper but Mal does not flinch like any other would, like the rest of them do in the bedroom when they hear her curse.

She motions around the room with her finger - This little dance, chasing the villain, would’ve gone on for weeks. – She dares shrug and take a seat on the couch - I took action.

- You ‘took action’? - Regina’s body asks for her to take a seat as well, but she starts pacing instead, the burnt cadaver still between them. She passes a hand though her hair to put it in place and to sort her thoughts, how long had it been since she’d killed anyone? Graham? - We don’t-  

- Since he didn’t have a copyrighted costume on him - She starts listing things with her hands – You don’t know who he is, what he wants, what he’s capable of- The short and concise story of the city of Storybrooke read through The Mirror articles stored in the Library had taught Mal that there was always a lucky break, she doesn’t have the patience for luck.

Regina’s voice returns to its normal volume - We never do!

Mal nods at her, conceding her point - And what if he’s not stupid? If he decides not to monologue, if he doesn’t identify himself and he doesn’t chart his path, if no one in town knows him. What do you do then? How do stop him before he does whatever it is he came here to do?

- We would have figured it out. He could’ve ended up here accidentally, or he could’ve been
looking for someone, he-

- He was looking for Henry. – Regina stops her pacing at that, looking at her fixedly and Mal holds her hand out to her, to see if she’ll come and sit but Regina stays still, thinking about how Henry only stays quiet when he is scared - I was rounding the corner when he threw you down the street like a rag doll, as I rushed to you he raised a hand and the gesture threw both Snow White and Emma Swan against a wall, and then he started moving towards David and Henry, you and I both know no one wants David. So, the last line of defense was an idiot with a gun, and he shot aiming at a leg; the man disappeared when he realized he couldn’t catch a bullet. All this under two minutes. – Regina swallows but doesn’t give any more ground. In Henry’s room they all look at each other over his and Lily’s heads and they strain to hear what Mal continues saying with a softer tone – My love, I know being tossed around is an old tradition of yours and since Emma’s body is infused to the brim with light magic, it begins healing itself the as soon as she’s injured, but the minute anyone with any real intent to kill gets to Henry, it’s done. He dies.

Regina shakes her head, there’s not a moment she doesn’t think of Henry and how fragile he is, but still - We’ve dealt with this before, we protect ours and we find these people and give them a chance! Think of it like this, if this had always been the way I would have been executed long ago, Lily came to this town with clear intent to harm Snow and David, should she have been killed too? Zelena, Cruella, Ingrid, Gold for Christ’s sakes… Mal, we’ve found a better way.

- No, you’ve found a lucky streak. These are all people you either knew or are related to. – Regina’s looking paler by the second and Mal stands to go to her and force her to sit, even if not by her side. She lets herself be led to the couch and takes the opposite corner – You never wanted Snow White dead, you had many an opportunity, and you went as far as to prevent others from getting to her under the ruse of keeping her to yourself. In Neverland, Henry was lucky enough to be needed until the rescue party came, but what did sparing Pan get you? – She pauses and Regina sighs by her side - And then, Zelena took him, she was only a lost little girl who wanted nothing but a family, it worked out and now they watch movies together… how long do you think this will go on? How many relatives can take him only to be reticent to harm him swiftly. – She points at the man, still on the coffee table - A man that won’t even try subterfuge is a man I don’t want to fight. For all we know he was going to clear David out of the way and break Henry’s neck immediately for whatever reason. -

Regina deflates some on the seat, her pain settling again now that the adrenaline of a body being dropped before her has worn off, and Mal takes the opportunity to come closer lulling her even more - Regardless you cannot just kill- I don’t know how to explain- This is a different world, we at least try to mediate before this. We need information, if he did want Henry what for? Does he work alone? God, if you got him this easily you could’ve captured him and brought him to us. She chuckles at her and reaches out to pull Regina’s hair behind her ear, looking at the clean wound on the edge of her hairline - With what? Anti-witch duct-tape? The man didn’t even bother with the fog, he disappeared as if he’d never been there. Lily and Henry might be terrified of me now, maybe Emma Swan too; but the rest of us know we are safer and it was much simpler this way. I saved you all the moral dilemma.

Regina turns to look at her, still reproachful – He didn’t even have a chance to explain, maybe he needed something, and we could’ve found an alternative, if only you had let him talk. Coming here could’ve been a fresh start for him too.

She keeps stroking her hair, as long as she’s allowed. She had had a hectic morning too, between seeing Regina fall unconscious, tracking the man, dodging a few hexes and all of this. Under all that magic Regina was still human, one bad head injury could take her out, longevity be damned;
and If Henry was a target because of Regina somehow so was Lily, so was her. - Even when I look like this I am still an animal, Regina. In one minute you were unconscious, Lily and Henry were exuding fear and Emma Swan had one or two broken bones. I won’t allow that. – Regina doesn’t say anything, but she doesn’t pull away when she moves closer to give her a one-armed hug careful to not harm her any more than she already is – Having said that, you have indeed built a place where people can heal, and I am in awe of how kind you can be now to these strangers. Next time, if the enemy seems like a reasonable person underneath the angst, no brutal force shall be used.

Regina huffs at her but she doesn’t pull away, mollified by the way the conversation went and closer to falling right back to sleep than to doing anything else. That’s bad, not sleeping just yet, she jostles her and some of the fight comes back to Regina, who turns to glare at Mal, making her smile. Regina glares some more before she motions with a hand and the body is gone, the table clean as if it had never been there – Go talk to your daughter, you’ve just traumatized her. Emma and I will take Henry, I need her to heal me anyways since I just spent all I had sending him to the vault. And whatever Snow and Charming want to do to tidy up this mess, you do.

She inhales sharply, she’s being pawned off to the idiots? She turns to Regina ready to defend herself but she's obviously trying to rile her up so Mal lets her smirk her heart away, responding with a wide, saccharine smile - Yes, darling.

Regina scoffs at her - ‘Yes darling’- She sing-songs and Mal smiles her victory, she finally has witnesses of a moment of pure childishness. Regina tries to settle comfortably on the couch but gives up after a moment - And drive me home.

She stands to do as told, looking at Regina inspect the blanket with which they chose to cover her while she was unconscious, it is not the same quality of her own knitted throws and Mal can see her weighing her cold versus the itch factor of Emma’ wool. She tries not to laugh at her and stops to bend down so she can press a kiss to the top of Regina's head - I love you, dear.

Regina deems the blanket worthy and pulls it over herself as Mal goes - You’ve just incinerated a man. I don’t know how to respond to these break-neck-speed changes in behavior. – Mal laughs at her and Emma Swan’s head pops out of Henry’s door when she hears the sound, if they’re happy again it must be safe, for everyone that isn’t trying to snatch Henry.
She’s not traumatized, she’s just completely above murder

- Did you ask him why he tried to hurt me? – Is the first thing that comes out of Henry’s mouth when the Charmings leave the room after she asks them to. He looks at her head on, rattled but still willing to stand his ground much like Regina does and Mal shakes her head slightly.

- I didn’t quite have the cool head to interrogate him. Be assured, your mother has already told me how stupid that was. - He’s in better shape than expected, at least in front of her he is. He was much more scared when Regina was unconscious and they were sitting around waiting for her to come to and get on with the planning; and the righteous anger Regina warned her of seemingly has been replaced with stoic indignation, for a minute he just stands there looking at her and crosses his arms trying to look like a man. Mal gives him a small smile – And I am sorry, that I made you both see that just now, It was insensitive of me. I know it is not how you grow up in this land.

His demeanor doesn’t soften with her apology - You can’t kill people anymore. We’ve worked hard to help mom and she’s better now, you killing people around her could set her back.

- I understand – She nods wholeheartedly and lifts her arm, so he can step in, eventually they’ll overcome one-armed hugs but today is not the day, the conversation went well and they should half-commit to a hug and move on.

He stays put – I know you understand, I need you to promise.

Mal’s mouth opens subtly, and she darts her eyes down to Lily who hasn’t bothered to chime in at all. It’s a lost battle with them, they won’t justify murder like people that have gone through wars will - Henry, I will do my best. – She can’t lie and swear off killing immediate threats, but as long as there is another option she will humor them, for the sake of their family’s peace.

He stares her down for another few seconds before giving her a nod and stepping briefly under her arm, looping his own around her back – Thank you, for protecting us. I’ll go check on mom. Most likely Regina will check on him but he leaves quickly, grabbing his jacket on the way out, before Mal can tell him that and she chuckles when he’s gone, looking down to see Lily still staring blankly at her. She tilts her head to invite her to stand up and looks around the unfamiliar room as she waits – That definitely is a child raised by Regina - she eyes a picture of them by a pool and a few seconds tick by before she realizes Lily is not amused by Henry’s antics half as much as she is. and that she’s not budging. She turns to look at her daughter for a moment and decides to lower herself to sit on the floor by Lily, her legs stretched before her – Your mother thinks you are now traumatized.

- You know you’re a psychopath, right? – Lily turns to her– I’ve met a lot of bad people but the only ones that can get up, go kill someone in half an hour and move the body around without flinching were the ones with real bad shit from their childhood, drug dealers with no morals, end up in jail because they shot someone over a game on their blood-money PS4 kind of people.

- Lily…- She tries to put a reassuring hand on her daughter’s arm, but she pulls away quickly, snatching her arm out of grasp – My experiences and relationships with death and morality are different than yours. I understand why you feel like this, after all I too know how this land sees these issues and I am German on top, but the memories I know to be real differ-

- Man, fuck all that – She puts more space between them as she shakes her head – Regina’s fucked up about all the bad stuff she did, and Red’s just as much of an animal or whatever as we are, and
she grew up there, you don’t see her killing people just ’cause. I think you need therapy.

- I do not need therapy. – Her indignant huff comes with a bout of fire and Lily moves away, starts glaring more intensely, Mal tries to placate her, of all things Lily being genuinely scared of her seems the worst - I killed that man because he hurt your mother and moved towards your brother, had he been left unchecked we would have had to deal with him for a long time, and I don’t have the patience or the will to see you all get hurt over and over again in a pointless battle. Lily if you can make a difference, even if it goes against your own sense of morality, you need to act; for a lot of people this won’t ever be a big issue: besides calling for help, what could they possibly do? But you are a witch and a dragon, so you either protect the ones you love or you stand by and risk losing them.

Lily sputters, and her face contorts into some semblance of anger Mal has never seen on her - That wasn’t self-defense, and it wasn’t small shit either like slashing some tires… you stood up from mom’s side and calmly decided to go murder a man and bring his body here like a fucking trophy for us to see! Like you’re proud of it! You gotta know how batshit that is! Fuck you for making me go through that shit.

She takes a deep breath, so they can both stop and think about their next step carefully. Lily’s grasp of her anger has always been feeble and Mal can obviously be quite formidable when she lets herself, her discussions with her own mother always left a few feet of forest reduced to ash. – I’ve already vowed to both Henry and Regina to go to mediation before violence; and I apologized for bringing his cadaver here as well, it was unnecessary. So I will not sit here, on the floor, and allow you to speak to me like this.

- What the fuck are you gonna do? You are gonna have to kill me too ‘cause outside of that you don’t have any power over me, I am an adult.

She growls - Then act like it. - Maleficent can hear them all pause what they’re doing outside for a moment and she lets another stream of fire leave her nostrils and lowers her voice again – Lily you came here filled to the brim with self-pity over being alone and having to scrape by… well, it’s time for you to see that that there are much worse things, especially because you have a long life ahead of you. If the burnt carcass of a man who could’ve killed your family is the worst thing you have seen, then count yourself as lucky and move on.

- Life’s tough, shit happens? That’s the best you can do? – She lets out an incredulous laugh and passes her hands through her hair – Thanks mom, you’re so good at emotional comfort.

She stands as gracefully as possible, fixing and dusting off her clothes under Lily’s scowl, being undignified throughout this discussion has been futile - The dog can give you emotional comfort after whatever this tantrum is, what you need is perspective. – She grabs one pair of headphones from the desk and opens a drawer to return them to the many pairs there - Henry, who grew up sheltered and spoiled like only a wee little princeling could has been through worse things in the last few years than you ever have; he didn’t like what I did, he told me so respectfully, and we’ve reached an understanding even when his view of the world differs from mine. Can you try that or does Emma Swan’s darkness impair you in this matter?

Lily stands up too, hating having to ever look up at anyone. Maleficent is taller still but the drop is not too much – What I don’t like is that your apologies are bullshit. You don’t give a fuck you just killed some dude.

- You are right, I do not. – She moves towards Lily and stops a couple feet away – But my apologies are far from empty. I apologized for hurting your feelings, and I promised to refrain from the actions that did so. I don’t think you understand how major the shift in behavior I agreed
to is, perhaps because it was so easy, the others won your battle for you. What else could you possibly need?

She fights her urge to stomp her foot on the floor like a three-year-old - For you to apologize for killing that man. To admit it was fucked up.

Lily’s a child still, regardless of any human standards, in the ways of dragons she might as well have hatched a few months ago; so Mal holds her laughter, lest she angers more and ends up chattering something in Henry’s room - To you? Why? – She brings her hand to her chest and lowers her voice into a soft tone, bending her neck to be at eye level with her - Did you know him? Did he teach you to braid your hair like you mother does? Did he lie to Regina and me for you like your brother does? Did he put up with your bad temper like Emma Swan does? – Lily holds her eyes for a few seconds but ends up losing their staring contest and looking away with a clenched jaw, Mal gives her some space – Those are the lives you should value above everything else, including whatever superiority you draw from keeping your hands clean of blood. That man meant nothing to me. Do I lack basic human decency? Perhaps but, unlike you, I was never under the delusion of being human.

Lily shakes her head again, weakly, and refuses to look at her in the eye again - I don’t care what kind of… creature you are, killing someone will never be okay.

- And yet, Snow White shot arrows into several hearts, David sliced more than one man open and left him to die, your little girlfriend used to tear the limbs from Regina’s soldiers like the snacks they were to her and Regina did everything she’s attributed and more. None of us will lose any sleep over this, but now we've all vow to never do it again, you got what you wanted. – The issue seems resolved, so she turns and walks out of the room speaking to her once again before closing the door on her way - You have ten minutes to be in the car.

On the way home Henry chatters on and on about how many times Regina’s been out cold for an hour or more since the curse broke and how Dr. Stubbs, who used to be the royal healer for Regina and now does everything that doesn’t need Whale’s pitiful attempts at surgery for the Mills, will come by because he’s texted her to come and confirm that once again, magic seems to have fixed the extent of Regina’s injuries. After everything happens as he’d said and the good doctor pleads to stop the constant concussions that had been happening since before they curse was even in place, they settle in for a quiet evening in which both Henry and Lily hover over Regina with the subtlety of bulls in a china shop.

Later, when the house is darkened and the silent spells have been cast by a still weakened Regina, Mal has only one minute of peace after the lights turn off in their bedroom before Regina moves her own shoulder from under her head to stop her from falling asleep – Lily has not spoken a word to you since she got in the car, will we be needing Dr. Hopper to help her cope?

- She’s not traumatized, she’s just completely above murder. The usual spiel of a law-abiding citizen born from a psychopath. She’ll get over it in a century. – Mal settles down again and throws her arm over the entirety of Regina’s body, pulling her closer for good measure - At least your ploy to become her favorite worked. Mommy gets knocked out once and suddenly she sits three feet away instead of her usual five, how transparent.

- Oh yes, my nefarious plan - Regina laughs and her arm fights its way out of Mal’s grip to circle her shoulder, she settles her hand on Mal’s hair and ignores the urge to tangle it – You made it so easy, all I needed was a disposable villain and there you were, yelling at her for being scared of burnt bodies and having a moral compass. Did you do that thing where you start crouching
condescendingly until you’re at the same eye level? – Mal huffs against her chest and Regina chuckles again, ready to comfort her after her mirth passes, but there’s a knock on the door.

After they let him know the door is unlocked Henry appears with his hair sticking up in all directions and his phone clutched in his hand with headphones dangling – Um… mom, will you check the spells around my room?

Mal releases Regina so she can sit up – Honey, the spells are definitely up, but they’re the same ones. If you want a few others we can read up tomorrow. – He nods but doesn’t move much more and Regina smiles at him softly – Sweetheart, do you want to sleep with us tonight? – He drags his feet, moving his arm back and forth through the silencing spell a few times, but comes into the room eventually, reaching the foot of the bed.

He takes a pillow from the nearby chaise and crawls on Regina side, settling in under the covers but making sure to leave a little space – Is that why everything’s so quiet?

Mal interrupts her own rearranging and pops up from the other side of Regina – it’s for Lily’s sake, she hears everything… so she can’t sleep if we’re talking. – Or doing anything else, but apparently, going on fourteen is too young for that joke in the land without magic

Regina motions for the door to close but halfway through its arc a hand appears and stops it, and Lily shows up holding her own pillow and marches into the room without a word, tossing it by Maleficent’s feet and laying down, sideways – This bed is huge.

Mal and Regina make eye contact but nothing more, too scared to do anything that will send Lily back to her own room, it’s Henry who sits up a bit to look at her – Aren’t you like forty?

- ‘Aren’t you like forty’ – she sing-songs and makes a face at him – I was worried when I heard you stop talking and breathing and existing, but maybe I’ll shut you up myself.

Mal looks at Regina once more before settling down on the crook of her neck and throwing her arm around her midriff, thankfully Henry was much more independent than her and had settled in a way that didn’t came in conflict with her own position. She whispers – Maybe we can take turns getting knocked out – She kisses her breastbone and Regina takes her hand over her stomach and squeezes before relaxing and settling in, for only a second before Henry cries out

- Mom! Lily’s kicking me!

- Maybe it’s the Chupacabra coming to snatch you too.

Mal groans and reaches down with her foot to nudge Lily’s shoulder - Children, please. Your mother needs a good night’s sleep.

They stay silent for another few minutes until Henry speaks again – It’s very hot in here. Can you guys not do that? – Regina lifts a finger and one of the windows opens, forcing both Mal and Lily to pull the sheets further up over their heads, Regina smiles at that and presses a kiss to Henry’s head that has landed on her shoulder and then turns to do the same to the one corner of Mal’s that should be somewhere underneath all the hair.
If that wasn’t my body, you’d be dead.

Maleficent’s head pops up from between her legs and Regina groans, forcing herself to open her eyes and hear whatever Mal needed her mouth for at such a crucial moment – Lily just came in.

- Can you just – she makes a hurrying notion with her hands and Mal laughs at her. She huffs and drops herself down on the bed again – You know what? This is ruined. You’ve ruined it.

She untangles herself as she can and huffs again as she moves to the bathroom and Mal falls face down on the spot, still laughing at her – What about lunch?

- Get dressed and find yourself some food.

It’s only maybe five minutes until Regina emerges from the bathroom but she does so fully clothed, by magic probably, and Mal rolls her eyes at her losing all hope – I’ll just lay here, all alone, clutching your pillow to my chest, and reminisce of the twenty minutes we did have. – Regina answers her with the slam of the door.

She should get to the office anyway, the only reason she had stayed in the house was that they were painting the building and she had no meetings that forced her to endure the smell, so she decided to stay and work from home and it was a good decision until lunch was brought up, but she could still make the rest of her afternoon count if she grabs a bite and drives to town hall to finish up some paperwork. With that in mind she reaches the living room to find Lily slumped over herself and staring miserably at her locked phone, scratching at her scalp.

Regina passes a hand over her shoulders as she rounds the corner of the couch to sit next to her – Sweetheart, is everything okay?

- Uhhh, yeah. I’m all right. – she pauses for a moment and tacks on – um, fucking great! – With a strange smile Regina frowns, pulling her to a better sitting position, usually she’ll act much more convincingly and stand up and leave with a weak excuse – Are you sure? If you have any issue I can help with I can play hooky and come with you - She puts an arm around her, they’ve deduced that she does like hugs… just not initiating them. With her free hand she moves her hair behind her ear and strokes her temple to get her to relax – Or If you want we can just sit here for a while too. Did you have lunch? I could make you something.

- Oh wow, so this is the deluxe mom package huh? I would’ve paid $14.99 a month for this. – Regina distances herself a bit and moves the arm around her shoulders so her hand lands on the back of Lily’s neck – We have pasta.

- Oh yes please! – In one second the hand behind her neck moves to the front and starts choking the life out of her. For a moment she tries to claw it away but as someone that has been choked before she knows it’s a long shot, who knew Regina was that physically strong? She knows now but her first instinct is still to try, and to her surprise Lily could even pry the hand off, but Regina holds on.

She hisses out - You are not my daughter. Where is she? – When the woman doesn’t budge she tightens her grip regardless of the resistance, as long as there are no long nails clawing at her she’ll be fine - Who are you?
She stops trying to break free and starts patting Regina in the arm like a wrestler giving up, Henry would understand her – Fu- ck. I’m Em- Emma. – Regina looks her in the eye frantically for a second, as her vision starts blurring just a bit, and releases her, standing to get a better look of her. She takes a deep breath as soon as the hand is gone from her neck, well Lily’s neck, and the air rushes into her lungs where it hits something, and she ends up coughing out smoke – God, what the fuck? Talk about whiplash. Genetically, I should know little old ladies that offer to feed you are not who you think they are. How did you know?

- I never dressed as an old woman to try an poison your mother – She rolls her eyes - Lily doesn’t like pasta.

- At all? What kind of monster did you spawn? – The smoke insists in coming out of her mouth and she coughs some more. – And I thought we had all sworn off impulsive murder.

- Miss Swan, care to explain?

Emma’s own hand goes to the skin, it’ll bruise, or at least if it was hers it would bruise – Look, the hulk, we were fucking around with our magic and stuff while we had lunch… and she had a book that you gave her so, thanks, and I read some page, and we got freaky Friday-ed. And then Happy came in and dragged Lily-me out because someone got robbed or something before I could think of an excuse, and I just sat there with the book but obviously it’s in harry-potter-ese which I don’t speak and then Ruby came by and got really touchy, so I just got the fuck out of there and I got home but I didn’t have any house keys or nothing so I kinda walked here and I was gonna call Lily-me so we can meet up again and switch back, and now I only need her password and boom, we fix this. – As if on cue the screen lights up with a text from Ruby proclaiming that Babe, you left your book here. Come and get it ;), followed by one that says And I covered your check so maybe I should be the only one coming in any way, – See, retrieve the book and tell your daughter to stop exchanging sexual favors for food and boom, we fix this.

In some ways, villains are a blessing, how could her gross incompetence be the worst thing in Regina’s day if there’s a dude with a magic thing doing bad stuff around some place? Peace comes with the utter rage in Regina’s face aimed exclusively at her. The woman tires of looking at her after her explanation, turning back from her completely and pacing the room, she yells out - Maleficent -, who apparently is home and doesn’t pop down to see what’s going on if she hears murder happening.

It takes an entire tense minute for her to even reach the stairs and come down, humming some tune under her breath; Regina’s death stare keeping Emma from turning back to see a dragon close to whistling. Mal finally reaches the first floor by the sound of it and, how cool is that? Echolocation like a Batman villain, and Mal hums happily closer – Darling, I do love when you scream my entire name – She pauses when she sees the back of Lily’s head – Oh, I’m sorry. I wasn’t paying attention.

Emma uses Lily’s face to frown and mutters – What were you doing while she choked me to death?

- Excuse me? – She frowns, coming closer to inspect her neck, the evidence is gone - I was taking a bath. – The ends of her hair and the bathrobe confirm her story and she stands up straight again and moves to Regina with a smile – And reminiscing.

Regina stays still as ice - Did you finish reminiscing? Because Miss Swan here, has a story for you.

She reaches her and tucks herself on her side, making Regina reach up to move the wet hair away from herself and Mal nods undoing her progress - I did, hence why my sunny demeanor contrasts
with yours that didn’t even get to live in the moment. Where is Emma? – On the couch, Lily’s hand is raised.

They find their daughter backing Emma’s body away from Snow just outside of Granny’s and decide to intervene before she can find a way to either harm or heavily confuse her, Regina does the closest thing to yelling she’ll do in a public setting to get Snow’s attention from the corner of the street and almost jogs up to them. Snow is easily distracted and turns back with a smile – Hello you guys – Mal nods amicably at her and she beams when Lily gives a friendly wave by her mother’s side, she always knew one day they would make progress. Emboldened by it she reaches out for Regina - Oh wow we all barely see each other when there’s no emergencies, we’re all here, let’s go inside for some pie!

Emma scoffs, well her body does and Snow frowns disappointedly at her, Regina circles Snow to grab her by the arm – I actually need Miss Swan quite urgently. We have a matter to attend.

- Oh, do you need any help? – she’s not doing much that afternoon, since David can stay with Neal while Emma’s on shift. Maybe she should go back to work soon.

- No, no don’t concern yourself. It is bureaucracy.

- Well, Maleficent and Lily can join me then! Red should be on a break just now. – She smiles sweetly in Lily’s direction and well, she doesn’t get glared at. Good day.

- No. I need them too. I will… miss them. – Regina rolls her eyes at herself but soldiers on – I will miss them very much so, we’re all going now to my office.

They hurry away from her and she chuckles as she comes in and drops herself by Ruby’s side taking the smallest peek at her screen, it has an opened conversation with Lily herself and Red was the last texter. She locks it as soon as she sits down and Snow pokes her on the side – You wouldn’t know anything about a surprise party for someone’s birthday, right? Your mothers-in-law and Emma were acting strangely just now in the sideway, and Lily even smiled at me

She snorts - You think Maleficent and Lily would help plan you a party?

- If Regina asks? Yes. – She shrugs and takes a fry of Red’s plate, it is so Regina to plan her a party and force Mal and Lily to participate.

Red doesn’t dignify it with a response, and hey maybe they should plan her a bithday party, it’s the first legal one in a while in which no one is in mortal danger. Her phone lights up with a candy crush notification and she sighs - Lily seems off, earlier she ran out of here and even left a book…- Which Regina appears in the back office to take, really easy to spot a dusty, leather bound parchment book in the middle of meal receipts, and she goes away without leaving a trace, all while Ruby goes on outside - and no word since, now you’re telling me she was right outside, smiling at you, and didn’t come in to say hi… Did she look like she lost her phone or something?

- You look like you lost your autonomy

- You- she pauses and gapes, shoving her by the shoulder - After I’ve been listening to you about finding David for decades! If there was a party, I’ll make sure there ain’t now.

Regina sits poring painstakingly through the book, the page in question is “somewhere in the
middle like not too near the end not too close to the beginning either and it had a purple thingy drawn on the corner”, needless to say, she has to go one by one in the thousand-page tome. Mal went to her seat on the couch and Lily sat next to her with her arms closed, still blonde and not saying much; and after maybe one minute of that kind of silence Emma, who’s spinning on a chair and marveling at her inability to get dizzy, can’t bear it anymore. She uses Lily’s foot as an emergency break and faces them – Kind of a cool mishap huh? Lindsey Lohan did it.

- She also did cocaine, Swan. What’s your point? – Lily, demonstrating daily she is related to Regina Mills since she came into town

Mal chuckles, Henry had showed her the movie in question – When I was quite young still, maybe as lanky as Henry is right now, my brother and sister goaded me into venturing to the village down the mountain range to buy anything from the humans. Skinny blonde girl, no family, no money and the worst common tongue proficiency you can imagine; the only one that would barter me a rabbit I had caught was a witch, most likely looking to test her concoctions in an unsuspecting soul… I was turned into a goat for a good ten hours, and my siblings had to explain why I was a goat when they stopped a cousin from eating me.

Emma’s mouth opens wide and she turns to look at Regina who doesn’t even bat an eye - There’s so much shit to unpack in that story, oh my god – She turns to Lily, who’s the picture of uninterested interest in her body – First of all, how old were you?

- 50, perhaps? – She mulls it over – Maybe 30 or 40, blunder years.

That gets a response, and there haven’t been many responses since the whole evil wizard fiasco – What? And you looked like a kid? What kind of freak of nature am I then? And when did you turn into the fucking ‘tells fun stories while mom stews’ dad anyways? – Regina passes her page as loudly as possibly to undermark her stewing and Swan pipes up

- Probably since she was reminiscing earlier and they thought I didn’t get what they meant- Mal laughs at that as well and Lily frowns while an epiphany hits Emma – Maybe that’s what’s up! Dads are just jerking off in the bathtub daily while moms leave their stress build up.

- Jesus, dude. Shut up. – Her entire face scrunches up and Emma laughs, she’s never seen her face do that.

- What? You’re an adult!

- Does your dad jerk off a lot? - Lily uncrosses her arms to pat her pockets - Maybe I’ll call him with your voice and ask him.

- Well, maybe I’Il call your girlfriend with your voice and tell her you won’t be eating her out for fries anymore and see if your relationship survives!

- Oh, shut the fuck up, you’re sucking dick for cake so?

The back and forth is quite interesting but it escalating rapidly so she holds her hand up - Children, please. Regina needs a calm environment – Regina raises an eyebrow at her and Mal turns back to Lily and Emma – And this mix of childishness and crudeness is staggering. Just terrible behavior, don’t repeat it.

Emma stands – Whatever, I need to go to the bathroom anyways.

- Don’t you fucking dare. Sit down.
Don’t you dare? Who says that? Besides these two– She jerks her thumbs in Mal’s and Regina’s directions - What’s the problem? Like… what?... Is it like a jungle down there?

Before Lily can respond to that Regina’s voice rings out from the desk, where her eyes finally left the book - Miss Swan, go pick up Henry. – Lily immediately tosses her the keys to the bug she’s been toying with in the jacket pocket and Regina dismisses her with her hand - To the school and back here, no pit stops.

Emma decides against talking back and starts walking out of the room with heavy steps, halfway through she yanks her sweater off and tosses it on top of the jacket she’d discarded earlier – I hate your fucking body! – She slams the door on the way out and Regina’s assistant looks away and says nothing as she marches down the corridor. One perk to being generally feared apparently, last week Emma had dropped a pen in the carpet and had to hear a three-minute rant about dry-cleaning ink.

- Well, I am no longer relaxed. - Mal sighs and removes her own blazer, rolling up the sleeves – Is she paying you for oral sex with fries?

- What?! No! I can afford fries, I have a job, okay? It was a text, a goddamn text. I do it for free… just- No. Mom anything? – She wraps Emma’s arms around herself again and drops her weight against the couch

Regina gives her a small reassuring smile – Not yet, it can’t be too bad though. Likely a spell to steal someone’s identity, it would want for the victims to live long lives after the fact.

Mal stands and circles the desk to glance at the book, she speaks many common languages but never the primal one that old magics and spells use. So, she can only put her hands on Regina’s shoulders and stroke her thumbs over the soft fabric – Darling, I think whatever the darkness was, it has mixed even further. They have different scents now and as far as I know consciousness doesn’t have a smell.

Regina sighs and drops herself back against the back of her chair as well, looking at Lily sitting like a kicked puppy with Emma’s face, she’s never managed that expression with her own. – I have told you both repeatedly magic is not to be toyed with, and when I gave you that book I marked the pages you needed to practice first and told you to stay away from the others. – She pulls at one of the neon sticky marks that clash so wildly with the tome she tacked them to - This book was owned by my mother, what if Emma had read something worse? What if we can’t reverse this seemingly innocuous thing. If everything goes back to its original owner and Emma’s darkness goes to her and you get your light, that could alter your very being, you could be a different person.

- Well I’ll be great right? Balance at last, yay – she tries for a smile

Mal ghosts her fingers up Regina’s neck to try to locate the crick that will surely develop there if she doesn’t find that page soon, she looks at Lily – What about Emma? Balance for her means living with anger she’s never learned to deal with – Lily shrugs and Mal finds the tense spot in the back of Regina’s neck – That’s your friend, Lily. The Evil Queen here can tell you a lot about having suffered for long and then getting very angry about it overnight.

- It is not pleasant – she passes the page and gets back to work while Mal presses on her knots and Lily sighs on her seat, slumping even further in it.

- I’m sorry okay? I wasn’t even the one who read it or anything. She’s the one that really fucked up.
- But you’re the one we have any right to chastise. Don’t get turned into a goat for not listening to your mother about spells, don’t make it genetic. – Lily nods and takes out her phone, to find it’s still Emma’s one. Apparently that’s the kind of thing that breaks both of them, and she folds on herself, crossing her arms over her knees and tucking her head in. She’s sniffing faintly, and it doesn’t matter how quietly she does it, Mal can hear her. She goes to sit next to her again and Regina gives her a nod – I know it is awful, but I am confident Regina will find a way, and at least you learned something today – Lily snorts under her, still hidden – How do you feel? -

- Weak. – She sits up again and Emma’s cheeks betray her, reddened with her grief – I’m cold, and I can’t feel the dragon, or my magic... Like if anyone touches me I’ll just break. I didn’t know it was a thing at all, but even as a kid I’d never get sick or anything and I’d just flung myself anywhere with no fear. Right now, I’m afraid to walk.

Mal puts an arm over Lily softly and pulls her in closer – Trust me, we won’t let anything harm you while this is going on – Lily sniffs again and stays close to Mal, sometimes being stoic works just as well as cuddling. Regina understands, being stripped of magic has done that number on her a few times, she’s never been big in any literal sense of the word, she only started doing any kind of workout when she decided she needed to ride into battle with her armies if she had any hope for them to be loyal to her, and many a time she was indeed broken and only magic mended her quickly. She keeps poring over the book determined to fix this as soon as she can and after a while Mal kisses the top of Lily’s head – At least you’re blonde now.

Regina huffs on her seat - You wound me.

Henry chatters away at Mal as Lily and Emma hold a civil conversation off in the other corner of the office, both sitting on the floor. Whatever happens after the spell is over, for the last months they have been as close as being balanced as they had ever been, and they both want to be there for each other if anything changes in their basic constitution; whatever anger Emma starts feeling Lily can help process and any guilt or anything that light would spur on Lily can be dealt with too.

They bump fists and exchange phones, to end up playing words with friends against each other; Emma can only make it to one round in peace – Hey I’m sorry I put you on blast earlier in front of Regina and Mal, that was uncalled for.

Lily doesn’t look away from her phone – Yeah, and I shouldn’t have said you suck dick for cookies, I know you like Luke seriously.

- You said cake, and you were right, I haven’t paid for a slice in weeks. It’s instant head as soon as he walks in my apartment. – She nudges her in the side and smiles – But I do like him seriously too.

-Ugh – She groans – Now I’m gonna think about it every time I eat cake. Thanks a fucking lot.

Emma claps her in the back to say no problem, what are friends for outside of mentally scarring each other? - How about you?

- I pay for my meals, didn’t you hear? I’m rich. You’re the one that walked out of there today without paying, the dwarf got me first.

- I meant, is it going well? I’ve been listening to a lot of far-away things today and you’re only a half-breed dragon, Granny does not play either… there are no hotels in this town… just curious – She turns to stare at them, all looking at the book pensively – How can Mal even reminisce or
whatever in that house without you hearing? Are you letting them hear you reminiscing? How long do we have until Henry walks down one morning and you all know what he did? Fuck. We need to warn him. Would you do that? That’s a big brother move.

- I’m a woman! – She turns to the desk too, where a breakthrough is surely happening. Thank god. She’ll drown Emma Swan in one piece after.

She shrugs - You’re a lesbian, it counts for something. You pass him your sticky magazines, or you know, links, whatever you have.

- No. You and mom need to talk about that with him, okay? Fuck. - She sighs and points to Mal – You can tune things out at will if you train, see, she’s not listening to your bullshit right now. And they usually cast a silencing spell every night just to be sure, you probably just walked into something when they had the house for themselves. And I’m not telling you about Red and I, maybe it takes planning… but like how long can Regina and Mal want to keep me around? I’ll move out soon probably

- I don’t know… that was a pretty nice hug I got in your body earlier today. No baby, big house, great food… her head game cannot be that good.

Lily laughs at her and shrugs – Maybe you’d be surprised. She’s pretty strong.

- What the fuck does that even mean? - Emma locks her phone at last and shakes her head - I know I should’ve taken it when she offered before the curse broke. Or this afternoon after Happy stole you… I bet that’s how you do it; Granny’s busy, the diner is loud, the B&B is right up there.

Lily narrows her own eyes at her - If that wasn’t my body, you’d be dead.

Emma laughs boisterously - She still cringes when she remembers… since she’s my godmother and all. This is going to kill her.

Apparently, it’s an easy fix, but the fix lies in Gold’s shop. Henry offers to go retrieve the item, since Gold will give it to him easily and there’s no known dangers in the prowl ready to snatch it from him mid-way, and he asks that his only reward is a pizza they need to ask for before he leaves so he gets back just in time to eat. Emma offers to drive him anyways and Lily makes herself scarce, she really needs to call Ruby and explain. Five hours of being left on notification-read would drive anyone insane. Regina’s assistant stops packing up to try and make small talk and she points to the phone as she dodges him, that dude had never tried to even say hi to her when she’d dropped by before. She dodges the painters who are packing up as well and sits on a stairwell.

Inside Mal leans against the desk and watches as Regina rubs at her temple with one hand while she browses the book lazily now with the other, the best stress reliever she can currently find, light reading on dark magic. She stops at a very nice drawing of a chimera – Could we pause on that baby until we are sure that one isn’t getting turned into a goat every time she leaves the house?

- It is only reasonable. We must groom her to be the catalyst of the incidents not the victim. The goat-maker not the goat itself. Otherwise how will her little sister learn not to accept anything a witch she barely knows offers in a goblet? – She slides closer to Regina’s desk with a smile – No matter how beautiful she may be.

- It was ambrosia, It is not my fault you had been mixing with peasants your entire life. But I am glad to know where your trauma comes from – Mal laughs above her and it washes over her after
the afternoon she’d had, each spell she’d read had wound into her tighter, waiting to be released but having to be contained. She was going to have to unleash hell on an unsuspecting section of the forest sooner rather than later. She moves her chair even closer and takes Mal hand – You did excellently today, as a fun-dad that eventually musters enough emotional competence when their child is distraught. We will work up to fully rounded dad.

- I have been watching sitcoms when you’re not around. I am gaining valuable knowledge – She winks at Regina and she smiles brightly at her, their terrible afternoon likely forgotten - I was, and still am, awful with children. But now I don’t have to stumble through it by my lonesome, you’ve done that already. I am counting on you to steer me into the right direction when it comes to child-rearing.

- But the sitcoms are working wonders, we could leave that and any other new skillset to the television.

She bends enough to kiss her once softly – Did… you… know… we… also… have… – she undermarks every word with a kiss and Regina’s separates from the seat in her urge to get close – woodworking… channels – The disappointment is palpable and she laughs at Regina, straightening up – I’m confident I can produce a small, minimalist shelf anytime now. Just say the word.

- That seemed so promising, and you finished with a proposition I could hear from a teenager in an Ikea. Pity. – She sits properly again and makes a show of turning back to the book with a smirk

- Ah, but she returns from her call with the wolf. Say your last words.

Regina makes a show of thinking about them – I will just add that sitcoms or not, you are doing great. You have been a bit of a loner but for us humans, it takes… a village. - Mal huffs and pushes herself of the desk, walking away as Regina laughs and stands quickly to catch up to her, sneaking both arms around her and fastening herself to her back – I love you in a suit, have I told you?

- You were a goat for ten hours.

- A magnificent goat, mother said. – Her smile grows slowly until they are laughing together in their odd position. Mal can only reach up to move the hair out of Regina’s face while the arm that’s over hers stay put.

Lily comes in with the pizza and a grin that finally matches one of Emma Swan’s own expressions on her face - I paid for it with Emma’s money – She has barely put it down when she reaches for a slice before Regina can warn her. The look of utter befuddlement that crosses her face for a second is priceless, but it is short lived, her face contorts in pain as she hisses and pulls her hand back – Motherfucker! What the fuck? People live like this? Oh my fucking god.

That’s when Henry and Emma choose to come in, he puts down the chest with the stone that will help return them to their bodies on the floor – Um. Wow. Grandma has a swear jar you’d have filled today.

She’s still happily wrapped around Mal and her button up white shirt, so she smiles as she shakes her head - Anything I cast right now comes charged with the book’s energy. You’ll have to live with it for a day, or learn to knit skin like I keep telling you too.

- It’s too hard! – She drops herself on the couch with a pout.

Lily frowns with Emma’s eyebrows for the last time, her finger now throbbling – Switch us back. My face was not made for that.
Where have you been, sister?

Chapter Notes

School had me on lock.

Weeks after the murder incident Lily is still favoring anyone’s company over Mal’s, although it doesn’t seem to be intentional, which only makes it worse in the blonde’s opinion. Regina has advised Mal to be patient so Lily can have the time to come to her own peace with what happened and how their view of the world can clash sometimes, they did all meet as strangers with very different experiences and it’s already a miracle they’ve managed to form any semblance of a functioning family living under one roof. And they spend time together in a non-confrontational way easily, the afternoons they use to fly together still happen just as often as they did, and around the house they can sit and coexist but neither can mention anything that could end in disagreement without it becoming a discussion about morality.

Mal tries hard anyway, entering the kitchen for breakfast to find Regina scrolling on her phone with one hand and holding a cup of coffee in the other, and Lily playing with an orange, making it orbit her head like a moon. She dodges the flying fruit and reaches for the coffee Regina’s neglecting - Do you want to come hunt with me later? You’ve improved your diving, I think we could start.

Both Lily and Regina look up at her in sync and Regina stands to serve herself some food when she realizes she’s not the one being spoken to, while Lily shakes her head, disturbing the orange – No, I get all my food pre-killed from the grocery store. Henry and I just went – On cue, a pop tart jumps out of the toaster and Regina gives her a reproachful look as she takes it herself and drops it on a plate for Lily

- I sent you with him because you should have more self-control.

- So we skimmed a little off the top for ourselves, it was basically child labor - Lily weaves between them going for her pop tart and then leaving the kitchen as she finishes - You just wanted to sleep in!

Regina rolls her eyes and rubs Mal’s arm – She’ll come around. Let me make you some breakfast.

Mal nods and sits on the kitchen island, reading the news on Regina’s discarded phone as if she cares about the world politics Regina seems to. The date catches her eye for a while, it had been almost 32 years since the curse was cast, likely the same time has passed back in the forest outside of Regina’s curse. They few months she has spent there in Storybrooke make her feel like she did when she was young, still living close to her parents and when there were always at least two of the three brats she has for siblings around. She’s only recovered that sense of warmth now that she’s found her own family, and she would loathe for it to be irreparably damaged over a man of no consequence.

She focuses on Regina frying her an absurd amount of bacon again and smiles softly, before probably angering to the maximum extreme – I need to take Lily to Fairytale Land.

Regina turns off the stove and reaches for a plate without turning to her - You don’t need to take
anyone to that festering, disease-ridden, unmanned place. She’ll hunt eventually, immersion therapy can’t be the answer to this.

A plate is placed before her and she munches on a strip of bacon happily as Regina moves around the kitchen - I think she’ll profit from it. You remember what it was like, hellish compared to this, sure – She points strictly at her fried bacon – But for us, with the magic in the atmosphere. I think she will gain something if she can feel that. And she needs to meet her family eventually.

She stops dead in her tracks - What family? You said you hadn’t seen a single relative in decades when we met.

- It’s true – She goes for the second strip on her plate and mulls it over – However Mother is still alive, I would know if she wasn’t. And only one of my siblings had died last time I checked, and he could’ve been brought back as I was, so I truly won’t know until we get there. A reunion is afoot if my timing is correct.

Regina sits on the stool next to hers with a stunned look - Mal your entire family is still alive? Why don’t you keep in touch? Should I not meet them as well?

She shrugs minutely – It is not our way to be overly attached to one another. My family has set dates for reunions so a big number of us coincide at home occasionally, but only blood relatives are allowed on those sadly. In another occasion I will joyfully parade my wife in front of them.

Regina waves her off with a hand – I am not planning that wedding by myself while you’re on vacation - Regina mulls her story over a few times, before standing to get her forgotten plate from the counter, does anyone from Xavier’s house still stand in the Enchanted Forest? Should she care? - Okay then, I’ll arrange for portals. How long will you be gone?

- A year or so. – She has to start big on important negotiations

She drops her plate right back into the marble - No. A week.

Mal chuckles and stands to go to her - Darling, we gather once every century and I did not attend the last one. A year is reasonable, it is a drop in the bucket so to speak.

She moves away before Mal can trap her against the counter - To you. Wait 100 years, then go away for an entire year when I’m tired of you.

Mal reaches out to pull her closer but Regina avoids her narrowly - Half a year?

She shakes her head from the other side of the island and takes one strip of bacon of Mal’s plate - Two weeks.

She continues rounding the island at a slow pace - A single, miserable month in which I will weep every morning I wake and your face is not the first sight that greets me?

Regina rolls her eyes and stands still enough to be caught - A month, and you take a mirror with you.

She pulls Regina in by the waist and takes back her bacon, eating it in one bite as the brunette huffs. She bends enough to pick her up and hoist her up on the kitchen island, standing as close as possible, and drops a kiss to her neck – I say we spend today making sure I embark on this journey as well fed as possible.
The portal had left them just an hour’s hike away from Mal’s castle, the trip had already proven itself to be a learning exercise for Lily that had stumbled into everything she could have stumbled into, was contemplating cutting her jeans into shorts and had accidentally almost killed a few small creatures that now hated her. They reach the castle and the doors part for them revealing the inside of it intact even when the outside looked like the setting of a dystopian medieval videogame. It is insane, the hall they enter through is big enough to fit their house inside easily, and it only gets crazier and crazier. They’re only there for some books for Regina but Lily’s sure that if they wanted they could spend the whole month in there and not go through the whole place.

She does her best to not run to a window in the room they’re in and she uses the couch against the wall to peer over the edge and over the forest below them, she’s only got 25% phone battery left but video of that view is worth the sacrifice. The green stretches before them for miles, interrupted for a few oddly colored-tress here and there, a few buzzing creatures that must not be bugs and across the valley another few imponent castles can be seen, Regina’s amongs them apparently.

She makes sure to put her phone back in her nifty bigger on the inside backpack carefully, and turns to Mal who’s looking for the books, dragging a staircase behind her to reach the higher shelves. Lily can see her mother smirk as she moves - I have a very strong inkling that you were conceived on that couch.

She shoots up, groaning and checking her clothes for anything strange – Do it. Kill me. End it where it began. Anything after that sentence isn’t a life anyways.

Mal laughs already climbing up a wooden ladder to reach for a tome – Do you think we can take it with us? The one in the living room doesn’t quite hit the spot.

- I will move out, I swear to god. Don’t try me.

They fly for two hours after that, and they are possibly the best two hours of Lily’s life. The wind carries them effortlessly and even when the air turns cold and the clouds start biting at her scales she goes joyfully diving and soaring back up, turning on her own axis to break through a cloud, circling around Mal and splitting from the path as far as she can before coming back. They land on a clearing obviously designated for it, the trees closest filled with broken branches and the grass beneath them flattened into a mushy mess now that the snow has fallen into a thin white sheet. They turn and immediately cold seeps into Lily like it never had, freezing her to the bone, she’s afraid that if she moves they will break and leave her a bag of pieces on the ground but she turns slowly as she clatters, to reach for the bag where Regina had packed her the heaviest coat Lily has ever seen, but Mal stops her with her arms around her.

Mal breathes fire in front of them and smirks at her, placing one hand on the middle of her chest – You’ve been doing it your whole life, this is just a new extreme. Let the fire warm you.

Those were very unclear instructions, but Lily lets herself clatter another minute before she can feel it take hold, the heat, like a blanket covering her on December but she doesn’t need to huddle or to hide from the wind under Mal’s arms, she flexes her fingers first and the color returns to them, she goes on to her facial muscles and they respond just fine and then she goes for the legs, she takes a step forward and sinks shin-deep into mud – Oh fuck me.

Maleficent laughs at her - Tall boots, my dear. I do believe your mother packed you some.

She sighs as Mal starts walking in her damn appropriate footwear and starts following her, her good boots ruined well beyond what her magic could fix. At least she can see the stone wall that
should be the entrance nearby. It’s an impressive wall, but it does nothing to hide or protect the immense structure it is apparently encircling; a castle that looks like it was carved right out of the mountain it stands in reaches up into the sky, leaving Maleficent’s one to shame, the glass of the windows reflecting sun light Lily could not quite see from ground level; the thing either starts higher than they currently are or they have the first elevators on the fictional creature land.

What’s worse is that the gate is open, not one iota of resistance as Mal pushes it; they walk five minutes after crossing it until anyone pays them any mind. A woman comes out of a wooden shed by their side, Lily stares at her over Mal’s shoulder, with pale skin, tall and thin like a tree in the forest surrounding them on all sides, there’s an urgency in how she approaches them but she’s not rushing, she doesn’t seem like she’s rushing, wearing a long dark gown with nothing special about it except how she wears it and how the wind blows her waist-length hair in a perfect curtain behind her

She reaches Mal and puts both hands on her cheeks, for a few seconds she does nothing but stare at her, until Mal tilts her head forward and the other woman does the same, their foreheads touching. The woman smiles brightly - Maleficent, at last. How are you sweet? – Lily’s face scrunches up, there it is, the strange language she can barely speak, it’s gonna be a long month.

- I am very well, mother - And there it is, the straight hair gene. They both close their eyes where they stand, it lasts for close to a minute before the woman straightens her neck to kiss the top of Mal’s head several times, making her laugh – Mother, stop. Meet my daughter, Lily.

The woman turns to her, only now registering her presence at all – Oh, you have a child - She approaches with a warm gaze and a small smile but stops to take a strand of her hair - With the Queen of the Eastern Realm of the Enchanted Forest. – Lily darts her eyes to Mal and she only tilts her head, the woman continues smiling at them – I do attempt to track you children every few decades, It was said she was seen with a dragon in your preferred bit of the woods, and it is obvious if one has seen her and is open to believe that her blood is capable of overpowering ours. Welcome… Lily… did The Queen name you?

- What is your name? – and of course that’s the first fucking thing she says to her grandmother who was probably just trying to make conversation, Mal just stands there off to the side without intervening, ready to let her put her foot in her mouth like she doesn’t know it will happen if she doesn’t do something.

- Dannica.

- Lots of… - she wants to say letters but what the fuck is the dragon growl word for letter? She frowns at her own stupidity- Beautiful name.

The woman takes it with aplomb and smiles at her, taking one of her hands while surveying her while Mal laughs to their side and rushes to put her arm across Lily’s shoulders, patting her a bit – Lily has only met our tongue recently mother, she is still blundering, I assure you. It is quite a tale for supper. – The way it works is that she can understand it naturally, just by the power of dragon gods or whatever but only after she reads or hears a word, or a structure in context she will learn it, Regina’s books didn’t teach her the language but they taught her that; so as it stands, she’s just learned the verb blunder. Her grandmother she will not be calling grandmother starts leading them towards the castle and Mal goes happily dragging Lily as well; she chats away like Henry on a car ride – Tell me mother, have the ogres finally found a way to settle their differences now that Regina has removed most humans from the land?
Mal informs her mother that they will go get settled and be down for supper and leads Lily to an open space past the sheds the woman had come out from, and she looks up. No elevators, just regular wing-related ascension. Their chambers are somewhere thirty stories up from the ground and the door is in fact an opened floor-to-ceiling window that leads into what looks like a cave when you reach it. Inside rugged dark stone gives way to a hallway that now looks like it was carved by something other than nature, it fades into a more polished passageway the further in they go, and Mal turns back to a human halfway into it when the stone is soft to the touch and the ground is even beneath their feet. Lily follows her lead for a few seconds, looking around herself and turning back to see the light stream through the window, on the wall to her right a carving of a dragon mid-flight meets her eyes, followed by an intricate M, she reaches out to trace a bit of the lines that stretch up to the ceiling and rushes when she sees Mal already turning a corner.

- Nice digs, M for Maleficent? Like the style. Mom would kill us if we started carving into our doors though - She whistles as the room comes into view. It’s more like an open space, house-sized, huge-house-sized, fully furnished cave. One could easily turn in there and fly up for a few minutes to light up the torches carved into the wall.

Maleficent does just that before landing back in two human feet before her and motioning around - Welcome. I will see that another bed is brought in.

Lily looks first to the monstrosity that is the bed, they could both fit in there, hell, Regina and Henry and Emma and Red and Maybe two of the seven dwarves could fit there with them. But she’s not going to be the one to say it so she shrugs – I can take one of the 35 couches. I can enlarge things now. – She points to the three, also colossal couches off to the other side of the room, or the one off to the side of what looks like a desk.

- Very well then, would you like a tour?

Everything is decadent in there. Not one piece of wood is without a carving, dragon-related designs and motifs are on every piece of furniture Lily passes by and they’re all monumental, far bigger than necessary if she has anything to say about. The Comforter on the bed has dragons embroidered and the desk holding parchments that probably date earlier than sliced bread is the most colorful item, flaunting a polished surface where three dragons can be seen flying over the sea. Unlike Mal’s castle not one surface of the walls is painted or covered in wallpaper, the entire thing is stone, and it is probably the same rock. On one corner of the room the floor slowly dips down and suddenly what seems to be a seat emerges of the pit – Holy shit, is this a pool?

Mal laughs at her – A tub, perhaps.

She jogs all the way down – No it fucking isn’t, a kid could drown in here - Even a tall and well-fed one like Henry

Mal avoids the dip and the clay jugs that probably hold the water – You should see Regina’s tub. –

Yeah, she bets she should, each house these people reveal is bigger than the last. There’s a fireplace in which Lily can walk in as well as a hearth with a small counter by it, polished stone; a section of the wall is dedicated to spears and weapons of the like used to hunt when one is bored apparently and the armoire rivals Regina’s walk-in-closet in size if not in content. She could easily lap the place thrice and call it a work out. She jogs up to where she had dropped her bag to take a picture of the place too – Is this okay? Henry asked for pics – He’d gone as far as to giving her an old camera with film and batteries for when her phone died. Mal chuckles and poses for her by one of the most imponent chairs.

After they’re settled in and Mal changes to a long gown in dark purple and does her hair it is time
to go down for dinner, supper like they say in dragon speak, she will really only ever learn old-
people-words in that language if they all keep that kind of nonsense up. A wooden double door
leads out of Mal’s monster of a room, Lily passes her hands over the carving there as well – Did
you do this? Like why is everything so dragon-centric, ego-much?

- Most of these things we have humans make as pay for our services, so to speak, and they all seem
to believe we want this kind of ornate display – She passes her own hand over her name imbedded
on the material and smirks – But we all are quite egocentric, yes. Father asked for our names to be
added.

She pushes the doors open with one swift movement and walks out leaving Lily rushing to catch
up. The hall is more like a balcony, it overlooks a similar one in front of it but between them the
drop goes probably all the way down to the first level. Lily frowns, looking at the attempt of stairs
spiraling down, and down, and down against the walls – At least we’re gonna work out right?

Mal chuckles, looping an arm through hers and turning back to her growls – Lily, I love you. You
are my greatest accomplishment, even when I can’t claim any stake in most of who you are. – She
frowns at her mother, and stutters, what is she supposed to say to that? Mal saves her the trouble as
they start moving forward – So believe me when I tell you this is, in no way, anything I derive any
pleasure from.

In hindsight, all the clues were there, they didn’t walk up so what were the odds they were going to
walk down? But still, Lily screeches when Mal pushes her right over the railing and lets her fall.
Her agitated breath as she plummets to death only lets her look up mid-fall to stare as Maleficent
dives after her and passes right by with an encouraging smile, she manages a nod and Lily manages
another scream as she nearly hits one of the torches on the wall. Mal rolls her eyes and extends her
arms, it slows her down a bit and Lily keeps on flailing, she rolls her eyes again – Turn! – Turn?
She can only turn after a few minutes of calm… TURN? She’s gonna die, this is how she goes,
she’s gonna die and then Regina will find a way to kill Mal and go to jail and Emma will let Henry
eat candy to death and then she’ll kill herself because of the guilt and that’s that for them, this is
why she doesn’t like vacations. She looks down and every second the floor rushes up to her a bit
more, the cold, unforgiving, stone floor she’s going to smack into, any second now, her own
fucking mother killed her, how fucking up; ghosts are probably fucking real so the minute she
becomes one she’s gonna come back and haunt the fuck out Maleficent, she tucks her arms into her
sides and angles her body so she’ll go down faster, but the dark purple cloud engulfs her in one
second and she turns somehow.

Mal sighs in relief and turns under her, spreading her wings wide to veer into another dark passage
and Lily follows, if only to catch her and stab her with any nearby sharp object. The hallway is
shorter than the one that led them in the castle in the first place, and there’s light at the end of the
tunnel. Mal turns as soon as the glow reaches her, not even breaking her stride and Lily imitates,
stumbling as she lands – What the fuck?! I’m telling mom! Like as soon as we get to the skype
mirror, on god.

She doesn’t apologize but she does keep speaking to her in English so, Lily won, something - Your
body would never let you die, it’s a matter of tossing you a few times until you have a control of
when to trigger it consciously – As if on cue, Lily turns to the giggles of some baby being tossed
into the air, he reaches an inhuman height and panics as soon as he starts falling, the smoke
covering him almost immediately.

- Sybilla! – Mal all but screams and the woman in question, just as tall as them, clad head to toe in
leather and with assorted knives strapped to her person for whatever reason, turns before the small
dragon lands back down. Her blonde hair is pinned out of the way in a braid that comes forward
over her shoulder and drops to her waist and on her other shoulder there’s another dragon perched with a tail that emulates the braid. The small little thingy fixates its eyes on Lily and she freezes in place. Mal goes in for the head, with one finger, rubbing between the eyes – And who might these formidable creatures be?

Two seconds of that and the small dragon shakes a few times before a cloud covers it and a baby appears of the fog, the woman’s hand shooting up to support him – Your nephew seems to have accepted your affections, Maleficent. – She passes the baby easily and Mal’s eyes light up as she looks at the baby, the woman catches the other one as it descends and eyes Lily in a fixed manner – You have bred with a caster.

Lily waves, nice, a new verb – I am Lily. – She’s now accepted in that language she’ll sound like an old bat with a penchant for dramatics, if they all speak like that. The most vicious of cycles.

Her aunt doesn’t even spare her a smile before turning to Mal again – Where have you been, sister? Decades come and go and yet, you stay hidden.

- I was simply becoming acquainted with myself, Syb.

- Becoming acquainted with yourself? – She lifts one eyebrow as she helps the small dragon coil itself where its sbling was a minute ago – Ever the child. – Maleficent eyes her for a second and the woman breaks, smiling warmly at her – Well, I hope you are fond of who you met.

They hug, finally and both kids turn into rosy cheeked babies and ask to be let down to the floor, where they start crawling around with the very clear purpose of something. Mal laughs at their rough gurgling – You were given two in one swift move. May you survive it.

- Me? What truly sounds unlikely is that you were unharmed by the magic of an untrained, growing caster.

- Taming her spawn early was the least her human whore could do. – A booming voice comes directly from behind Lily, and she had been so distracted taking in the grandeur of the room and her new relatives that she’d tuned him out. She turns to watch the man and the size of the furniture suddenly makes sense. He is twice as tall as anyone in the room, thrice as wide. Long hair and beard, both too light to be just graying, obscuring any other feature and like Sybilla, his entire outfit seems to be made with thick leather. Behind him a more regularly sized man smiles at her, big but not big enough there isn’t an NBA player his size. He has thick jet-black hair and dark eyes, looks like an Abercrombie model that is trying to become an actor and his first role is in this medieval drama they’re in.

He sidesteps the giant – Apologies. Father is much too uptight. I am Trivio and we will become fast friends, if only to be company to one another. – He loops an arm around her shoulders even – My sister is going through a rebellious season, she will not be attending this reunion. – He drags her over to where Mal stands, glaring at the giant – Aunt, cousin. I am honored to make your acquaintance.

- I see your whore tamed your spawn as well. If it had been you, brother, this boy would be a disgusting boor like you are.

That man takes one menacing step towards them and Lily steps between him and the rest of them instinctively, arm already warming up to dangerous degrees – I will fuck you up so quick. I don’t care if you’re huge.

The giant doesn’t seem to understand English, or at least her expressions, because he’s just
confused for a second before he laughs at her – She dares speak to me, in a common tongue? This is disgraceful, we should have her head- damn, this people are quick to kill.

- Enough! – Grandma dragon from earlier strolls in the room and takes the chair by the head of the table, followed by a woman too similar to Sybilla to not be her daughter, she doesn’t even glance their way and sits to the left of her grandmother, who sighs – We will sit and eat like a family. For once, no discussion of your purist politics Kajetan.

- Of course, the preferred child returns. Nevermind that it has been over a century since she has shown her face, nevermind she is a stranger to our children because of this, and nevermind our brother fell because of her.

Mal's voice rises over his somehow - That was not my doing. – The plot thickens. The rest of them freeze by the seats they were about to take and Lily glances at her mother, as she turns around to face the mountain of a brother she has with ice in her veins– Regardless of what you think it was not my duty to live my life for him. Mother and father were here.

- He would not listen to mother and father and you knew that much. It was your time and you decided to go frolic with the cattle instead, and our brother was left here alone. He thought it would be no trouble, if his sister was living among them in her human form, and they killed him in one of their villages. We could never find the roach responsible to bring him back, you would know that had you bothered to come help with the search.

Mal turns quickly to their mother and the woman holds her gaze easily, but doesn’t deny any of the claims. Lily had thought her mother unbreakable, at worst she had seen her upset with Regina and that meant cold distance and a lot of flying. She had never seen her look down like she did right there. Mal walks past her brother leaving the room and Lily rushes after her, both turning halfway down the dark path and flying up.

There’s a decanter with what has to be one of the oldest liquors known to mankind, or dragonkind or whatever, and Mal pours herself a glass full of it to swallow it in one go. She breaths fire after her drink and it is enough to light the behemoth of a fireplace she has, so perhaps it is gasoline in the tumbler. She serves another one and Lily frowns – Hey mom, do I have to raise Henry or something? What's the buddy system here?

Mal laughs drily, fire leaving her mouth again as she turns to Lily and reaches out to pass a hand on top of her hair – Syb must be two centuries older than me. My parents maybe five. It is easy to convince yourself that times are changing and they are out of touch so to say, so if you’re the cousin or the sibling older but closer in age you become a role model easily… - She passes Lily to go sit on one of the couches – Kajetan met his mate. He would leave for months then, years sometimes, and Syb was out living her life, I wanted to go live mine… Joachim had this place all to himself for a very long while. I guess it was his time to get antsy after our father died, cooped up in here. You don’t have to raise Henry but don’t rush to get away from us, there’s centuries to explore.

- So it wasn’t worth it?

- Well Joachim died and Kajetan hates me, all for a century of roaming and getting caught in trouble. If I could still meet your mother and have you when we did, I’d take it back. I wouldn’t have been such a disaster when we met either, I could’ve helped Regina through all her grief.

Mal closes her eyes, dropping her head against the back of her imposing seat and Lily shuffles
awkwardly for a moment - Hindsight is 20/20 – Not the best line. She summons the mirror in her bag as she serves her mother another glass of that thing, the container hot with no source of heat in sight. – How do I get this thing to call mom?

Mal takes the glass with a small smile – If she didn’t teach you then we wait until she wants to appear. I am powerless when it comes to those trinkets.

- And I thought Skype was shitty.

Mal doesn’t laugh, she swallows her drink in one go and breathes the fire out though her nostrils this time around – You should go get to know your cousins, I’ll find you if your mother shows herself.

Who knew their vacation was gonna start so shittily for Mal, Lily leans against the table in front of her and chances a sip of the tumbler in her hands. It burns. That’s a new one. She coughs over the sting and sure enough fire spouts out erratically. – What I need is dinner. Let’s go hunting. – Mal eyes her like she can see right through her and Lily shrugs – Unless there’s a McDonalds nearby.
- So, what adventures are we going on now that you’re wife-less? – Zelena drops herself on Regina’s bed and her hair flies around her with the thud – That don’t include reading, please. What are you doing today?

- Kindly remove your feet from my bedding – Her sister complies with one of her best eyerolls and Regina gives her one back – I am headed to the forest now, Emma saw Roland leaving the B&B today. I have to ask Robin what that’s about, their house might need repairs well over his expertise.

- Oh, his house is fine. – That’s all she says. She goes quiet. It’s not like Zelena to ever go quiet. Where’s the follow up snark?

- Zelena?

She shoots her arm half-way up with a grimace - We are ready to get this cuff removed from my forearm this weekend? – she shakes it a bit and her other, uglier, jewelry moves against it

Regina stands from her seat and crosses her arms for good measure - What on earth did you do?

- Nothing! – She turns sideways on the bed after a few seconds of Regina trying to shake her down with her look. She will lose no staring match with her baby sister – Okay, I’m shagging Robin. – Regina flinches, so Regina loses.

- What? He has a wife! You homewrecked him?!

- I what? - She plops back down in her original pose and laughs - The home was already wrecked, if anything I salvaged something out of the debris.

- Zelena, what on earth?!

She shrugs, and it rumptles Regina’s duvet - What? Do you want him? We can share, I won’t tell the dragon

- I do not want him. But this is wrong… somehow – Regina will pinpoint it but it’s mostly the obvious girl-code on exes.

- Good, because I cannot share. I was just saying that because I need you to remove this cuff – She pulls at the leather as she stands and moves to leave the room, making Regina follow - Well, come on then. Now you know, and I promise not to ask about any kinks you have. Let’s go see the fine specimen.

So, after a grueling afternoon of Robin Hood avoiding her eyes, Zelena coming up with innuendos and Roland being his usual happy, unmarred-by-the-scene self, Regina has yet another challenge to her day before coming home later that night. She had foolishly agreed to have dinner at Snow’s loft. They make it through the meal just fine, but David has a shift, Neal falls asleep and Henry hadn’t even bothered to show up, so suddenly there’s no reason for Emma Swan to act like her presentable self

She opens a beer with her magic as she hands Regina a glass of scotch that can’t possibly have come from anywhere inside that house, she’s been improving like that. And then she drags a chair
to sit backwards on it - You look kinda fucked up about something.

- Emma! – Snow scolds her while drinking a cup of tea in a chaise by the window

- What? The kid isn’t here. – She takes a long swig of her drink

- It’s just not polite. You look great Regina. – Snow nods her way with a smile and Regina rolls her eyes at her, taking a sip of her own beverage

- I didn’t say she looked bad, Regina can be dying and look like a model – It’d be a compliment falling from someone else’s mouth, maybe someone not sitting like a truck driver - What I said is that she looks like there’s something on her mind that’s fucking her up. Am I right Regina?

She waves her away, dreading this half an hour she must stay with them out of social convention - It's nothing. Please let’s move on from my mental state

Emma snorts – Why would we ever? Your brain is a goldmine.

Snow glares at her daughter - She just misses her family, Emma.

- But to look this out of it? – She points to Regina with the bottle - It’s only been like a week, but I guess we can pitch in some money and get you a dildo if you need us to

- Emma please! – Her eyes dart to Neal’s crib across the room, dreading he’s now forever traumatized by that comment, but luckily he’s still dozing off and has no grasp of the English language quite yet.

She laughs and drinks some more - I’m kidding! I miss Lily too. Shit, I almost wore pink today.

Snow whines - Is that bad? – She tries to not make a big deal out of it, eyeing her own pink cardigan that she decided to wear over a floral print dress with soft pink roses.

Before Emma can do any more damage, Regina swallows the three fingers of scotch and sets the glass on the table, done with the entire thing already- Fine, shut up, both of you. Remember your text about Roland in the B&B this morning? Robin is staying there. He’s moved out of his house and Zelena is now involved with him.

Snow catches on first, and stands to pick up Regina’s glass tacking on an uninterested tone as she crosses the room - Like… they’re…

- Oh my god they’re screwing? I love this town – She all but cackles and takes another swig of her bottle - I know sometimes it doesn’t show, but I freaking love it.

Snow forgets all about both their glasses to sit on the couch with her - Oh Regina, are you okay? – At least she refrains from touching her

She responds with an unimpressed look and Emma laughs again - Are you gonna like predivorce Mal and fight your sister for your ex now that he’s like, walking out on his wife?

- No. I’m just concerned for them, and Roland, and Marian who you brought here and is now alone apparently. – She straightens her back, already plotting her timely departure and subsequent scenic drive. She shouldn’t have shot down that scotch.

- Hey, you wouldn’t be with Mal if I hadn’t done that so, why don’t you start with thanks Emma, for saving me of my mediocre boyfriend and thus helping me get with my tall blonde ex with the
magical uterus

Snow sighs by Regina’s side and saves her from having to lord, tell Emma Swan she’s right, by standing up with a huff and the glasses in her hands - You’re really aggravating me tonight.

She looks sheepish for a moment as Snow skulks away - Sorry mom, but this is the juiciest thing since Red told that girl to skip town. – Her tone soberes up even as she drinks more of her beer - Are they… is it serious?

- She came with me to his room in the B&B and they seemed… like something – She drifts off, they had looked almost hesitant and shy at first around her, but then they just looked comfortable. Of course, Zelena disturbed that calm as often as she could

- Shit.

Snow shrugs from the kitchen island - Maybe this is good, Zelena can mellow out

- And what? Regina has to invite her soulmate ex to the family dinners? Years go by and this is the new normal to all of us? But then Maleficent kills him one night? Hopefully Henry won’t be there but I will, and we will later learn than Regina was not in fact sleeping with Robin but with the neighbor! Who’s already fled town to avoid the fire. Then I am forced to go on a chase across the world because he’s stolen something valuable from us; he’s taken the declaration of independence, or something of equal value to Storybrooke, maybe the town sign.

Regina frowns - Why am I sleeping with the neighbor?

She shrugs - Who’s your neighbor?

- Mr. Norbury.

- Yeah. It won’t happen. You’re too uptight for him. You’re sleeping with your assistant.

Snow pauses her dishwashing - Really? You think Andrew would do that? He’s so nice.

- Mom’s right. You’re gonna have to join a gym, I’m thinking yoga teacher.

As expected Henry is nowhere to be found, his absence at dinner made it clear he was milking every second of that curfew and sneaking into the closest house at exactly 9:00 pm, Emma lives closer to any cool spot that he might’ve been in and so, it is 2011 all over again. The house is dark, cold, silent and empty. She trudges upstairs massaging her temples, hot cup of tea certainly materializing on her bedside as she trails up checking on doors for no apparent reason.

It takes her fifteen minutes to change with no magical aid, out of her clothing and into warm pajamas, putting her jewelry away properly, cleaning her face, moisturizing her skin and finally brushing her hair. She does it twice before trying for the mirror she sent with Lily to the Enchanted Forest.

She sends a command and the mirror turns grey, she continues passing the brush through her stands, a bit passed her shoulders now – Hello? Mirror mirror on the wall – The murkiness before her turns into a crystal-clear image of Mal hovering over it with a startled look and she laughs – Ah, the fairest of them all

- Darling, I thought the month was going to pass by and you’d leave me to die. Teach Lily to make
this infernal thing work. – She grabs the pocket mirror from its place on the bed by her head, where’s she’s decided to keep it just in case, and sits up properly

In the blur Regina spots another mirror – Oh, look at that beauty. I will be over there If it’s quite all right with you – She commands the grand mirror over the vanity on the far wall and gets a laugh in when Mal’s confused for a second watching herself in the compact mirror, before turning to her other mirror – Mal this mirror must be as big as a wall… and that is a mighty bed you have there. I can see it all, drop the covers for me?

Mal chuckles and all but swims from the middle of the bed to the border, to get out of it and move to the vanity - I am sharing this room with your daughter, she can come back any second now.

She sighs dramatically – We really rushed into children, didn’t we?

- Yes, well. Where’s Henry? Will he come Say hello? – Regina’s free hand rolls her wrist in a dismissive manner and Mal laughs – He’s with Emma then. Lily too is off on an adventure I suppose. I do have a very zoomed in video of her chasing a giant off just two days ago, you will love it.

Regina smiles on her side of the mirror – Show me now

- No! The battery is precious. I am refraining from everything from music to my tetris game, to capture the very most precious things to show you and Henry when we return.

- Of course, I was a fool to even ask – She winks and for a moment they both keep quiet, looking at each other smile. Regina breaks first, resuming her brushing – So how is this mysterious family of yours?

Mal huffs – As complicated as I remembered – Regina’s chuckle is endearing, really. So Mal laughs with her – I’ll contextualize you. The youngest of us died in the years I chose to be troubled and my older brother blames me for his lonely and untimely end. My older sister has baby twins and they do not care who or what they spit fire at quite yet, Mother has recently discovered that she can pass as a man in a joust if only she keeps her helmet on and now seems to be scamming humans out of their meaningless gold coins and Lily has become fast friends with her other cousin that can control his fire just fine but I’m sure he has issues with different body parts, like father like son after all.

- You know what I am going to do tomorrow, first thing in the morning, right?

Mal smirks at her - Is it an organized list of facts about my family?

Regina smirks back - With room for additions. Specially for when you fix this thing with your brother.

- Gods, do I miss you- She takes a deep breath -He’s unbearable. Zelena is an angel compared to the brute that is Kajetan.

Regina laughs on the other side and stands from the vanity to settle under the covers with a pocket mirror equal to the one she gave Lily, still her face appears where it was before, just much bigger – Speaking of, Zelena is fraternizing with Robin Hood, while naked.

- And judging by the flannel pants pajamas, you’re slipping into a deep depression over this tidbit of information. - she rolls her eyes

- Careful dear, one might say you’re getting jealous – Mal holds up the pocket mirror and Regina
takes the hint, appearing in that one instead so Mal can make the trek to the middle of the bed again – I’m wearing these because there’s no one here to wear the lace for, I am terribly sad you’re not here and I need the extra warmth. You’ve spoilt me.

- It was my honor to do so – She smirks, but it is barely visible under the bedding she’s wrapped herself under, hair spilling out on top of her, she adjusts it a bit and goes on – So your sister and your soulmate are together. Maybe he is meant to be in your life until death do you part.

- I had a similar thought. Maybe we were meant to be very good friends and we misinterpreted the situation. – She scrunches up her nose and Mal somehow knows with all her heart that Regina is rubbing her feet together - I was certainly fabricating 80% of the passion I was supposedly feeling for him.

- And gods, he’s not the sharpest, is he? It takes a simple man to put up with both you and Zelena. Anyone with a brain would know once you’re out you have to seize the opportunity.

- Dear please, you came back from the dead to get a second glimpse of me.

- And now I’m deep in a mountain range in another realm.

- I know the exact location of this mirror, I can send someone to end you.

Mal laughs at the sheer idea of some lackey of Regina’s venturing into dragon infested lands with the intent to kill her over a joke and she burrows further in her bed – Please, not Zelena.

- Show me a mirror in a common area and I’ll get that brother of yours to do my dirty work for me.

Lily flies in just as Mal is about to formulate her best response, so she can only chuckle and sacrifice as little warmth as possible, taking her hand out just enough to hold the small mirror up, outside the sheets and in Lily’s direction. Regina catches her turning back to her human form with a frown, she misses those frowns. She comes closer to the edge of the bed staring at the sole hand her mother has decided to remove from under the sheets – Is that mom? Ew, what are you guys doing? Do I have to leave?

Regina changes mirror yet again – Lily, we’re just talking! Oh look at you, very nice outfit. Love the pants.

Mal retorts from the bed, covering her arm back up – You would! Leather pants, if I wanted to be boiled I’d go find the local witch.

Lily whirls until she finds the big mirror –This is some high def shit mom, and you can change screens? How do I get to people? Oooh get me to Emma, I got some stuff she’ll love on the iPad.

Regina rolls her eyes and reheats her forgotten tea – Hello mom, I miss you mom, how are you mom.

Mal chuckles from her spot and takes her hand out to wave the little pocket mirror around - Just get her Princess Emma and come back to me.

Henry appears boggling down a slice of pizza on the general vicinity of the mirror Emma keeps on her living room’s wall and Lily snorts as he drops some on his chest, directly on his skin because apparently he doesn’t bother with shirts over there – Hey dude, magic skype, pick the cheese up from your one chest hair before mom sees you, and get me Swan.

He all but runs out of the room.
Or perhaps you each take three and I wait here

Mal’s mother that Lily still refuses to think of as a grandma raises a hand and no one moves a finger to stand up from the table after breakfast, the only one thinking of doing that was Lily probably but still, they get extra quiet when she does and she smiles slyly at that before speaking in an agreeable tone – I have a small favor to ask of you three.

You three must be her three kids so Lily, and the other two cousins who can stand on their own do so swiftly and take their mess with themselves, out of the room and towards the kitchens where dishes are cleaned with no running water. She’s shown them some few videos of the land without magic that she had saved and they’re both willing to come by for a visit sometime soon, if only to see a toilet in real life. They can thank Emma for her toilet memes. As they leave they can hear their grandmother continue to speak but they all entertain themselves with their usual small bet to see who gets to clean up.

By the head of the dining table Dannica stands and rights her clothes – There is a small number of ogres that need killing. Do I count on you?

It is hardly a request and they all know it, so Mal glances both ways before opening her mouth. When neither her brother nor her sister utter a word she rolls her eyes – Mother, may I ask why?

- Simply put, I made a deal with some elves but you are younger and spirited, it will be an easy task

- I am not a warrior. I am sure Syb and Kajetan will be fine without my assistance. – She stands from her seat as well and moves to pick up her plate but her mother’s glare bores into her and she freezes. In another century she would have fought right back, and it would have been hours until one of them backed down but now? Mal sighs with a smile and drops the plate right back – Anything for you, mother.

And that’s how she finds herself with a sabre strapped to her back, wearing her sister’s pants and in charge of carrying what’s practically the snack bag and camping supplies in case they become necessary; trailing Kajetan as he bulldozes through the forest and follows the breadcrumbs this makeshift band of ogres have left in the territory of the elves that live on the foot of their mountain.

Mal jumps over the branches and pins her hair up with a groan – Why don’t we take this to the air? We will see them from afar and burn them to a crisp before they can react!

Sybilla passes her some water – The elves think this land sacred, we cannot singe a single leaf in one of these trees. Enjoy this Mally, just bit of adventure.

Easy for her to say, father used to take her on this kind of thing, Mal was more of a reader. Feet ahead Kajetan laughs boisterously – She no longer cares for trees, remember? The witch has given her machines!

- You sneer about… - She sighs, there is no translation for technology is there? – You sneer at the trinkets the humans have made but once you encounter one you will see how incredible they are, almost indiscernible from magic. We could kill these ogres without having to be near them. – She’d love to have Emma Swan’s gun to be done with this.

- And be free of the smell of them? Do you hear this, brother? Perhaps we should visit this new land of hers.
He stops where he stands – Ah, so a bow and arrow then? – He plucks his and aims true, Mal doesn’t see what he aims at but she knows he always aims true. He releases an arrow and in one second a scream reaches their ears and a thud with it, she’d be impressed if he didn’t turn around to look down at them with a smug expression – Could It be magic?

He takes off on a run towards the sound and Sybilla follows closely behind as Mal longs for Regina and her purple mist, ans starts dragging her feet behind. Surely they don’t need any snacks just yet. Mal has never been particularly good at trekking long roads by foot and there is no attempt of a road before her, only the sounds of the wounded ogre and the others flocking to it, so she follows her only lead as swiftly as she can without rushing and hopes they’re all dead when she gets there.

Ten minutes into the scenic walk it starts sounding like a few more ogres than they expected are arriving, twelve minutes into the power walk it starts sounding like a good fight kicking off, fifteen minutes into the almost jog she smells the blood of one of her own and speeds up into a run, to arrive twenty minutes in to see Kajetan panting and shielding himself against a rock with a cut on the forearm while Sybilla plays hide and seek with one of the ogres and the other five look around to find the other attacker she’s sure.

It could be worse – Are your cousins playing a bit rough today, Kajetan?

He growls at her and pushes against the rock some more, moving the boulder towards the ogres – Will you help or are you here to carry the food and nothing else?

Mal eyes the scene once more and decides to sneak under the boulder undetected, sidling up to her brother and cleaning his cut with a cloth from the supplies bag with a concentrated frown – That witch of mine has a few books on the major blood paths in the body, I believe if we make the precise cuts on the front of their ankle, just as their feet begin, they will lose all their blood in a matter of minutes… although it could be hours for them. Regardless, they will be incapacitated. – He only glowers above her and she sighs – You are big and strong, but they are five times your size. Sybilla is outrunning them, I say we use that to our advantage.

It takes him a solid minute to relent, but he does so by straightening up and pushing the boulder off his back before rushing off almost comically to hide behind a tree thick enough for him. Mal dashes after him and Sybilla notices them huddling and approaches as well, with a grin for whatever reason – Motherhood is not quite as exhilarating, is it sister?- Eventually she’ll have to tell them the entire story but for now, she settles for raising her eyebrow at her.

- Maleficent seems to have a proposal. – He interrupts, unsheathing his monster of a sword

- With creatures this big we are better off running around until we can hit once just right, and a sword to the front of the ankle will render them useless.

- I suppose you could not think of a trickier spot? – Sybilla claps Mal on the shoulder a bit too hard

- That’s the lowest one.

Kajetan steps from around the tree with purpose in his step – Each of us must take down two, may be the gods be with you sisters

- Or perhaps you each take three and I wait here, with this weapon I barely know how to wield?

Their glares tell Maleficent she’s going to at least try to maim ogres today whether she wants to or not.
Her siblings avoid being bludgeoned by the swinging clubs the ogres favor so much, but Maleficent does not. When the one standing last swung its meager tree-bark-thick stick at her she’d flown a few feet across the clearing until a tree still rooted in place stopped her trajectory. But still, she got one and that's what she will tell Regina when she can share this terrible day with her. She cuts at her ribs as she sits up form where she’d landed on the forest floor and Sybilla rushes to her as Kajetan disposes of the offending thing with a renewed anger.

- Mally! A bit rattled but safely in one piece, are you not?

Mal prods her side again with a huff – Oh, fuck you.

- Common tongue - Kajetan slinks his way to them, looming from above and sinking his blade on the ground by Sybilla, blocking any sunlight from reaching Mal – Father must be horrified in his grave.

- Father would have starved you for a week for having me flung into a tree thicker than you are.

They keep quiet for a second but Kajetan laughs above them, a genuine laugh that makes his shoulders shake under the heavy armor-like leather he likes so much– Yes, the light of his life. He barely spoke a word to me during the goat ordeal. – He sinks to the ground much like a child and starts rummaging through the bag of snacks – Poor Joachim, he could never be coddled properly because father had eyes only for you.

Sybilla at least tries to check Mal for injury – And mother goes to great lengths to please you, K. Woe is me, trapped in the middle.

- As Malcolm. - They both glance at her, before deciding to completely ignore her antics and she rolls her eyes. These are the only two in the world that could make her feel like a clueless child. – In the land without magic there is a… performers reenact the life of a young boy, he is nor the eldest nor the youngest child and he feels his life is shaped by this.

When she finds nothing to worry about Sybilla too sits down and accepts some food from their brother with a chuckle – You truly enjoy living in this land? With humans, and humans and more humans; all because of the occasional witch.

Mal fights the urge to shrug as she’s passed some snacks too – Life is much easier in every practical aspect, Regina and her son are happy there, Lily grew up there. It’s home to them, and I don’t loathe it. Perhaps I long for the freedom to roam around flying for hours and breathing in the sharp magic in the air here but, I can always come for a visit.

- She has a son?

- You can easily come and go? It was said to be impossible.

At least they choose the important bits to be fixated on. She stretches on her spot after eating the couple of loaves she had – I will tell you everything but first, won’t we eat them? – She points with a head nod

Kajetan strokes his beard with a frown – We would have to take them somewhere we can roast them without issue. - He gives her a narrowed-eyes look - Are you certain you can help?

- Oh, fuck you too.
Sybilla stands swiftly – Let’s keep just one. Three-teeth is muscular as possible, it will make a good dinner.

So, as they walk, Sybilla and her each lifting a leg and Kajetan in the front walking bent under the ogre’s back to sustain it, Mal tells them the story, her story from the day she left their home to never come back until now. From roaming around disguised as a commoner, to dealing with the humans for trinkets and castles, to the entire ordeal with Stefan, and then finally to driving Henry around on Saturdays so he can find supplies for his school’s crafts. It is a lot. And they don’t appreciate the few times her life was endangered because humans have gotten the best of her, but she’d always seen them differently.

Humans to her were always fascinating little things, a bit weaker from a physical point of view but not to be thought of as cockroaches like many dragons do. Just like elves, and ogres, and fairies, and shifters, some humans are good, some are bad, and some are exceptional, even if they lock you up for three decades; and keeping to your own kind like many of the creatures in Fairytale Land do keeps one from meeting many exceptional beings. Who knows? Maybe there’s even a worthwhile dwarf outside of the seven that trail Snow White around.

They laugh at the mere notion of a worthwhile dwarf, but they cross the threshold of the grounds joking about it and bouncing other anecdotes of each other. Kajetan drops his load on the stony path and changes to fly up. Their mother and the children follow him out and greetings go as usual, their mother meeting Mal’s eyes from the other side of their spoils, a sly smile in her face as Kajetan retells their day of adventure and subsequent bonding.

Mal gives only a raised eyebrow she had honed because of the proximity to Regina and Zelena, it explicitly says What? Like it’s hard? They could have bonded without traipsing to the woods if they so wanted to. Mal’s distraction comes in the form of Lily, shuffling to her with a disgusted look in her face.

- So you killed this giant, you dropped him here in the backyard, and now we’re gonna barbecue him and eat him?!

Mal turns with a slow smile, reaching up to tuck some of Lily’s hair behind her ear and kisses her temple – It is an ogre, giants are much prettier.

She doesn’t pull away - Y’all are fucked up. I’m gonna get some of that super salty meat they keep in the kitchens.

- Yes, you’d think that’s beef, wouldn’t you? – Her tone doesn’t bode well for the origin of the super salty meat.

- What is it?

Mal shrugs with a mischievous smile - Who knows?
Five would prove to be too much

The tragic chain of events had been as follows:

- When it was barely 10 am Lily and Sybilla’s eldest, Gunda, were sitting dangerously close to the edge of a rocky outcrop overlooking the mountain range to the north of their own family mountain bit, Lily had always liked heights for what are now obvious reasons, but the nooks and crannies her cousins were showing her defy every skyscraper she had shoved her head out of, regardless, they had been there discussing Gunda’s recent heartbreak and Trivio had flown up and turned, promptly inviting them to a “tavern”. Apparently, none of them were the kind to concern themselves with it being before noon.

- They had flown like 4 hours to get to the bar in question so it follows that they would have to fly 4 hours back at some point in the near future, it was carved right on the side of a fucking volcano and with the darkest non-décor Lily had ever seen, both tables and seats were basically more volcanic rock and there were even a few trickles of lava against the walls here and there. It had been impossible for Lily to resist the temptation of putting her hand under one of them after seeing some other dude just casually walk under it. It didn’t burn her, it was kinda warm and I weighed down her hand way more that the gooey consistence substance should, but she can touch lava apparently. Anyways, the bar served a jet-black concoction that Trivio ordered for them.

- Lily eyed the glass of dark, murky whatever they just put in front of her with distaste and Trivio clapped her on the back with his ginormous hand while he laughed, almost making her cough up the bile that was gathering up in her throat. They must’ve had beer in the medieval ages, shitty beer but beer nonetheless. And he had said tavern, so Lily was expecting like a bar with shitty beer and like maybe a dude with a mandolin in the open mic or something, but no, that thing was all they had. Her cousin grabbed her glass without as much of a glance to it and downed half of it in one go, and she doesn’t seem like the type to chug anything, so it gave Lily hope that maybe it was just a lil’ ugly but it would taste all right. She was wrong, it tasted like it looked. But, she could feel herself get hot from the belly and onwards, the jet-black concoction was getting her drunk, fast. She was already giddy after only one gulp of the pint in front of her and then she drunk the thing straight when Gunda and Trivio did so. She swayed a bit on her seat and they decided they would only allow her five. Five. Five would prove to be too much.

- They were barely halfway through pint number two when some dude came in cackling boisterously and Gunda tensed up by Lily’s side. Five would definitely prove to be too much if the end of number two had Lily clapping excitedly for their cousin as she held the mountain of a man in a chokehold in the middle of the tavern. It was, apparently, the cheating boyfriend. Trivio rushed to the fight when the dude landed a blow on Gunda’s nose and Lily wobbled her way into the mayhem when a friend of the ex plowed him to the ground a few seconds later.

- Did any of them die? No. Were they all bloody? Yes. Did it sober them up? Not Lily. In fact the woman who came to patch them up instructed her to down another glass of the thing, right as she pulled on her arm to fix it, allegedly. It was kinda mostly okay, a brief white-hot pain and then just absolute agony while the woman checked her over for other injuries.

- That was done, but the woman was not done with them, laughing with Trivio and Gunda, and joining them on their table for a while. That was a terrible idea. She was too interested in Lily. A strange face in the bar. Plus, the place was burning up for obvious reasons like the proximity to a fucking volcano or the lack of windows and AC in the cave walls, so everyone was just like, losing layers. So there she was, well into pint number four eyeing this stranger sitting in front of her in the
medieval version of a lather vest and pants, brown skin and hair curiously similar to dreads, her eyes were deeply brown and she kept dragging them over Lily as she grilled her about her sudden appearance in their quaint neighborhood.

- Pint number four wasn’t too traumatic, Lily still vividly remembered she had a girlfriend back in the real word. But pint number five indeed proved to be way too much. One gulp in Lily felt like a videogame character taking in her surroundings, she was in a fucking cave lit by torches lining the rock wall, lava pooling a few feet to her right. Some genuinely strange-looking people around, one cousin dressed like a game of thrones character and the other jostling her with his arm that’s the size of her leg; and what had to be the most beautiful woman she’d ever laid eyes on in front of her almost begging her to press x to interact. Storybrooke was a far-away thought, she could barely remember anything outside of what she saw. Her body temperature was high enough she was genuinely debating just taking off her tank top and ripping up her jeans, she was getting hungry in a very steady manner and the scrapes from the fight were tingling like only sinking into a nearby lake would soothe them. Gunda intervened for her, suggesting they leave, they were after all battered and hours away from home, plus she would really like to prevent her own cousin from cheating on whatever werewolf she had in the land without magic. But unaware of that, the woman decided to go with them.

- She was a strictly navy blue dragon somehow, and the sun was moving lower in the horizon, hitting her scales just right for Lily’s addled mind to stare at. Flying wasn’t too hard, it was gliding, batting a wing occasionally, veering a bit; a very peaceful experience if one doesn’t want to embellish the trip. It was a death sentence while drunk. If she wasn’t falling asleep and losing height rapidly Lily was entranced by the unknown dragon cruising before her, she liked to dip and rise up again, turn in her own and fly around them all playfully. It was too much and too little all at once and Lily had narrowly avoided the tops of trees at least thrice when it all went to shit.

- A spear coming out of goddamned nowhere slashed Gunda on the side, she let out a wail and rose up again, blood pouring out of the wound, and in the commotion Lily forgot to check down and a spear flew at her, going through her right wing and staying there like an annoying toothpick. Annoying is an understatement. More like an excruciating toothpick. Much less agile than Gunda, Lily started losing height again, unable to move her wing to sweep upwards, so she crashed down on the trees under her, making the entire thing worse. On her way down she could finally see the little men with some kind of wooden apparatus designed to shoot spears upwards, why the fuck would they even need that kind of shit? Before she went down entirely Trivio and the new addition to their crew swooped down burning the entire patch of greenery and weaponry to ash.

She opens her eyes suddenly, breath picking up to a huffing pace before she can fully identify her surroundings, Mal shows up in front of her with her arms up and a worried look, reaching up slowly to stroke the side of her head, Lily huffs an tries to move her wing but it doesn’t cooperate with her and Mal strokes some more and speaks in casual english – We are patching you up, think of it like local anesthetic. – She swings her head fast enough Mal can only duck to avoid being hit and spots a paste around her wound and her uncle that’s barely talked to her painstakingly cleaning it with her grandmother’s help. On the other side Gunda lifts a wing as a greeting, with thick leaves already on her gash and Trivio sitting on the floor in his human form against her with his head between his bent legs. Lily lets her head fall on the floor again and Mal resumes her stroking – Lily dear, you can’t turn until this heals properly – The huffing breath makes a quick come back and Mal shushes her, making sure Lily’s head stays down – One or two days only, I promise. But sadly, this is goodbye. – Lily gets agitated again and Mal nods, solemn – Regina will kill me. I live already on borrowed time. The minute the blade pierced your skin I was doomed.
Lily’s head drops again with a huff and Mal chuckles, stroking her once again. She’d push her off but honestly, she doesn’t want to. Sybilla approaches with a glass of the amber booze for Mal and motions to Trivio – They were inebriated, had a scuffle in the tavern that left them impaired and as they flew home a band of humans attacked them. But he dealt with them, with help of the other.

- Which other? –

The woman comes from around Gunda with a nod towards Mal – My name is Cassiopea. I was with them after the brawl and coming here as well, I suppose. – Lily realizes suddenly that she hadn’t even asked her what her name was.

Mal nods at her as well – Thank you for helping Trivio, we are indebted to you.

- Oh no, It was my duty, not a favor is owed. Your daughter and I were fast friends, you must protect your friends.

Mal’s ever knowing glance to Lily forces a groan out of the defeated dragon, before she turns back to the newcomer with a sly smile – Indeed. And welcome them home. You may stay as long as you wish. I’m sure none will object.

A true millennial, Lily had never been alone with her thoughts for more than an hour or two since the 90s. The Pages had bought her a Gameboy once, to shut her up she suspected, and then she’d hustled enough money to buy a Walkman, those two had last her well into her twenties, even when she was in the streets she had kept those well-hidden. Not even Emma had known about them, just in case she turned out to be a thieving bitch. So the two days she had to spend as a dragon had been very much torture. Mal and Trivio had come by to chat them up a few times and she could communicate basic things like hunger and boredom with Gunda but outside of that it was very much her and her mind. And it was a well-known fact that her and her mind made a terrible fucking team.

She is all bottled up something when Mal lets her know she can turn back into a human, and her first order of business is sigh as she stomps away from Mal, towards the couch she’s been using as a bed for the week they’ve been there. Mal follows her with a fond roll of her eyes, sitting by her side and making her tone as soft as possible – What is it? Are you upset your cousin and your friend killed the people that tried to hurt you? – It’s the kind of thing she’d worry about no?

- Nah… I don’t even know anymore. - She groans – You speak to mom?

- Oh yes, I would wager they haven’t slept in two days waiting for your triumphant return to the magic mirror. – Mal chuckles, standing to reach for it just in case

- They?

- Henry, Emma, The Wolf. They have all been informed.

- Ah fuck –

- Oh no, it’s the good kind of news. Regina says you’ve gained street cred with all of them – She lifts both eyebrows quickly and settles by the bed

Lily wants to laugh at her mother saying street cred and at the idea of the other mother relaying the message as well, probably from Emma; but she can’t laugh because she really does feel fucking terrible. Maybe something did get mixed up when she switched with Emma, or maybe that’s just
how people with steady relationships feel – Is she still here?

Mal laughs from across the room – Who? Your spring break fling? She left yesterday. She did leave a goodbye note, for your eyes only.

Lily’s hands drag through her face in a way that looks almost painful – I was so fucked up, not even the hard stuff on earth gets me that shitfaced. And she was so… hot. – She flinches on her seat, is this really what she should be discussing with her mother? – I just… I’ve never had to actually stop myself, I’ve never had anyone to cheat on.

- I am far from judging you, in fact, I am in awe you were even able to control it. You should be going through the second coming of puberty. – Mal tosses her the note with a sharp flick of the wrist, it glides through the air to her almost as if a spell was at play – Do you feel any different than you did back in… Earth? Less constrained? More powerful? – She drifts off - If only Regina was here, she would have squeezed the very last drop of magical potential out of you by now.

Lily makes a finger gun and starts “shooting” things around the room playfully, making them jump a few feet in the air and land softly – I do feel it. What does it have to do with me almost cheating?
- Because had she not been fucking shot, that's definitely where that was going. She wouldn't have had to ask twice.

Mal watches amused as her things fly around – Dragons very much want to reproduce, I would say that not wanting children is unheard of. To you, a dragon will be much more physically attractive than any other creature you might encounter. Especially now, you’re very young. And correct me if I’m wrong but she was the first dragon you met without any blood ties. Half the work was already done.

- That makes no sense. So what? Any dragon I meet I just instantly want to fuck?

- Not quite. Do you find men attractive – The snort answers for her – Then no men, the most dashing male dragon won’t appeal to you. But let it be two women, one maybe a fairy and the other a dragon, your physical attraction to the dragon will offset your physical attraction to the fairy, biology one might say.

- Okay, then why are you marrying mom then? You didn’t like any dragons?

Mal shakes her head softly on her spot – There is much more to attraction than that initial physical aspect. Had I found a dragon as devastatingly beautiful as your mother – Lily rolls her eyes and Mal smiles – Maybe at first glance I would’ve been blinded like you were in that bar, and then what? The novelty wears of.

- But it’s like a thing you still feel then? At least now that we are here, have you seen some dragon so damn fine you started sweating at the fucking prospect?

Mal laughs at her, and Lily hopes she can’t feel her temperature rising at the memory. The first puberty was much better. Mal sits all the way on the bed, to give her space probably – When you find your mate all of that loses its pull on you. Don’t get me wrong, I am not blind, I could clearly see your new friend was very beautiful, and she was 100% a dragon, but for me Regina’s lips hold the universe, I need nothing else. I did my roaming, dragons catch your eye faster but others can build up to the same intensity. I thought your mother nothing but exceedingly pretty at first but by the time she wore me down I couldn’t bear those two little kisses on the cheeks she liked to give as goodbye without submerging myself in the frigid lake after she left. – Lily huffs a little bit, amused – She was very cutesy.
Lily tries to wipe the skin right out of her face again – So, If I’m in love, like really *in love* with whatever thing I fall in love with, even if the hottest dragon chick shows up, I’m just immune to that?

- This is perhaps an unfair comparison given that your mother exudes power and she was very much capable of giving me offspring, but in my experience, I’ve desired no one else since your mother first graced my eyes, even while I wasn’t aware of our attraction to each other.

- You gotta stop talking like that. It’s too creepy. – She toys with the bent paper in her hands, debating getting rid of it

Mal rolls her eyes, why must she always oversimplify things for these children? She goes on in more casual terms - I’ve also never known a couple with children that breaks up

- Gunda just got cheated on!

She rolls her wrist in a dismissive motion - Gunda was not with her mate then, let’s say she’s dating around.

She crinkles the paper with the force of her fist clenching around a corner of it - So, If I’m not feeling the intensity, should Red and I just break up?

Mal shakes her head - Life is all about connections, some might be fleeting, and some mundane, easy-going, soft. It’s never bad to have a lover, though, even if you don’t think it’ll be the one who overfills your heart. As long as it is good, any love is worthy of time. - Lily relaxes a tad and drops her gaze to the paper, clearly still torn about this stranger. Mal stands and takes a few steps forward - However, in your case it is more than a hunch, it is a fact that you are holding someone else’s person, their lives are much shorter than ours and eventually, and may the gods and your mother forgive me for this, they will find each other. Here, it is not just you you should be thinking about.

She keeps quiet for a while, before looking up at Mal – You know, Disney says you guys are such pieces of shit but you’re all so fucking soft. I lucked out on Moms.

- Balance is key. You learn as you main various enemies. – She moves to find the abandoned mirror yet again, Regina should be appearing soon.

- Shit, this has been the most educational trip I’ve ever been in, hands down. – She plays some more with the paper in her hand before deciding to torch it, a simple snap of her fingers making it catch fire.

Mal chuckles - Make sure to tell that to Regina later when you speak with her, and that I made emphasis in the importance of not flying while inebriated.

She catches the mirror after Mal tosses it like a frisbee again, dropping the blazing paper in her lap and kinda ruining her jeans there, they were already bloody so it’s good or whatever - Instead of waxing poetry about her cheek kissing?

Mal doesn’t even turn at her taunt - I will tell Emma Swan you were rendered a blubbering puddle of your own sweat without as much as *any* kiss and then where will you hide that shame won’t find you?

- Damn. I take it back. Y’all are cold as fuck.
Are we having a party?

Kathryn is the last to get to the house ever the new England image of perfection in her heeled boots defying the thin sheet of snow now covering the ground, a long coat, and pulling her Hermès scarf from inside it as she breezes past Regina, the curse had left her personality mostly intact and the transition after it was seamless, a princess in all settings. She checks something on her phone as she enters – Lovely as this invitation is Regina, this better be good – she pauses when she spots Emma and Snow on the couch with a cup of coffee each – Oh dear, this better be excellent. I would rather go back to work.

- Cup of coffee? – Regina says to keep herself from laughing, while she shakes the pot she was holding when she went to the door

Kathryn nods as she debates which seat to take - Deeply Irish.

- How else? – Regina chuckles and with a wink and a plume of smoke a flask appears on the table next to the empty cups, cream and sugar.

Emma pouts – I want some too – but snow's Stern look shuts her up, for now

Zelena comes from somewhere upstairs, wearing a ridiculous pair of dark green sweatpants coupled with a plaid button-up and her hair up in a bun – Another one? Are we having a party?

- Yes, well – There must be a pause, for dramatic effect. And she pours some Irish coffee for herself, she’ll need it if she’s gonna spend the rest of the day in this mixed company – I need to plan the wedding, you are all going to help. – She perches herself on the arm of Kathryn’s seat as gracefully as humanly possible – We have six days.

- Oh oh, I call maid of honor - It’s Emma’s reaction to that, while the other two royals merely blink at the nonsense of ‘plan the wedding’ mixed with ‘six days’, and Zelena cackles.

Snow recovers first, thinking of the least important bit as well – You can’t call Maid of Honor, it’s Regina’s decision, we are all her friends and she has to think of who would help the most and who she has a more meaningful and lasting bond with – Regina rolls her eyes at the puppy expression she tacks on and glances at Kathryn from the corner of her eye, who has said nothing and only raises an eyebrow sharply up at Regina

Regina resists the huff she wants to let out – Well, Zelena. She’s my sister. It’s only right. – Very diplomatic

It certainly will anger everyone, including Zelena. Kathryn gives a dry chuckle recognizing the move for what it is and Snow looks down, dejected. But Emma, she lets out her longest groan to date - Oh my god! What? What would you say if I started calling Neal when I have issues instead of you?! - She starts listing things with her finger - They have the same experience in sibling years, and mine doesn’t even bully me. The betrayal. I’m picking you the worst cake ever, it’s gonna be carrot cake probably.

- Miss Swan, please do stop calling me every time you have small issues.

- But we are besties. – She whines

- Aren’t you besties with baby angst? – Zelena, grabbing for the flask and bypassing the coffee, asks
- Well I can multibestie – She stands up angrily, putting her arms up

- Seems like a conflict of interest. – Kathryn adds with a grin. Calmly seated.

Emma narrows her eyes at her – Well thank you for your addition, step mother.

Snow is the one who takes offense at that and Kathryn laughs - Ex step mother, dear Emma.

Regina tilts her head to the side, remembering a conversation in the rocky months after the curse broke and no one was quite settled in their identity, whichever they chose – Kath, did you actually divorce him? It is legally binding. Side note, I’m gonna need whichever papers to sign. Please get that done.

The gesture her head makes isn’t nod or shake - He was hopped up on hero adrenaline over these two being gone, then Cora, then the rest of this town’s shenanigans. - She rolls her wrist and sips her spiked coffee – I didn’t do it on purpose, what am I going to get after he dies? His flannel shirts? Please.

The gasp that leaves Snow White shuts them all up, she stands too and Emma sits almost involuntarily – You’re still married to David?!

- Barely. I am not a threat to your… - she chooses to pause as well, for the drama no doubt – partnership.

Regina, Zelena and even Emma want to laugh at that but Snow’s body grows taut and the bit of hair she’s grown since having Neal make her adorable expressions a bit sinister, like she’s plotting against them. And of all of them, Snow is the one Regina can squeeze the most help out of, she should have kept her mouth shut. She intervenes – Kath, draft divorce papers. Just in case Fred wants to propose. And we can have another two weddings soon, after we plan mine.

It takes Kathryn another good thirty seconds of holding Snow’s gaze but she relents eventually, taking out her phone to text her assistant to get on that, and the upcoming marriage papers. And with a sharp nod Snow leaves the room, going god knows where.

Emma huffs but goes after her with her characteristic stomps - I bet Red’ll be the maid of honor in that wedding.

Zelena drains the rest of the flask and stands up, stretching like a cat- Well sis, as all your reunions, this is a smashing success.

Regina rolls her eyes and nudges Kathryn - Why did you have to aggravate her? You’ve never even touched the man.

- I remember doing it and for that I will never forgive you. – She laughs and takes out a small, legal note pad – Okay then. What’s the color scheme?

- Oooh, dark green. The only maid of honor color I would ever wear.

Zelena’s grin stretches across her face sinisterly and Kathryn takes one deep breath, but Regina shrugs minutely – Mal does love dark green.

The blonde frowns – I do not care. What do you love?

- Mal.
Zelena gags on air before them and Kathryn thinks that maybe, Regina’s new sister and her can be very good friends after all.

Snow recovers but she sits silent in what would otherwise be her dream afternoon get together, thankfully Emma shows some more enthusiasm, in the form of playing the devil’s advocate it seems – So the colors we’re working in are white, dark green and silver? – Regina nods and Kathryn sighs almost imperceptibly, Emma goes on – Like a fucking Slytherin-themed party?

It gives her pause and she glances at the two that had stuck around for the half hour Snow needed – Oh well, I’m sure no one else will make that connection

- Trust me Regina, they will. But whatever, gloomy wedding. – Emma shrugs – and you’re holding it where? How are you going to get Mal there? A portal indoors would turn the place to shit

- She can just open it in the forest and then transport them there – was Zelena’s idea from the start

- That kinda ruins the surprise though, because Regina’s gotta be dressed. Mal will definitely get suspicious if she’s waiting outside the portal all hair, make-up and white dress

Regina rubs at her forehead with one finger - So I change with magic when we go to the venue.

- Will you change Mal with magic? Or just marry her in whatever she’s wearing? Maybe you should clue Lily in, tell her to ask Mal to dress up with an excuse, and then take Mal to the venue with magic

She sighs, they’d lose a limb in the process – Maybe I shouldn’t drop the entire thing on her like this, should I give her an hour to prepare herself?

Zelena harrumphs on her seat - Shitty surprise wedding –

Snow finally speaks up - She should show up and see you already standing in the altar. Lily will help.

Regina nods – But she can’t transport anyone – Emma looks like she’s about to rebuke her – Not on purpose and on target.

- Let’s hold a wedding in the woods then. What do we have three witches for? Stop winter somehow. – It’s Kathryn decisive comment, she nods at Snow and the school teacher holds her eyes for a moment before returning the gesture, and it feels like a treaty was just signed.

Emma pipes up again – Okay. Cute. Now food, who’s gonna cook all the stuff? We can’t hire an outside caterer and have the second bride show up from an inter-dimensional hole in the space-time fabric.

Zelena snorts - Do you have an issue with this wedding?

The six days prove to be a challenging time-frame. They all have day-jobs they can’t neglect, even Zelena seems committed to guarding Storybrooke’s forests, so their afternoons and late nights are what they have to work with. First Regina makes a guest list that Zelena cuts down 30% with witty remarks, knowing the exact number of guests Emma gets tasked with convincing Luke and Granny to provide the food and drinks for the entire thing, while Snow and Kathryn’s childhood
calligraphy lessons get put to the test when the companies that take care of things such as cards ask for at least 10 business days to deliver them, they also have to get the chairs for the forest, the get up for the altar, the flowers out of Moe French, the officiant, the string quartet, the venue for the reception, the music, waiters, someone to man the bar, someone with a camera that is not Sidney Glass… and Regina helps with all that, researches the spells needed to hold an outside wedding in Maine in early December, drives out of town three times to find the perfect rings and dresses for herself and Zelena, and she spends twice as much time with Lily on the mirror, in the dead of night, trying to teach her to transform clothes so she can get Mal in at least a dress that only needs to be turned white when they cross the portal and she can make herself a suit to stand behind Mal when the time comes.

She’s almost gotten the bow tie right when she seems to have an idea – Can we get like another portal? Mom’s kinda okay with her brother and sister now, bet they’d like to come. Her mother too.

Regina interrupts the forceful re-editing of her vows – You had five days to have this idea, Lily. Okay. So, what? Three? Four? Red meat option obviously.

She counts in her mind quickly with a grimace – Five. And two babies. – Regina huffs on her side of the mirror and Lily holds up her new dark-green bowtie with a shit-eating grin – This shit looks good, I’m pumped. – Regina rewards her success with a proud smile even after her bit of anger and Lily fiddles with the fabric in her hands – Hey mom, will… did you invite Ruby?

- You don’t need to ask. Yes, of course she’s invited. - She is engrossed in the paper in her hands again, glasses low on her nose

Lily stammers - Oh, I wasn’t… I just… kinda, cheated. But I’ll just like… avoid her. Don’t worry about it, no fighting at the party.

She looks right up - Oh my god. – She slumps on her seat – Why on earth would you cheat on a werewolf? Why would you bring this up now?

- Yeah, no. I hear you, I was just… It just happened… like earlier. I just… - That was a terrible fucking idea - I’ll just talk to mom about it tomorrow, you’re stressed.

- Yes. – It comes out more like a yell than it should, and Regina takes one deep breath to calm herself. – But Lilith, tomorrow morning you will start slowly convincing your mother to wear the dress, say nothing about this, and you will put on your suit and place a glamour over it. Then you will take this mirror and get Mal’s family through a portal that will appear where it is. Maybe an hour later you will take the mirror somewhere else for the portal that will bring you and your mother to the clearing in the forest where we will hold the ceremony. Now, don’t even glance in Ruby’s direction until after we are married, she has helped tremendously this week in the diner while Granny sorts this wedding out, so for the sake of her hard work I say you need to let her enjoy the party, get well and drunk, and dance her heart away. If you feel the unstoppable need to ruin the poor girl’s day with this information you better do so in a private setting. Don’t use a crowd to try to avoid being yelled at, Mills women aren’t cowards.

She keeps quiet for a while and sniffs just out of the mirror’s mic range – Did you call me Lilith? – She’d never liked the name but the sharp pain on her chest was new

Regina’s eyes narrowed, surprised that was the take-away from her message - How can you cheat on someone the same week as a wedding you’re excited about? That's incongruous.

Yeah, it was a tough one to swallow. She tries for a joke, so they can move past it - At least it’s not my wedding.
Every glimpse of pride brought on by the success on magic left Regina’s face - Lilith… - Yup. A third one would probably drive her to suicide.

- Sorry mom, see you tomorrow. Can’t wait.
- Yes, sleep well.

- She’s right, at least it wasn’t her wedding – Regina turns to Kathryn, who had chosen to stay around instead of going home in the last leg of the journey – Five and two babies, Eugenia will love this one. - It was too late to drive, and the glasses of wine they like so much do pile up. Zelena had laid claim to the guest room before anyone could even think of that and Snow and Emma had left in a cloud of sparkly smoke, but Kathryn had decided to stick around and rummaged the closet for a pair of pajamas and a moisturizing mask, she was typing merrily away on the bed while Regina tightened the last bolts. The brunette moved under the sheets by her friend with a groan and Kathryn wagged her phone in the air – Thumbs up and angry face says your soon to be ex-daughter-in-law.

- Who does that? She couldn’t keep it together for less than a month? – She released another groan as her head hit the pillow

Kathryn moves her eyebrows under the thin sheet covering her face - Are we sure dragon eldest was able to?

She narrows her eyes - You like Mal, what is this about? – She takes off her glasses, putting them over the over-corrected paper on her nightstand

- You’re getting married. After the entire Leopold debacle, someone has to ask.

Regina chuckles, he hasn’t crossed her mind in the mess of a week she’s had - I am fine. Is this because of your just recently failed marriage to a certain blonde bimbo?

Kathryn laughs as she nods on a rare admission of feelings and related issues - Fred proposed, months ago. And I can’t bring myself to go through with that. After father drilling into me I must marry like it was my sole duty in life, and the entire James debacle. I put up with that boor well before the bimbo took over his identity. And you had it worse. – She breathes out – We met what? Twice? Thrice? As children. At least I could have a second imaginary biscuit, your wifely manners were rooted in well before our tea parties happened.

- I loathed and loved the idea equally. - Regina shrugged on her spot, recalling the parties in question, from another lifetime she hadn’t tapped into in what seemed like centuries. It wasn’t even in the forefront of her mind, that she had met Kathryn before becoming Queen - I’m sorry the curse handed you your worst nightmare, and here I was thinking you were the one left intact

- It’s ok. I wasn’t aware while it happened and now I can make Snow’s face beet red occasionally, a lifetime hobby of mine. She was a much more frequent visitor in our castle, and I in hers. Younger by just enough years to make entertaining her annoying in my eyes. – Kathryn laughs and turns fully to Regina again - So you are sure? Because you can call it off and I will take the brunt of the insults making the rounds tomorrow.

The woman nods against her pillow - I am completely sure

Kathryn reaches overhead to turn off the lamp by her side, Mal’s lamp, and her screen lights up - Then we set this alarm for 5 AM and you go put up the spells with Zelena at sunrise.
- The things we do for love

- Can I sleep with this mask on?

- I suppose we will see in three hours when you either wake up with skin or not.

- Hilarious.
Oh. Yes. The wedding. I do.

Chapter Notes

Merry Christmas, you filthy animals.
Hope you had a great one. xx.

- Have you seen… any of the others? – Is Mal’s question when she enters the spacious room, turning into human with a frown on her face

They must be already comfy, or un-comfy, in the first row for the wedding, so Lily shrugs - We had breakfast.

- Well after that they seem to have vanished. And we’re pressed for time, your mother will have a heart attack if we miss that portal.

Lily continues looking down, onto her lap, focused on her glamour not fading – Just write a note and leave it on the kitchen counter or something. I don’t think they’ll mind.

It’s all very suspicious, even with Lily’s regular behavior she should want to say her goodbyes at the very least to her cousins - You… - Mal approaches her, circles her seat and then gets promptly distracted – Reek of magic.

Lily stands and takes some distance with a chuckle – Yeah. Regina Mom just kinda taught me some of her hair and make-up spells. You know, I look a mess. Eyebrows fucked up and shit.

- Ah, grooming for the wolf. Well then. – She laughs as she sits in the chaise Lily vacated – Hopefully she’ll appreciate it.

- What about you? – It is not as casual as she wants it to be and Mal raises an amused eyebrow at her – I mean, you look you know, great. But is that what you’re wearing? ‘Cause you can do better, and do some of that hard pattern shit in your hair so mom can really see what she’s been missing.

- You want to use me as a lab rat. I will not suffer your attempts at experimental magic – She laughs, a laugh coming from deep in her chest spurred by the good mood one wakes up in when ready to go back home to a lover – But I suppose I could change. Any suits in that bag of yours? She likes a suit, I’ve been told.

- Oh no… - She makes a show of thinking and switches her tone just so - But there was this dress on the back of your huge antique closet thing. I bet mom would like you in that one.

- By Ozma, you got the tiny one. – Zelena shuffles to Regina again after a few excruciating minutes of ushering Mal’s family to the front row, the snow falling above never quite reaching them as expected. The little chill wasn’t as easy to displace though so the guests that had arrived were all forced to stay in their coats. – One of them is a no show.

Regina would peer to get a glimpse of them but well, the element of surprise – They are… taller
than Mal?

- There’s one young man that looks like a tree I could climb – she sighs dreamily – Are you ready
to shackle your life to this amazon of a woman? We do have half an hour to run to safety.

She rolls her eyes on her seat - Everything is in place?

- Except the brides. And Lily. And Roland who seems to be frolicking in the forest. But he is
hardly vital to this shenanigan.

Regina huffs, Robin and him are well into the last rows so it would work itself out eventually – Ok
then, tell Emma to open the portal.

- And then what? Run back here to walk after you? Call her. Reggie, don’t tell me marriage will
render you stupid.

Mal can tell something is very wrong when the portal drops them off somewhere deep in the forest
and there is no one waiting for them. Still, she doesn’t sense the danger anywhere near and a quick
look around reveals nothing but mottled white covering the little green that autumn left. She wants
to alert Lily, but the foolish girl is almost delighted by the sight and nudges her forward with an
elbow, towards what Mal can see now is candle-light of some kind, a confusing mix of scents
coming from it.

After a very pointed look towards her daughter she approaches gingerly, making sure Lily is safely
behind, and fire already gathering on her chest just in case. So there’s a lot of tension in her body
when the soft music starts, and the trees bend in ways they could never do to let them peer into a
clearing ahead. She whirls around to look at Lily, who raises both eyebrows at her now wearing a
suit with a bowtie, and her hair somehow tied in a neat, low ponytail, backpack gone somewhere
out of sight. She smiles and points forwards, and thank god she does because Mal turns just in time
for the music to rise as Regina walks from a side to stand directly in front of them, looking ahead
with a smile.

She doesn’t move much, completely out of it as she is, the only thing that happens for a while is
that the fire leaves her nostrils as she exhales in relief. It’s Lily who takes a step forward and
passes a hand over her shoulders, Mal’s dress changing to white from the spot where her palm
makes contact and downwards – C’mon mom! Let’s walk down this aisle – She only sees the
others then. There must be at least 50 people sitting in two neat blocks before them, all turned back
to watch her, and in the middle a path softly covered by the Snow that’s fallen and lined with
candles. Mal takes one step into the path before her and the music changes, to a nuptial march.
And that’s when it all clicks in her mind.

It is a miracle the music maintains its pace instead of speeding up to match her strides, or that she
doesn’t stumble in her haste to get to Regina, or that regardless of what she thinks it is a very slow
advance she makes, but Mal feels the few feet she crossed were an ocean when she finally reaches
the front and manages to take one of Regina’s hand. It lasts one whole second before she’s pulling
her into a kiss and the woman is laughing under her lips

- You’re skipping steps.

Zelena snickers behind her and Mal remembers herself – Oh. Yes. The wedding. I do.

There’s a few chuckles from the audience Mal has not stopped to study yet, and the cricket smiles
beatifically at them both, not that they notice – Well, that would make my job easier. But I feel obligated to take it from the top.

Regina takes a small step back with a wink to Mal, still holding onto her hand and motions for him to start. The entire thing passes in a blur if Mal’s being quite honest with herself, the minute he starts speaking her eyes drift to Regina’s bright smile and the crinkle around her eyes, at the way her olive skin peeks so beautifully from under the lace of her dress that goes from her neck to the forest floor, at how the diamond earrings play with the light from the candles that float around the clearing and the snow fading into nothing just a bit above their heads. She had gone through all this trouble while Mal herself was prancing around the forest without a care in the world. She wonders if she can interrupt, with a hug to give her some warmth, with another kiss, with the tears about to spill from her eyes.

And then she speaks – Maleficent, from the moment I laid eyes on you you have been an ever-present thought in my mind. I immediately wanted to devote my life to making you smile, even before I knew what that meant, and I am so terribly sorry it took me – she chuckles as Mal’s eyes start getting misty – It took me the better part of four decades to become someone who could. You have been patient, and strong and often too forgiving; and I promise to honor those choices every day, to repay it in spades and to do my absolute best to make you happy.

She seldom cries, and it is even less often that it renders her a mess unable to articulate but under Regina’s beaming smile and Lily’s attempt of a discreet sniff she can only stand there for a minute, willing her tears to at the very least leave her voice untouched. She clears her throat as subtly as she can and the woman before her gives her own wet chuckle as she steels herself – Regina I am so incredibly grateful you’ve chosen to spend your life with me. You gave me purpose once upon a time, you gave me a family I can call my own, you showed me the depth we have within ourselves. I have existed for many years, but I wasn’t fully alive until I met you. You don’t need to repay anything, you have done so already with every second you’ve given me. I would do it all again.

It is another endless stretch of time in which she can’t draw her closer and kiss her, a small squeeze of the hand will have to do. Zelena’s hand breaks the moment though presenting Regina with a ring and behind Mal Lily does the same. As they take the rings and place them on each other’s fingers, finally, Archie lets out a small breath and draws attention to himself with a warm smile – Regina, do you take Maleficent to be your wife?

- I do.

- Maleficent, do you take Regina to be your wife?

- I do.

- Then I pronounce you dragon and wife – Mal huffs amused at his little quip and he smiles brightly, at not being charred hopefully – You may kiss each other.

Permission is much heavier than expected and for a second she watches Regina’s smile grow as one of her own tears escape, thank god for her impatience because if not they could have stood there another eternity. Regina reaches up to pull her closer, her fingers tickling the nape of her hair, and Mal goes down willingly as the guests cheer for them.

There’s a lot of hugging at the other end of the aisle, Henry rushing to squeeze in between them while Lily passes an arm behind Regina to smack him in the head while the photographer tries to make something out of that, it takes him a few shots but by the end they have one that Regina approves and Mal disturbs the unit before Emma can sidle up to them, she squints at the front of the crowd – Is that… Trivio?
Lily stops her low-level bullying - Oh yeah! We can get a pic! – Mal rushes off to her family and for a moment Lily pays attention to that, amused as her mother tries to explain what a photograph is and why they should come over and get one.

Emma pops up from just outside the crowd to jostle Lily, Luke smiling warmly from above her shoulder, while Henry and Regina finish catching up from the three hours they’ve been apart, and Mal convinces the other several sizes of dragon to come with her and starts making introductions. Regina, gracious as ever, greets them perfectly while Lily stands there ignoring Trivio’s grin to focus on better things, like the purple baby dragon standing on Regina’s head and Henry’s sheer excitement at the little thing. It’s such a nice scene, them getting along together, Sybilla answering any question Henry throws her way, Dannica laughing amicably at Regina’s quips. Mal turns to glance gratefully at Lily and draws attention her way – And this is Ruby, Lily’s famous werewolf – she’d reached the group while she was dragging her family members towards the strange lightning-jail contraption. There is one single beat of strange silence but Mal’s too happy to even notice.

The wolf frees her right arm to wave at them before slipping it right back under Lily’s jacket and Gunda huffs – A picture, was it? –, she doesn’t sound excited as she eyes the man’s camera flash towards another group of people.

But they do take a few pictures and Mal smiles at the miniature version the photographer shows her for approval, they look great, and it will last for centuries to come. They can even have a printed copy for each of them in less than a day - Kajetan wouldn’t come, I assume. – Nothing can ruin Mal’s mood as she chats easily with her mother and sister while Regina lets herself be held before her, regardless of how short it makes her look, completely engrossed in observing one of the twins perched on her forearm while the other coos from his mother’s arms in its human form - A wedding was just one bit too much for him, I am afraid – Her mother says with sharp eyes

- It was, of course, more for my benefit than Mal’s. I hope it didn’t offend. – Regina says apologetically but burrows closer against her wife with a smile – It served as an excuse to meet you, though.

- Yes, of course. And for us to see Mally bawl like a hatchling and for the twins to meet a friend as well. – Sybilla says as she lets the one who isn’t fixated on Regina’s eyes down on the forest floor where it sits by a standing Neal, who had wobbled to them, quiet for once, and staring right at the baby in front of him as if he knows it is not an equal. Regina ignores the huff Mal gives behind her because Neal’s innate magic blocks a bout of fire and her new sister-in-law laughs – They do not see a lot of infants, thankfully this one can defend himself.

- How does one control that?

Mal chuckles by her ear then – One doesn’t. They burn what they burn.

Dannica chimes - Some more than others.

As if to prove her point the one on her arm waves its tail and Regina ducks just as he sneezes fire, at least Mal is intact – Well then, we will have to prepare.

Henry’s had just one bit too much and he tries to whisper – Mom… I’m cold… I’m cold – Most likely he’s thinking of the meals he can get, and the cake slices to come, the glasses of champagne to taste when no one is watching

Mal laughs and reaches over to warm his cheeks and his reddened nose with her hands as she smiles by Regina’s ear - Oh dear, can we get cars? I promise you will all love it.
She chose a waltz for their first dance, Regina knows from first-hand experience Mal *loves* a waltz and since she was a girl, Regina had always longed for a grandiose ball the day of her wedding, her father had stoked that fire with tales of dresses and banquets any princess like her would have, while her mother of course focused much more on how she had to behave in such an occasion. Regardless, she had chosen a tediously long waltz, and the groans from Kathryn and Zelena were very much worth the trouble, seeing as how happy Mal looks at the sound. They go around by themselves maybe five times before David maneuvers Snow to the floor expertly and the others join in.

Well past caring about form, Mal pulls Regina closer to motion with their joined hands to Emma and Luke stumbling around awkwardly with very confused expressions, and then to Robin and Zelena stepping around and twirling Roland – Thank god, I am far from the worst.

- Darling you dance like your nightly meals depended on it – Regina praises and, as if on cue, Fred decides to lift Kathryn and twirl her around, drawing attention to her, much to her chagrin. Mal raises an eyebrow and Regina laughs – If you must, go for it.

Regina still yelps when Mal draws her up, her hands shooting down to hold on to her shoulders, they go around a few times and Regina laughs when Mal lowers her a bit only to decide to twirl her some more. The men around the room have a very clear physical barrier, their arms allow them to use the momentum for one or two twirls, Mal doesn’t seem to have that issue. It’d go forever probably, but Henry appears by their side with wide eyes. He gapes – Uhhh, I can’t do that, but… grandpa gave me lessons?

Mal chuckles as she puts her down, Regina’s watery smile aimed towards Henry and his little tie. She gives a bow and kisses her hand in farewell, turning to her step son with a grin – All yours, Prince Henry. – For the next song Regina dances with Henry almost amazed at his skill, while Trivio moves in surprisingly graceful for a dance with Mal, it would seem like he’s fraternizing with humans behind his father’s back.

They make a show of cutting into the cake, complete with Emma moving to smash Regina’s face into it and Lily’s clawing into her arm to stop her, and then it is time to eat and for the DJ to overtake the live band with the compromise playlist Regina approved of the day before. The seating is a mess, the family table was shuffled and re-shuffled and shuffled once more at 6am with the 5 additions, and Mal kinda chuckles at the resulting joining of two round tables and the variable chair-to-surface distances, Roland the most affected on his mildly-uncomfortable father’s lap. It is Zelena and them, Lily and Ruby, Henry by his lonesome, Trivio and Gunda and Sybilla and Dannica with two small dragons trying their best, and finally Regina and her. Surely, Snow White took offense to that. She sits with Charming and little Neal, Emma and Luke, and somehow by the will of the gods Kathryn and Fred. And they chat easily over there, as they do over here and Mal interrupts her very tasty meal to lift her glass of wine with one hand and round Regina’s chair with the other – I would just… loathe to leave this moment pass without letting you all know how grateful I am for your presence here. This has been truly a significant occasion, I’ll never forget it.

- Darling… – Regina moves to peck the corner of her lips and Zelena interrupts her moment

- Is this a toast in the middle of the meal? Because I refuse to stop eating – She undermarks the entire thing with a bite of her salad – I woke up at dawn for this, we barely ate toast.

- Well then – she tips the glass on her direction – To Zelena, who made this day toast possible.
They raise their glasses chuckling as the redhead rolls her eyes, and Regina lays another quick kiss on her cheek before going back to her well-needed plate with only one hand, the other one grabbing for hers when she tried to return it to her fork. She too could eat one-handed.

After the party is underway and the alcohol is flowing Mal and Regina are much more equipped to do the rest of the social rounds. Everyone’s very happy for them, some people are under the wrongful assumption that being elated would let Regina dance to pop music in public, Snow White turns bold with a little alcohol in her system and Emma and Luke develop a very specific scale to rate the different, all excellent, appetizers offered, washed down of course with Dr pepper obtained from god knows where, a palate cleanser. Henry is stuck in limbo torn between Roland, Neal, the dragon twins circling each other and the other very young infants, and the youngest on the other side of the spectrum who might probably only be his mother and his sister; so he sits at the bar with another serving of cake and avoids the hair rufflings people would love to give him. Zelena takes the dance-floor to engage in public indecency with a blushing Robin, and Trivio and Gunda amuse themselves with making whoever dares ask for a dance very uncomfortable; while Sybilla and Dannica chat amongst themselves sampling all the different liquors the land without magic has to offer, always keeping an eye on the two overpowered miscreants playing with little fragile kids in expensive little suits and dresses.

At the end of the tour the last but certainly not least is the over-crowded family table but with the DJ they hired playing “fire only” the last remaining there are Lily and Ruby, sitting there after what seems like a long while. Surely, Lily’s doing, Mal thinks. What a strange mix of shy and defiant her daughter is. Ruby waves them over to the seats next to theirs and congratulates them with a smile big enough Regina knows Lily followed her advice – It was such a beautiful ceremony. I am sure you guys have the real deal.

- Thank you, Miss Lucas. It means a lot coming from a believer such as yourself – Regina smiles and between them Lily takes a deep breath and swirls the liquor of her glass

- We can call the girl Ruby, dear! – The waitress laughs and nods – I have a favor to ask her anyways. I need you to kidnap this one tonight. I do not care where you take her or what you do with her. I need the house to be empty. – Mal turns to wink at Regina and Lily sits up from her slouch, a moderate slouch, Regina will train it out of her altogether, eventually

- What? No, Mom. It’s okay. I’ll go to Emma’s.

Ruby grins conspiratorially -Nope. I bet Granny is staying out late sorting this stuff out, you and I can have the place to ourselves. You heard your mother. It’s for a good cause. Let me go ask. – She stands and bounds away from the table as Lily groans, watching her dodge bodies with an expert precision

Mal chuckles as she pats Lily’s leg. Mallory and hers compounded experience with films tells her everyone should be getting some love after a wedding. And she would love an empty house. She stands, kissing Regina’s forehead as she goes – I’ll find Miss Swan, make sure she knows to stay sober enough to keep Henry safe and then we can wrap this party up, so you can see what a month does to a dragon. – She adds in a mock whisper, laying another kiss by her wife’s temple before leaving altogether

Lily can’t even muster enough energy to be properly disgusted, passing her hands over her face. Regina gives them both a good margin of at least ten feet and five screaming people in between before she moves to the chair closer to her daughter – Oh Sweetheart, how are you? We haven’t had a chance to talk.
- I’m good, all good. Not ruining anyone’s day.

Regina takes one good look at her, gets her to stop scrubbing at her skin by cupping her face with her hand and stroking her cheekbone – I wish you could have a better time today too. How did you like the Enchanted Forest?

She shrugs - Shit food, very crisp oxygen. The trees were definitely on high definition, though. Weird render on some animals… and don’t worry about me it’s my fault for fucking up every good thing ever…. I am super happy for you two, though. You just go, enjoy your party.

Regina laughs at the quick summary of the surreal experience that is being in another dimension where the very air seeps with magic, and she plants a kiss on her cheek, absence does make the heart grow fonder and disregard any embarrassment it may inflict on 30-year-old teenagers – You look very beautiful on your tuxedo.

- I feel like… Henry’s age right now. Stop it.

Regina drops her hand to the drink and takes it, sipping it herself – Very well then – She straightens on her chair – What possessed you to go screwing around in what basically are the middle ages? Even if Miss Lucas wasn’t in the equation, with nothing but a selfish outlook of the situation, do you understand the risk you put yourself in? Anyone else who might decide to sleep with you from now on? God forbid you are dying with some strain of syphilis or something of the like we can’t detect nor fight in this land. And gods, did you think of contraception? Because I do believe that’s an issue for you these days.


- That’s what I thought. You’ll show me the pictures of your trip tomorrow? – Lily nods - And Ruby, you better talk to her before she tries to have sex with you tonight

- Yes ma’am. – Lily salutes her weakly and Regina turns to leave, passing a hand over her shoulders as she goes. It really is a very nice tuxedo she produced. There’s potential in her daughter.

Regina finds Mal watching closely the strange formation Henry and Emma are trying to replicate, instructed of course by Trivio and Zelena, experts in this traditional Oz dance. She molds herself to her side – Will the lady give me this dance? Away from whatever this is? – Surely Henry can’t die doing that, so it’s a question to ask in any other time, and as long as the disk jockey is playing slow songs, she might as well sway to them.

- Oh. I could never. I am married, you see. – She turns sideways with an easy smile – Powerful caster, you wouldn’t stand a chance.

- I won’t risk my life with such a public display then – It’s always nice to stand up on her toes to whisper anything in Mal’s ear, if she’s gonna give the satisfaction of towering over her to anyone. Regina knows it renders her completely adorable though, and forces herself to do so in private only, but it’s a special ocassion. Mal passes both arms around her waist and she laughs, only a little, while Regina goes on – But if we sneak out to the balcony, she doesn’t have to know.

She barely has to agree before the cloud of smoke takes them outside, the sun barely setting over the Storybrooke sea, not that the guests inside care, for them it was night-time the minute the meal was done. Mal presses a kiss on Regina’s hair as they look out to the view – All of this is lovely,
Regina. Thank you.

- Most of it was the work of Snow and Kathryn surprisingly. Nothing like a wedding to make allies out of foes.

Mal smiles against the side of her head – No doubt under very strict orders from you. It is all breathtaking. And you look… sublime.

She burrows closer with a smirk but chooses to control herself, a sixty-something teenager is worse, somehow - Do you want to listen to the rest of my vows? – She looks up at Mal and shrugs under her hug when she raises an eyebrow – You were already on the verge of tears and your sister was grinning, I thought I’d save you from that. – Mal laughs as she nods, bracing herself against the railing to face Regina more fully as she starts – You have been fire who kept me going when all I wanted to do was stop, and strength when my nefarious objectives seemed too big for my young arms to carry, you were company when I thought I was alone in the world, and you were comfort when I came to this new foreign realm. Every time I wronged you I felt my soul shatter some more, Mal. I remember every second, every thought that passed through my mind, every sign I chose to overlook and every gesture I took advantage of, and I am ashamed. It is the biggest cross I bear. You do not like it when I apologize, so I will only vow to you that I will atone. With every kiss, with every strangely raw meal, with every night your hair tries to suffocate me; I will love you like you have been loving me all along.

The tears fall without asking her for permission, she can only pull Regina to her for a long kiss, forgetting herself and the party carrying inside at the moment. Choked up well beyond her comprehension, her mind disconnects from her mouth and perhaps only a very carefully edited and re-edited letter will ever say what she wishes to after that. So, she settles, – You are promising then, no more time locked in caves? Because we have a long life ahead of us darling, it just seems hard to foresee – She gets no response to that, Regina only huffs and pulls her back down. It seems like a lifetime and like a second, but the sun finally sinks lower under the sea and Regina’s body presses closer, perhaps only to ward her against the cold. Mal winds both arms around her tightly as she notices the Snow yet again – Fly with me - What’s life without a little risk of hypothermia?

- Emma should be gearing up to interrupt the dancing with a ridiculous speech anytime now, we should be present for that. – She passes a hand over Mal’s tear-streaked cheek with a smile – With intact make-up.

She tightens her hold some more and gives an excellent impression of a pout - Give your wife a few minutes. – Regina can’t say no to that.

Mal takes one single second to pass a finger over the stovetop softly, humming happily at the polished surface, and it amuses Regina to no end apparently. She is so amused that her soft smile turns into a little insufferable grin that pushes Mal to round the island in three long strides and pick her up by the waist easily making her squeal, and then maneuvering her into a bridal grip since her dress doesn’t allow anything else – The way I envision it, we defile this marble right here, move on to a few rounds on the living room. We have a break, for snacks, I am sure you will need it – Regina laughs in her arms and Mal lays a slow kiss on the side of her neck – We will have a choice then, the counter again or finally making our way to the bedroom. I suppose we will see. Notify who you must, you will be busy for the rest of the evening.

Regina makes a show of patting her skin-tight dress looking for a phone and when she doesn’t find one she shrugs and uses the hand she’s looped over Mal’s shoulders to play with the tendril of hair escaped from the updo - We go back to our wedding reception. That’s the true answer-
She tuts – Regina, I laid down very clear instructions. This union doesn’t work if you don’t listen

- You would deny me my triumphant exit? – She moans nonetheless when Mal finds a sensitive spot to kiss, her head lolling to a side – We would have basked in their cheering once more.

- The rabble cheers often, they will praise you again. For now, show me the hidden zipper of this dress. – She puts her down on the island, making a show of checking every inch of the dress, from the bottom

- At least take me to a bedroom – She laughs when both her shoes get thrown against a nearby cabinet, maybe she’s drunk. Or extremely happy, she thinks, when Mal drops her head onto her knee with her hands still wandering the sides of the dress

- Who has the time, - Mid-sentence they appear standing by their bed and oh, how has Mal missed that bed and her terrible pillows– She looks around the room for a moment– See, a very powerful caster

For a second, they only look at each other, and then Regina reaches for her side, lowering the zipper finally with a smirk but the house phone, of all things, starts ringing and she stops to answer, reaching for it with a huff and the fabric bending in odd angles – Yes? I have been whisked away. Make sure to send cake, I didn’t have the opportunity to eat my slice – Her playful anger dissipates as Mal molds to her back, undoing the zipper the rest of the way and sneaking a hand through the opening. Regina’s breath hitches as Mal traces her ribs with her own sigh – Okay then Kath! I will talk to you at a later date. Bye bye.

She lays a kiss on the back of her neck trying to force the dress down - Unplug it.

Regina surprisingly does as told, and reaches inside the dress to drag Mal’s hand out of it – It goes up. I’ll do it by magic.

- Oh dear, no. Don’t deny me the satisfaction. – She lifts her arms and it takes a good tug but eventually, the dress is coming out, only to reveal more white lace underneath. She grabs for it well before Regina is completely unwrapped and she chuckles from the confines of the dress covering her head. Mal steers them to the bed promptly, finally getting rid of the dress and positioning herself in front of a sitting Regina with narrowed eyes – Why on earth are you giggling? I feel like you are not taking me seriously.

She tugs at Mal’s dress – How did you get in this? No way Lily managed a zipper. Are we doing the same arms-up shenanigan? - She laughs again and Mal huffs as she climbs onto her, forcing her to move back until she reaches the headboard and moving in for another kiss. Regina holds onto her face like she’s something precious and for a moment everything is right, but Regina smiles at her amused, again – If you’re still wearing it, it must mean you don’t have a clue on how to get out of it. Let me cut you out of there.

Mal eyes the lace under her fingers, it poses no barrier whatsoever and it can’t be too expensive. She toys with it – I should tie you up for your insolence – that always does the trick just fine, sobering her up and making her give her undivided attention to the task at hand. Mal smirks as she pulls her by the legs until she’s on her back and her breath turns shallow. She bends down to kiss her and at last they might be getting somewhere, Regina barely realizing Mal’s torn the lingerie of her, she tosses it away for good measure and gives her some space to flutter her lids open and tune back in - Luckily for you I am vastly, deeply in love with you – she kisses the moan coming out of Regina as she finds out her underwear is gone in the sweetest of ways and lets her adjust - and your disrespectful giggles as well.
Regina has always given as good as she gets and after Mal tears herself out of her own dress they make the most of the following hour, but a day like the one Regina had takes it out of anyone. She collapses on top of her wife a panting, smirking mess, and makes it a few minutes before the lulling tone of Mal’s voice puts her right to sleep, not that she doesn’t want to hear all about their stay in the Enchanted Forest.

She wakes up, however, when water laps at her skin. She starts slowly and then startles looking around to place her surroundings and prevent herself from drowning. It’s only the bathroom and Mal laughs at her from above, wrapped in a towel herself – Welcome back to the living.

She eyes the wet hair and listens to the soft piano music playing, both proof of betrayal by shower, and pouts – You just dropped me in the tub?

- We were coated in sweat, hardly your ideal sleeping situation. I changed the sheets, drew you a warm bath and soon as you’re done there we can wrap you up in something warm, like myself, and continue the night – She comes closer to take another one of the towels and place it closer to the edge of the tub and winks -And if you need an excuse to bathe tomorrow morning, I’ll be more than happy to give you one.

From where she is she can easily reach Mal’s knee, just under her towel, and stroke the inside of it – Won’t you get in?

- Directly in opposition of the goal of the bath.

- I promise I’ll be good

- Directly in opposition of the woman I married.

She unravels the towel anyways and climbs in the tub, sitting behind Regina and letting her lean back comfortably, she drums her fingers on the porcelain sides of it and the queen reaches to intertwine hers in them, toying with the rings in Mal’s finger as she drags the hands into the water. – Where do you want me to take you for our honeymoon?

She uses her other hand to find Regina’s as well and wrap her in a hug – Mallory’s hometown is quite beautiful in the winter, all quaint cottages and stone paths. I’d like to see it in the flesh.

- It was wistful thinking on my behalf that you’d choose a tropical paradise. Tell me about these imaginary German winters you lived through. It’s peaceful for a while, and then it isn’t, when one of the story of the neighbor’s drama rings close to a current event. Regina huffs, still in her arms – Your daughter found some woman to cheat with while deep in the wilderness.

Mal laughs at that – See, you’d think she’d come to me about this first. We had discussed it already and my reaction would not have been as bad as yours probably was. But no, my daughter comes to you.

Regina turns just enough to lay her head on Mal’s shoulder, so she could see her raise the one eyebrow most likely - What did you discuss?

- The day she took that spear through the wing she met a woman, it rendered her a puddle, barely able to piece together a single coherent thought. I told her it was her body’s normal initial reaction to most attractive dragons within her general vicinity. She was resolute to not act on it though, when did this change?
- Yesterday. She told me last night when we were tinkering with your dress and her suit.

- She was sober. Unlike when it first happened – Mal sinks lower on the tub, rearranging Regina - And here I was, thinking she was just being coy around the wolf. Well, at least now she can go be with the girl that passed through before.

True Love’s kiss, seemingly always looming on the horizon for every couple in that town. The playlist ends so their bath must be running very long, Mal’s mere presence keeps the water warm though so she stays and tinkers with the ring some more - Do you turn into a puddle barely able to piece together a single coherent thought within the general vicinity of dragons?

- Darling, the only one able to melt me is you. – She kisses a spot of the intricate pattern Regina had wrapped her hair in and leans back against the edge of the tub with a smile – She asked me if I ever saw someone so beautiful I started sweating at the prospect. I can’t say that I sweat, but often the mere thought of you makes my knees buckle and my breath labored.

In a flurry of movement Regina turns fully around and draws Mal way from the end of the tub, locking her legs behind her and settling her hands dangerously low on her hips – Okay, fine. 10 minutes. But after we take separate showers. – Mal’s laughter rings for a moment before it dies to a moan under Regina’s lips.
Chapter Notes

Make sure you read the two of them

The ceremony goes beautifully, there is just enough cheesy shit Lily feels like she might cry but it is still genuine enough it doesn’t look like they copy-pasted the vows out of some website. And Regina really outdid herself, the place is beautiful, with the candles lighting the way and the Snow stopping like it was Hogwarts and stuff. They got a string quartet playing music through the whole thing and the white dresses they wear flow down and onto the speckled white forest floor, making super intimate eye contact with each other the whole time. And people look great too, the ones she glances at in the little spans of time between trying to not cry and trying to look natural up there, and after it’s done she will just walk to the other side and never stand up in front of a crowd ever again if she can help it. Zelena had contacted her via magic mirror to tell her to prepare a speech and she had jack shit. Well she had three stammered out sentences about family and the urge to vomit if they go through with that.

And like Regina said she avoids even looking for a red spot in that crowd until after they’re basically making out by her side and people are clapping around like they’ve never seen anyone make out ever before. Could she have married Ruby if she hadn’t fucked it up? Making out in front of people seems like too much. It lasts awhile and the quickest of scans shows a lot of drab-color coats and Trivio’s dumb little face grabs her attention anyways, so she forgets about her impending doom for a moment to make a face back at him.

To be honest, she feels comfortable around them after a month of forced bonding, definitely more comfortable than around the citizens of Storybrooke all looking very ready to greet her like they weren’t scared of her a few months ago, so she starts moving towards her dragon kin as Regina and Mal walk down (up?) the aisle again, all held hands and big grins. But as soon as that’s done the crowd disperses, walking around all over the place and blocking her path like thirty times as Kathryn and Snow make sure they know where to go for the reception. It was in the card, but people have great room for stupidity.

After a couple minutes of navigating that mess Henry zooms by Lily on his way to Regina and Mal and she can’t help to smile at the little shit, and at Regina who gives wonderfully warm hugs she’s been lacking for a few weeks. So, she guesses maybe she should walk up, very calmly and collects hers, even lifting her mother playfully a bit and giving her a congratulation on the side. But her plan doesn’t work out, since the dude with the camera decides right there is the perfect family picture they need. She ends up by Regina’s side, while Henry squeezes himself between Mal and Regina, totally ruining their suits-on-the-sides-white-in-the-middle kinda thing, Lily smacks him to see if he’ll move but he doesn’t get it and only ducks while Regina chastises them both to be still for the photo, she was only trying to help but guess they’ll have to live with the mess of a picture forever.

Henry rushes to hug her first, while Mal sees the one silky dark hair all the way to the front and grins her way – Is that… Trivio?

Lily looks up from where she’s messing up his hair and the look on her mother’s face is kinda
priceless, Regina is happy to see it too – Oh yeah! We can get a pic! – That’d be nice. Mal can clearly see It’d be nice, because she almost runs off in that direction. Regina chuckles and turns back to Lily and Henry, probably to tell her hi but the kid starts bouncing, like he does, ready to tell some story and Regina starts listening with rapt attention, like she does.

Lily pays attention too, for exactly ten seconds but Emma reaches them finally, it’s a miracle she didn’t try to sneak herself into a family picture - A suit? You fucking lesbian – She claps her harshly on the shoulder and Lily refrains from showing her what a month on the Enchanted Forest has done for her general strength

- Pink dress? You fucking sellout. – It’s very heartening to see their friendship intact

- Dude, I am your uber to the party. Take a hard look at how you speak to me. – For a good few seconds they stand there mean-mugging each other until Lily laughs at that one and Emma hugs her tight with an eyebrows wiggle - Speaking of lesbian... head’s up! I’ll be waiting with my magic fingers over there.

Distraction is a bitch, Lily turns just in time for Ruby to catch up to her, grabbing at both lapels of her jacket and dragging her just a tad closer with a smirk – Don’t you look dashing. Even more than the last time I had the pleasure of seeing your face.

- Hi. – Pathetic.

She laughs – Babe, I’d be offended if I wasn’t so cold. – The happy little kiss she lays on her is followed by her burrowing closer with a hum, both arms under her jacket for warmth – I missed you

- I missed you too – She can barely get that out without her insides churning, and it’s true. Guilt, as new as the sharp pain at Regina’s disappointment and Gunda’s huffing from behind Mal as they reach them again.

She tries to pry Ruby’s arms from around herself so they can look slightly more normal but the wolf laughs – Oh are you embarrassed of me? – She lays one long kiss on her cheek with a certified lipstick stain and Trivio laughs, he’s awful. Mal draws even more attention to the mess to introduce Ruby

- A picture, was it? – Gunda’s heavy accent in English makes the thing much more intimidating that it is, and Ruby finally releases Lily to join her family for a photo, and she goes almost relieved Ruby notices, wiping the red mark off her cheek.

Lily had actually never been to a wedding before, but she’s sure that the first dance in front of her was not representative of the normal ones. As Regina and Mal glide around she props her elbow on the chair next to hers to support her head and look on, very confused with everything from the choice of music to Prince Charming standing up and bowing very low to invite Snow White to stand and join him on the dancefloor. Henry taps his feet on the floor to some non-existent beat and pretty soon all of her mothers’ weird friends are joining in on the madness, even Cruella ends up dancing.

Red nudges her and points to where Emma is wiggling her shoulders at Luke who shakes his head vigorously for a minute but eventually gives in. They look like they are completely making the shit up as they go, they probably aren’t because he’d seen enough of it in the castle his entire life, and Emma was roped into lessons a few times, but they’re still so bad no one would know. They have
fun though, laughing when they bump into the others. Ruby chuckles and drinks her champagne -I feel like a filthy peasant again

She speaks in a wistful tone and there’s like nothing Lily can do. There’s no way on earth she’s gonna stand up and try to do that – I’m sure you weren’t filthy

- We were piss-poor. I hadn’t seen as much as a tower of a castle from afar before I met Snow. – She finishes her flute and takes another one from a nearby table – How was Maleficent’s place in the forest? Nice neighborhood? Lots of dragon lairs lying around?

- Um – She doesn’t want to reveal she’s trash before they get to eat, Regina made that much clear – We had to fly up. It was a big castle carved into the side of a rocky mountain, and the other dragons weren’t close.

There’s a bit of silence while Mal starts flinging Regina through the air and Ruby pokes Lily on the side with a smile – Very mysterious.

They do get to eat eventually, mostly after Mal tries for a speech and Zelena shuts her up. Lily focusing on her plate and Ruby focusing on Trivio by her side telling all sort of stories from his very exciting life around the world… or whatever shape that other dimension comes in. His enthusiasm is completely contrasted in Gunda’s pointed silence and even more pointed glances aimed at Lily, her eyes bore into the top of her skull even as she does her best to just sit there and eat her food so every once in a while she has to make eye contact that says ‘I’ll do it fucking later’.

They had taken her out for drinks, to say goodbye, at another strange and even further away dragon tavern. And Lily had gone with the express intention of not drinking to fucking stupor like the last time, she had to get home in one piece and without holes, lucid enough to talk to Regina in the middle of the night and magic up a dress. And that one was deep in some snowy mountain and everything, so when some other chick started flirting across the place she had no extra heat to blame for the sweating. She kinda fought it while she drank like three fingers of something similar of the thing Mal kept in her room, and then she kinda went ‘fuck it’ while she fully conscious.

- Babe, you ate an ogre? – Ruby shudders by her side and Trivio laughs the full belly laugh of a father of five

- Oh yeah, shit was awful. I miss burgers. – The steak before her is like way better than anything she had the last month but, still

Ruby makes the unwise decision of putting her hand on the back of her neck and stroking it – Aw, I’ll make you one later.

She should probably kiss her, like that’s the normal non-alarming response Ruby is probably expecting. So, she smiles and nods through her bite and kisses the corner of her mouth – Yeah! – Ruby hums happily and loops an arm around Lily for good measure. Even Trivio looks troubled by the situation.

She gets roped into dancing, because if Emma is dancing and Trivio wants to dance and Ruby wants to show him how to dance, she is expected to be in the general vicinity of all that. So she stands there, bobbing her head in what she hopes is not the most awkward of manners while the others do a series of elaborate moves one must conquer is one wants to call oneself a good dancer.
While they do that and she stands watching, she starts wondering if it was fucking worth it. She’d never had a girlfriend that would show one of her not yet existing cousins how to do the chicken and be happy about it. Granted, Ruby’s like a few drinks in and it makes her much more willing and pliable, but she is very nice even when sober, and her smile is pretty bright, and she’s been thoughtful and nice since before she even knew Lily, it’s a fucking mess.

She must look all kinds of stupid with her remorse face on because Ruby comes close to her and pulls her arms out of where she had them crossed with a big grin, tugging them this side and then the other to see if that turns into something presentable — You are a terrible dancer.

- I am. Can’t even be taught

Wrong thing to say. She gives up on tugging Lily’s arms, only to strap them around her waist and loop hers around Lily’s waist — This one is easy enough, I sway and drag you with me — She does just as she says and even when the music changes they stay just like that for a while. Lily tries to think of something to make small talk, something that doesn’t involve feelings or anything that skirts the topic. As it is, Ruby probably already smelled the dishonesty in her and they’re barely halfway through the party, it’s probably still light outside. That is all she can think of, darting her eyes around the place to see what everyone else is doing, at the very least the twins should have set something on fire to drag attention. Nothing comes to mind before Ruby leans back a bit to catch her attention — Hey, are you ok?

- Huh? Yeap. – Yeap? What the fuck? She suddenly realizes she’s a very bad liar simply because she never had to lie before, at worst it was a knock someone out and run kinda situation she could find herself in

- Are you sure? Because you were over this eye-contact thing.

Lily frowns and stops their swaying — What eye-contact thing? — She hesitates in the middle of that sentence, shifting her eyes to someone who dances by

- You could never hold eye-contact when we first started talking. I thought we had trained that out of you but you’re doing it again

She should really go to the town shrink if she was intimidated to the point of not holding eye contact over a fucking crush because she could hold eye-contact just fine with the woman across the bar, but it sounds like something true that she needs to weasel her way out of now so she tries to look less shifty — I just uh… I don’t know. Is the air in here like? Heavy? Like maybe I need to sit down. I did have like three glasses of Jack Daniels earlier, full disclosure. So maybe, I don’t know.

She chuckles, dragging her back to the table easily, like she didn’t want to stay dancing with the other well-adjusted people — Maybe it’s the magic here, you’re just adjusting to this shitty atmosphere. We can ask Regina when she isn’t entertaining Snow over there. — She looks over Ruby’s shoulder and sure enough, there’s Snow trying to force her mother into a selfie, stick and all. — Or just tomorrow, because if we ask her today she will absolutely ruin her wedding night to tuck you in and monitor your progress.

Low chance of that after she called her Lilith twice the night before but it’s whatever, she nods in agreement and motions for another glass of scotch, shrugging under Ruby’s playful glare - You think it’s the magic.

She chuckles and drags her chair closer to lift her legs and drop them across hers — I miss the forest sometimes, turning there is so easy… my lungs would feel at double capacity, the breeze hitting my fur was fresher, the moon spoke louder, hell I think the very soil felt richer under my paws. It’s
been a while though.

Lily smiles briefly under her glass, she absolutely understands, and she absolutely can’t open that can of worms right then or everything else is coming out – Yeah. Maybe I can get you a couple of those beans and you can take a weekend. – That much she could ask Regina for, it wasn’t for her anyways.

The sit there for a short while and Ruby tells some stories about the forest, about the people around the room and it kinda flies by, the others on the table coming by for a second or two and leaving them alone again, until Mal and Regina come back, looking a bit tired even and ready to collapse in their seats probably. Ruby calls them over so they can take the seats next to theirs, and when they do approach she straightens in her chair dropping her legs to the floor and turning to talk to Mal first, she’s sits right next to Lily – It was such a beautiful ceremony. I am sure you guys have the real deal.

Regina sits in the one after that one - Thank you, Miss Lucas. It means a lot coming from a believer such as yourself – she smiles at Ruby and between them Lily takes a deep breath and swirls the liquor of her glass

Mal puts a hand on Lily’s shoulder and smiles - We can call the girl Ruby, dear! – The waitress laughs and nods – I have a favor to ask her anyways. I need you to kidnap this one tonight. I do not care where you take her or what you do with her. I need the house to be empty.

Jesus fucking Christ, so this is how having those well-meaning idiot parents feels like. Mal turns to wink at Regina and Lily sends a panicked look to the woman, she needs her to intervene - What?

No, Mom. It’s okay. I’ll go to Emma’s.

Ruby grins on the other side and loops an arm over her shoulders - Nope. I bet Granny is staying out late sorting this stuff out, you and I can have the place to ourselves. You heard your mother. It’s for a good cause. Let me go ask. – In one millisecond she’s gone, moving through the dancefloor like an agile cat instead of the wolf she is

Mal pats Lily’s leg like she did something good and stands, kissing Regina’s forehead as she goes – I’ll find Miss Swan, make sure she knows to stay sober enough to keep Henry safe and then we can wrap this party up, so you can see what a month does to a dragon.

It’d be gross, if she had heard it. But she only hears her own pounding heart, it had to happen, after the party and while they were alone? She couldn’t justify it going past that. She was gonna be forced to confess. Or just like, ghost her? Because obviously lying wasn’t gonna work, not after she already told her mom and lost her ability to keep her face neutral apparently. She passes her hands over her face until Regina speaks to her – Oh Sweetheart, how are you? We haven’t had a chance to talk.

How is she? Fucked up. - I’m good, all good. Not ruining anyone’s day.

Regina stares at her for like a solid minute and then grabs her cheek, starts running her thumb over it and puts on her mom voice – I wish you could have a better time today too. How did you like the Enchanted Forest?

She shrugs - Shit food, very crisp air. The trees were definitely on high definition though. Weird render on some animals… and don’t worry about me it’s my fault for fucking up every good thing ever. I am super happy for you two, though. You just go, enjoy your party.
Regina laughs, planting a kiss on her cheek – You look very beautiful on your tuxedo.

What? They aren’t going to address the elephant in the room? Because I mean, it’s just a suit, you’d think people would be able to imagine her in a suit. - I feel like… Henry’s age right now. Stop it.

Regina drops her hand to her drink and snatches it right out of hers, drinks it and everything, changes her entire body language. Elephants are better left alone when Regina Mills is concerned. A lesson for life. – Very well then. What possessed you to go screwing around in what basically are the middle ages? Even if Miss Lucas wasn’t in the equation, with nothing but a selfish outlook of the situation, do you understand the risk you put yourself in? Anyone else who might decide to sleep with you from now on? God forbid you are dying with some strain of syphilis or something of the like we can’t detect nor fight in this land. And gods, did you think of contraception? Because I do believe that’s an issue for you these days.


- That’s what I thought. You’ll show me the pictures of your trip tomorrow? – Lily nods vigorously and sniffs just enough Regina knows she’s made her point - And Ruby, you better talk to her before she tries to have sex with you tonight

- Yes ma’am. – She salutes her weakly and watches her go, a hand always dragging over her shoulders before she leaves completely. Open bars, she’d heard nothing but good things about them from people who had attended weddings before. She stands to put the rumors to the test.

Is the bartender super worried about her? Yes. Does she give a fuck what the dude thinks? No. And it is an open bar that her mother is paying for so, Lily decides to get shitfaced enough Ruby’s just mildly worried and angry about that when it’s time to leave, she will drop her on Emma and then, the next day, maybe, Lily will know what the fuck she’s going to say to her. So maybe after an hour of just constant shots she’s well into drunk territory, vision blurring when she moves her head around and no one really trying to make conversation anymore.

No one except Snow of course who approaches with her happy little steps to order a fruity cocktail that’ probably very vodka-full and decides to say hi – Hello Lily! – She only turns to glare at her and the princess does not take the hint, she might be a bit drunk herself –We missed you both this month! I know we’re not exactly friends-

- Right, so go.

- I know we are not exactly friends – She puts on the most patient of tones, it sounds like singing – But Ruby, she really cares for you and as her best friend I’d really like it if we could be friendly at least.

- I think we’ll be a-fucking okay. – Lily will be glad to see her go. She swallows another shot and pours herself another, the bottle hers since a few shots ago

- Are you okay? Should I get someone?

She starts looking around as if to locate any of her thirty-five family members but Lily growls on her seat - Listen you nosy bitch, stop trying to fuck with people that don’t want anything to do with you! I’m good. Take your shitty drink and go! – Who was she gonna get? Mal and Regina are just trying to have fun, Trivio and Gunda don’t give a fuck if she’s drunk at some human function, the
other two won’t even give a fuck is she eats someone. Henry? Swan? Ruby herself? Jesus fucking Christ she’s not hurting anyone by drinking.

She takes one, maybe two or three more shots and after being aggravated the one time there’s no going back and the music starts pounding on her head, the sweat and perfume and food and more acrid alcohol starts stinking up the place, the glass is too cool under her fingers and the lights are too bright above her head. She could leave, Regina knows what the fuck is up and no one is actually gonna miss her. She makes it two steps away from the stool before Luke is dragging her to the restroom and Emma is joking ahead of them so people can clear the way.

She uses a champagne flute to splash water on her face three times before Lily seems kinda aware of space and time – Dude, what the fuck? Why did you cuss out my mom?

- Shit, I don’t- Just leave me here a bit, I’ll sober up quick. I swear. – She had no plans of sobering up, but she can’t ditch the party if Emma stays around

The blonde shares a look with her boyfriend and he leaves, closing the door behind him with a soft click and Lily leaves herself slide right down to the floor, undoing her bowtie and a couple buttons, jacket lost somewhere out with the well-adjusted people. Emma struggles a bit, but she sits on the floor as well, in front of her with legs bent to her side – Do you have like an issue with weddings? With Regina and Mal getting married specifically? Worried that new sibling is coming? Did you see some evil lurking when you were in the forest and are now keeping the secret so they can have their day but what is to come is eating you up inside? Or what the fuck up? You got shitfaced as soon as Red left.

- She left? – She looks up and it is still dizzying, - Why?

- I don’t know, maybe Granny sent her for something. – She shrugs

- Do you think she’s at the diner?

- Where else in this shitty town?

- Will you send me there? – She should just rip off the band aid, no more yelling at her mother’s friends or her friend’s mothers or any variation of that

- So what? You’re just gonna bail on your parents’ wedding to go screw on an empty diner? – Lily doesn’t really correct her – You’re living life in the fast lane, Page.

Emma’s entirely sarcastic tone is the least of her worries at the moment, plus what are the odds they’re gonna be friends after the word spreads around? Might as well let her think whatever. Lily groans at the pounding of her head, she needs another shot already - I’m a Mills. And Mills are not cowards.

- Yeah. Cora’s motto. When in doubt, consume your bodyweight in alcohol, go somewhere else and fuck. – She stands and lifts the one hand menacingly – Stop yelling at my mom okay, I know you’re still mad at her but she’s my fucking mom, and Red’s best friend and Regina’s… unhealthy something. Try to be nice for once, damn. – Emma motions her arm to the side and the cloud of sparkly smoke takes Lily right outside of the diner

First she pukes on a nearby shrub, then she realizes Ruby is not in the diner. Lights are out, smells are static somehow, It’s empty. So, she must be back in the B&B. Lily drags her feet around the corner trying to come up with a nice neat speech that will let her explain. Does she want to end the
relationship? Were they awful together? No wedding was ever going to happen there but Mal said it herself, every connection is worth nursing if it’s good. But, how could anything in her shitty life be good if she was going around fucking strangers after one bat of an eyelash.

The door is open because there is no crime in the tight ship that Regina leads, at least not crime that a locked door would foil. She struggles up a couple of steps before Red peers out of her bedroom with a startled look. She’d barely paid attention to her the entire night, between ‘enjoying’ the love fest and trying not to confess Lily had been preoccupied and hadn’t noticed the beautiful satin dress and the way the curled hair tumbled down over her shoulders, the damn thing was green. She’d gone against her every instinct and wore green to match the wedding, or most likely Lily and her stupid bowtie, and she was about to break her heart.

She takes another step and Red holds her hand up – Nope. I heard your cousins talking. - Panic strikes in Lily’s chest, is that what had happened? Is that why she had left the party without saying goodbye? Granny was the most prepared woman in the world she wouldn’t forget anything. Lily starts climbing the steps two at a time, a bit desperate to at least tell the story herself and Red pouts – I was just fixing up, for later. I know you were out yesterday and then I’m sure Regina pestered you all night, and today you had to make sure people crossed the portals. You’re tired. I was just putting on fresh sheets and finding this windy noise ten-hour youtube video, and you know making it cold but not too cold, that kind of shit. So we can sleep.

- What? You were- what?

Lily drops herself on the bed to stare up at Ruby, she’s no longer drunk enough to stab a knife into her heart, not after all that tweaking to allow her a long night of sleep. – Did Emma tell you I left or something? I told her I was gonna come back. Regina and Mal are gonna think I’m super rude. Did you tell them you were coming to get me? – Lily can’t barely understand what’s going on and Ruby comes closer chuckling and pulls the bowtie from under her collar, undoes another two buttons – Babe don’t get me wrong, all this? Very tempting. But you looked super banged up all the reception and I know the forest, it’s beautiful but all that barely surviving can tire anyone.

Welcome back to the 21st century, we have sweatpants. - Lily can only watch as she unzips her dress reaching for a couple pajamas on the dresser and tosses her one with a smile – You’re so quiet. Start talking, how many mythical creatures did you see?

She really was tired because she fell into the shittiest fitful sleep quickly even when deeply anxious she was gonna start talking on her sleep or something. Barely 9 PM and she was dead to the world. And the one kinda advantage to winter in the north is that the sun lets her sleep a little bit more, it’s past 8 AM when she blinks her eyes open, fully rested, stone cold sober and with the weight of Ruby on her chest.

She tries to flip her to the empty side of the bed but halfway through the flipping Ruby holds on with the strength of an army and pulls her down – I am a creature of the night. I don’t like being moved around before noon in my off days – She releases her as she pops her joints – But it’s not your fault, it’s the first time we actually wake up together.

- Guess we’re biologically incompatible – She stands to pick up her folded suit, maybe she can ghost someone in the two squared feet that make up Storybrooke, one invisibility spell and she’d be good to go.

- Wait, what was that?

How hard can it be to be the piece of shit she’s always been? She turns around holding her clothes and Ruby’s confused face meets her from the bed, all crazy hair too. It’s hard. She looks around the
room for any more seats. There’s none. Standing up and clutching dress shoes it is – Ruby, I like you a lot but maybe we should kinda… stop. Seeing each other.

She sits up but keeps quiet for a long while - I don’t understand… are you breaking up with me? Over what?

Lily was a fool to think she would take that line at face value - There’s no reason… - she doesn’t have to know and get all fucked up over it

- So what? You just don’t give a fuck about me anymore? – She moves to climb out of the bed and Lily takes a step back, it only angers her more – You were gone for a month! Do you know how excited I was to see you again?

- Ruby I just… you know- she backs away towards the door and in one second Ruby is blocking it somehow. Out of bed and with her back to the door, arms crossed.

- No. I’ve been nothing but kind, patient and loving with you. You’re going to explain what I did to you with big girl words. Was it before you left? Because I know you were talking to Emma in the mirrors and you never showed up in mine

- Mom would get me Emma- Her other route of escape is the window, she could turn right outside, after jumping, but it’d probably wreck power lines and hedges and she can’t carry her clothes that way either

Ruby clamps a hand over her forearm when he sees her as much as glancing at the window - Regina chased Snow through reflective surfaces in the fucking middle ages, she could’ve found me here if you asked. Cut the bullshit. Someone did something and if it wasn’t me… what did you do? – Lily keeps quiet, clutching her clothing some more – do you suddenly want to move back out of town? Is this a weird moment of self-doubt that we need to talk through? Dorothy again? Did you meet someone? – Lily’s expression changes for one millisecond and Red collapses against her door with a sigh, lets her arm go – Okay then, you’ll go back to the Enchanted Forest to be with some random woman you met in the month you were away, is that it?

- No, Ruby, it’s not like that at all – She drops one of her shoes and bends down exasperated, it would’ve been so easy for her to be sad and let her leave - This is a waste of time! You do have some chick you’re meant to be with, go do that.

She holds one finger up and points at her - You met someone. Your heart rate picked up when I asked. If you’re leaving me for someone else, the least you can do own up to it, you coward. What’s your plan? Disappear and hope people won’t notice? Bring her here and hope people don’t know basic math?

If she had learned teleportation already she’d be out of there by now - Look, there’s no one else! Just let this go! We’re not in love! We’re just dating… and it’s a waste of your time, I’m kinda done with it…

- You know you can’t strike gold on relationships, right? It takes work. Like, one good month doesn’t mean it won’t get boring – she motions between them – or whatever in a while and then what? You cheat on her too?

- I didn’t meet anyone! – she adverts her eyes for one second

At that Ruby growls, and her eyes flash yellow while she takes one step towards Lily - Yes, you did! Just admit it! Don’t lie to my face!
Her own fucking animal nature gets offended at being growled at and she takes a step forward herself, eyes in a normal color she hopes - Fine! Fine. I cheated on you, I fucked someone. I fucking wanted to break up with you without telling you and you wouldn’t fucking let me, now can I go? – She reaches to pull her to the side, so she can get to the door, but Ruby still won’t budge

- So what’s her name? Why didn’t you invite her to the wedding? It was the perfect opportunity for all of us to meet your new boo–

She swallows the snarl crawling up her throat, she has no right to get angry at all – Ruby it didn’t mean shit. I’ll never see her again. And for what it’s worth, I would’ve liked to keep dating you for whatever stretch of infinite time, but I fucked that up. We can’t stay together.

- No shit Sherlock. – She barks out. – So what? You were drunk, she came onto you, you just went along with it and when you realized you were on your back on a straw mattress, was that it?

She wasn’t drunk, and she’s the one that willingly crossed the room to talk to that woman bypassing even the smallest nicety of asking for her name, and she had a very nice smaller castle thingy nearby, great mattress. But none of that is information she should disclose – Does any of that matter?

- Yes, it fucking does. Because you once said you need to be drunk to fuck people and it took me past a month to break you out of that, so I want to know what the fuck happened. Did you find Aphrodite herself walking around or something? Make me fucking understand.

It’s probably the same with wolves, and Ruby had met one pack of wolves when she was younger, she had told Lily that. So maybe she would understand - She was a dragon. I couldn’t pass up the opportunity.

- Excuse me, what? – Or she wouldn’t understand, at all.

- Ruby I didn’t want to hurt your feelings or anything, you’re beautiful and I don’t want you to feel like you’re missing anything. You’re fucking great, the best girl I’ve ever met, the only one I’ve really given a shit about, really. But in that moment, everything in my body wanted to, and my mind just went ‘why not?’

- Why not? – She growls again and reaches for her own sweatshirt on Lily’s body, clutching it in her fist - Because you had a fucking girlfriend, you sociopath.

An enlightened feeling suddenly reaches Lily, maybe this is how Mal felt when she killed that dude the other time. It had kinda been an animal reflex she had to stave off, until she didn’t. She pries Ruby’s fingers off her one by one - It was my last day there, and it had happened before. I was just like, back home I can probably get another girlfriend, what are the odds I’m gonna find another dragon? – Lily grimaces a soon as it leaves her mouth, sometimes honesty is the worst policy.

- You… - Ruby gapes at her for one second before she reaches out to shove her back, suddenly too close – You absolute, steaming pile of shit. Well good fucking luck on the search for your new interchangeable girlfriend. I hope your romantic night fucking a stranger by the candle light was worth it!

Her path to the door is finally cleared and she hesitates in taking the step forward- Ruby, I really am so sorry

- Don’t even come near me again or I will probably tear your limbs from your torso.
It makes sense that she would really. Lily trudges down the stairs hoping to avoid any human contact until she gets home.
Mother, I am sorry you had to raise four of us.

Regina’s hand darts out to shut off her alarm as soon as it goes off, most days she wakes up just a minute before it does and there’s no point on letting it screech the house down. Not that there’s anyone else in the house besides the two inhabitants of the bed, the other one still sleeping against her side. It is a rare opportunity that the northern hemisphere is giving her, before Mal can be disturbed any other way Regina moves to straddle her and pulls the covers off them both. She shivers as the cold hits her skin but knows it won’t be there for long, gone as soon Mal wakes completely up.

She twitches a bit under her and Regina assigns herself the task to kiss her awake, using her fingers to pass softly over every ticklish spot on the naked body under hers and trailing a path from one shoulder to the other with her mouth until Mal groans under her and she can sit up with a wide smile– I love winter!

Yes, I love you too – Mal is barely awake and tries to shift back to laying on her side, almost toppling Regina off her

It takes gargantuan strength to fight back but she has decades of horseback riding under her belt and pins her down, hands skimming up her torso – See, in winter my alarm beats the sun. And I get the pleasure to tease you awake – she bends down to kiss one nipple while her hand pulls on the other and it seems to do the job

She groans, sitting up swiftly using one arm to hold onto Regina and the other to prop herself up– What time is it?

- What is it to you? I’m awake.

Mal sighs- Ah, mere vengeance it is then.

Regina chuckles and readjusts herself on her lap, casually grinding on whatever surface of Mal she can to do so – Maybe I just need you to fulfill your wifely duties

- I’ll just lay here and look pretty then, is that all? – she lets herself fall down on the bed again, trying to reach for the discarded duvet, but her smile betrays her words and Regina moves some more on top of her, grabbing both her arms and guiding them to her waist, Mal rubs her thumbs over the soft skin there with a yawn – you just keep rutting dear, I’ll wake up in a minute.

There’s an hour and a piece before the sun comes up, and they utilize every second in that time frame, but they have not eaten in hours and if they want to take a trip anywhere they have to leave that bedroom eventually. Still, dressing up isn’t a requirement for a quick breakfast and they barely tie on their robes to go downstairs, Regina clinging to Mal’s back to prevent her to go head first into the fridge and eat some raw piece of meat that would ruin the mood completely. The blonde can carry her anywhere easily and it shows, she laughs as she drags her without any resistance, Regina’s feet doubling their speed under her to keep up.

They make it one step into the kitchen before Lily turns away from the stove humming and hits the breaks with a grimace, the shimmering bubble around her fading as she waves a spatula at them, her phone shouting music out– Like, I know you have nipples, but I hate seeing proof. – And she hasn’t even noticed the state of their hair and the length of the robes
Mal looks down, it’s cold in the house. How had she even snuck in without them noticing? Regina pops up from behind her to speak up – Good morning dear. We’ll be right back down after we change.

Regina starts backing away and tries to pull Mal with her, but she puts up a fight - I resent that, it is too early for child-rearing

- Hardly child-rearing if she’s well past thirty.

Mom! Well past? – That’s a mom aimed straight at Regina, who chuckles behind Mal, holding onto her tighter.

- You should have seen her dive straight for the poisonous groves because they smelled funny, time and time again. It felt like taking a five-year-old for a stroll – Lily huffs on her spot and Mal smiles – This breakfast effort is hardly necessary. We should be going to an outing with the others, brunch is it? I would loathe to ask either of you to cook for all our family.

Regina laughs - And you would loathe to cook.

- You know me so, dear wife.

Lily frowns, spatula still in her hand, eggs in an critical moment to be either scrambled or allowed to be an omelet - So, you’re buying us brunch?

Regina tuts - With my money

- Our money, where the law is concerned. I did not sign any prenup. If I leave, I’m taking half of everything. – She turns to smirk Regina’s way and it wreaks havoc on the integrity of the knot that tries to hold her robe closed - Lily, notify the others. The diner in one hour.

Regina pulls the rogue lapel back in place and smiles - One and a half, to account for our attempt at a joint shower

- God. – The bacon frying on the other stovetop stops looking edible suddenly. And then she remembers something worse. – I can’t show my face in Granny’s. So I’ll just… cook.

It’s a lot of toast and a lot of eggs and a lot of bacon and sausage and all other hints of meat in the freezer, not one single pancake or waffle, but the dragons eat with gusto every scrap of breakfast food in their house, Zelena came with her own green smoothie for her newfound diet and by the time Emma and Henry arrive to the house cereal is all Lily can offer them, maybe the milk survived. Regina watches her children go into the kitchen and crawls back onto Mal in the seat she chose well before she knew she’d have to accommodate for another grown adult in the chair.

Emma smiles - Aw, cute. So, what are we doing? – She just sits on the floor to avoid navigating the room and getting mauled by the tiny dragons piled onto each other mid-nap on the coffee table, thank god for sturdy furniture.

- Excuse me, why is the back-up fanny allowed to stay but Robin couldn’t come?

- Your shitty boyfriend is the back-up fanny. Anything goes wrong in here and the soulmate failsafe gets triggered. – Emma lifts a finger Zelena’s way and settles down more comfortably – I am family.
- The back-up fanny? What…? - Gunda frowns, but no one clarifies because Henry saunters back in with two bowls of cereal, and Lily drops herself in the chair she’d vacated to go reach the high cupboards for him, the ones with the sugar.

Regina sighs – Please, disregard them. You were telling us about your night in the… caves?

Gunda smiles for what seems like the first time – There were all kinds of trinkets there! There was this thing, two wheels, metallic binding between them, no remains of a carriage nearby… Very exciting.

- A bike? People camp and hike and stuff nearby, maybe we should get a cleaning crew to pass by? Send Mr. and Mrs. Forest! – She tilts her head towards Zelena, it was much better when the hate manifested in snarling, - Why didn’t you stay at Granny’s? – her granola-based cereal bowl sloshes as she adjusts her position – Why didn’t we eat at Granny’s?

A room full of dragons exchanging looks wouldn’t fly under anyone’s radar. Emma, Zelena and Henry perk up at the possibility of drama and the redhead smirks – Okay then, a game of guess is it? I’ll start. You all noticed baby Reggie and the waitress had slunk away in the middle of the party, much like her mothers, and lord, if she couldn’t come home she could only go to that excuse of a hotel. With your super-hearing, the caves were a much better option.

Henry’s intently staring at his plate after that and Regina notices right away. She was about to shut Zelena up, expecting him to make a question, it should’ve flown over his head, that it didn’t doesn’t bode well for the future. Emma holds her spoon up – I’ll play. That doesn’t make a lot of sense because Lily can handle a silence spell and if she couldn’t there’s Granny, she would hear too.

Lily snaps in her seat – Stop it!

Sybilla surprisingly tries to help, shooting a look Lily’s way, but pointing at the table – The children can’t be trusted around most fabrics just yet. A few more years and we can stay at this inn you speak of.

Zelena laughs right over that– Touché. But what about the meal? One of us must’ve done something to upset one of the wolves then. Henry, did you break something costly?

- Did not!

Emma wags her spoon and the drops of milk just fly around - I bet Regina criticized the food.

Mal is infinitely amused by the whole thing and Regina wants to elbow her in the gut for it, she tightens the hold she has on one of her hands, significantly - Perhaps we just wanted to be at a private setting, the patrons would’ve been gawking at this

Zelena tuts – Sissy, if you wanted us here there would be a feast prepared. Henry was with Swan and neither would say no to an outing to Granny’s, so it’s one of the other two who objected. So, which one?

Henry pipes up, his bowl surgically clean, the last bowl of lucky charms. Pity. - Granny and Mal are friends, she’s told me.

Mal smiles at him and Emma sighs, how is he so bad at this? - And she’s not friends with Lily? She’s dating Red! Take this seriously kid, where’s the spirit that found out about the curse?

- Well since they were both gone for the longest while and we were busy yesterday, Granny still
likes them both because there’s no time for them to fight, and Mal isn’t going to get mad at Granny for any reason. So, I say it’s Lily who didn’t want to go because she doesn’t want to see Red or the other way around, because of something that happened yesterday after they left the party early.

Mal lifts her hand to tap her nose in his direction and he beams on the floor by Emma and holds his hand up for a high five. He gets a surprised one from her and the dragons chuckle at the peculiar sight while Dannica speaks up, breaking her glacial expression, how Mal describes the woman as warm is beyond Regina – He is quite intelligent. He would make a fine King. – She’s nice, at best.

- But only marvelous things happened after they departed early, without a word and with haste – Trivio pipes in with a leer towards Lily – Isn’t it so cousin?

Gunda glares at him – Are you mad?

- Well surely, she wasn’t to tell her immediately, in a night of celebration. She would be a fool to do so! Did you not see the wolf we speak of? I would postpone the making of a fur for an entire month if that was the beast to slay.

Mal whispers in Regina’s ears – He’s as delightful as his father. – It makes her smile, even as Gunda gets riled up

- You are both foul!

Emma waves both her arms - I’m so lost, what the fuck is happening?

- Miss Swan – Regina chastises her

- Aren’t they discussing killing Red? A little cursing is the least of our issues here.

Regina rolls her eyes at her and points - *You* know better -

Well Gunda and Trivio keep on bickering, and Mal, her sister and mother have a silent conversation with their eyes, Emma and Regina keep going back and forth about cursing with Zelena’s commentary running in the back and Henry just kinda stares at Lily until she breaks with a grunt - I cheated on her, and I told her and now I can’t ever go back to the goddamn restaurant.

Zelena’s cackle rings over the sudden silence, Lily’s a bit comforted by the sound - That’s all? Cheating? Whatever happened to our family sissy? Mother would be appalled.

- Mother is bad line of reference, Zelena.

She rolls a wrist - At least she would’ve walked in there and ordered waffles like nothing happened and your carpet wouldn’t have stains from the princess’s clumsiness – Emma, good at practical magic, cleans the spilled milk right up with a covert raised finger

- See, mother would never eat a waffle, you’d know that had you actually known her

The entire thing is out of everyone’s hands but that’s a confusing bit of information for her new mother-in-law - You two did not grow up together? – She is afraid of what could’ve happened if they had then

– They are growing together as we speak, mother. - Mal drops her head against the seat more comfortably while she chuckles and brings Regina closer, somehow – And while we didn’t get to have a grandiose meal of what this realm has to offer at least we are all together.
It would be a nice note to end on, and the day would’ve gone on. But instead an awkward silence sets over the room and without the distraction of food all it does is makes Lily’s ears ring as she contemplates the mess before her. She had honestly traded her newfound peace for like two hours of fucking some girl in the medieval ages, it had been an absolutely mind-blowing couple of hours but god, at what cost? Emma was probably gonna straight up ditch her when she was forced to pick a side on the divorce and Granny would now be mad at Mal and Regina too, after they’d gone through years for these people to like them. She certainly used to hate the parents of the little shits she encountered in life as much as the little shits. Even when the planet doesn’t conspire to fuck her up, she fucks herself up. Before the thing can get even more awkward she stands and walks out of the room, all the way to the edge of the property where the woods start to calm herself down.

It does nothing. Specially because her body refuses to tune out the ongoing conversation and she doesn’t have the willpower to cast a spell, not when they’re talking about her. Emma dismisses Henry who tramples upstairs, probably super upset, before she starts – Well, what the fuck?

- Miss Swan, this is hardly any your business.

- It kinda is my business, she's my friend. And yours, kinda.

- Be that as it may, their relationship is not ours to discuss.

Sybilla, who’s barely spoken a word since being mesmerized by a pop tart, speaks next – And surely, we’re making too big of a thing out of this.

- Mother!

- Oh sweet, I know your wound is fresh, but you’re less than a century old, so is your cousin. You will overcome.

Zelena chuckles - Oh, I do like the way you think. However, I think Miss Swan’s concern is with the other one, not Lily.

- For once in your lifetime, you’re right. Lily’s always extra angsty, so what she’s storming out of rooms? Red must be really fucked up, sorry I don’t give a shit about your daughter’s ego right now. I wanna hear some reasoning.

Dannica agrees – It is quite the breach of trust, devastating to the one at the other end of the sword. Was it the one who helped you children home after the attack?

- Not even, just some physical fling. Which is why she did not need to disclose it to the wolf. – Trivio’s voice booms through the walls – If she wanted to end their liaison, she could have done it without the added harm.

- If she wanted to? Oh dude you fucking suck. I thought you were cool.

Mal’s voice rings out, calm like she always is - Honest is the best policy. Regina knew, therefore I knew. You all knew. If any of us had let it slip it would have been worse. You need to learn to live with the consequences of your actions nephew, dreadful as they may be. There’s honor on the fixing.

- This is not cowardice, it is about sparing the girl some suffering. Tell me, have you never told a merciful lie?

Zelena tuts happily – My favorite fun fact. Regina was married when they started shagging, no one told the King and he died a happy man, until the poison kicked in of course. You’re oddly quiet,
She laughs – You want to call me out for cheating on a man thrice my age who regularly beat and raped me?

- Well you let a man thrice your age beat you?

Mal speaks again, coldly. – I am sure she’s joking. She wouldn’t dare imply anything done to that man was undeserved. Am I right? –

Zelena must be either waggling her eyebrows or staring daggers at Mal, no inbetween - You know me, always in jest.

Regina goes on as if nothing was said - I am worried for Miss Lucas as well, and I don’t condone Lily’s actions. But the first time you went to the Enchanted Forest you dragged the pirate and my mother back here so honestly? This should be insignificant to us. She was going through some sort of biological phenomenon and doubting her relationship, drunk on the magic around her… young, foolish, had spent a month away from your oh so balancing presence. I’m sure it’s complex.

- That sounds a lot like condoning Regina. Biological? What? She couldn’t help it? I bet the girl had a miniskirt on, was that it? It’s just so hard to not fuck people... If you can’t tell, I’m getting really pissed at how chill you all are about this.

Mal sighs - We’re all, mostly, in agreement. It was a horrible thing to do, we can barely follow her reasoning, and coming clean was the only way to go about it. It’s the crucifixion we don’t see eye to eye on. But this is our child, we’re allowed to be biased.

Sybilla pops up again - The what now?

- Oh it’s most interesting! There’s this form of organized cult here on earth, religion. Like in the Enchanted Forest, but more prevalent…-

It snaps something in Lily, hearing Zelena launch herself into her half-assed explanation of Catholicism for the tourists while Emma and Regina probably glare at each other and Mal checks out entirely of the situation counting dragons in her mind or whatever other meditation technique she constantly engages in. She crosses the back yard in a frenzy, running right through the kitchen and up to the living room where they are scattered around with a fire roaring like it’s a hallmark fucking movie. She stops abruptly and heaves out a growl – Shut the fuck up! What I do is none of your business! – She turns to Emma – You’re not even related to us, you need to go home right the fuck now. – Back to the stunned faces looking up at her from the seats – And all of you, literally killing like living sentient creatures to roast them and eat them, enslaving some people because they don’t uphold some shitty deal, why would you even think you can give me shit for cheating?

- Oh cousin, some of us weren’t-

- You shut the fuck up too! You’re a piece of shit, at least I’m not proud about it!

Mal taps Regina on the side and they both stand, the blonde moving to her with one arm out to grab onto hers, she speaks firmly – Lily, please stop.

- No! This entire thing is way out of fucking line! You don’t get to sit here and talk about me and that’s it? I just gotta take it? Plus, this is all your fault, you guys kept introducing me to people and you kept telling me it wasn’t gonna work between us and that my body was doing whatever the fuck. – She points this way and the other, voice raised to the point of the twins twitching on the coffee table, before zeroing on Mal – I am done listening to your fake fucking wisdom, I don’t
need you, so keep your opinions to yourself and fuck off. – It makes her mother stop in her tracks for once and in the deep recesses of Lily’s mind a voice tells her that *that* was way out of line but it’s a lot to take and she only gets the time to exhale once

Regina marches from behind Mal then and reaches her, her voice grave and her eyes set on hers – Do not speak to your mother, or any of us, like that again.

She sputters, what kind of alternate dimension is this? Is she a kid again? – Are you losing your fucking mind? I’m thirty-two! I can speak to whoever I want however I- By the time she finishes the sentence she’s in the kitchen, shouting at the fridge.

Regina releases one long breath with her eyes closed and her fist clenched while Mal recovers from the few last minutes. It’d be tense, but her mother laughs – That was very cathartic to witness. Almost poetic in nature.

- Mother, I am sorry you had to raise four of us. – She sits back down and lets Regina pass a hand over her hair for a moment

Sybilla chuckles on her seat before reaching for the waking tiny dragons – I’ll have you know I was a delight to raise.

She dumps herself on one of the kitchen stools and drops her head to the marble counter before her, covering it with her arms to refrain from sobbing as loudly as she wants to. She knows she’s a piece of garbage, it’s hardly necessary for them all to fucking discuss it at the round table. In a minute Regina appears in front of her, and starts pacing on the other side of the island. Lily can hear the steps going back and forth while she probably finds a way to tell her to be gone ASAP. She balls her fists up above her head and tries to stop the congestion in her nose and the ringing on her ears, clenching her eyes as hard as possible as well but it doesn’t seem to work too much.

Regina rounds the island and pulls her arms to their normal position by her sides – Please, have a little dignity. – She pulls on her shoulders next to get her sitting up and makes sure her posture is straight – Zelena has a point. Mother’s methods were misguided but the lessons she imparted are priceless. What you lack the most is grooming. See, us sociopaths are successful members of society because we are house trained. Without it you’re just - She motions at her with a sneer

Lily changes a glance to Regina’s face and it is thunderous, so she looks right back down - I uh- I- I’m sorry?

- For what?

- Like, losing it? – She sniffs before anything slimy can leave her nose and Regina’s eyes narrow on hers, making her voice crack some – It just was so much, I’m private with my shit. Sorry. I didn’t mean to insult you and mom and-

Regina holds her hand up and it silences her right up. - This kind of gossip sessions are what happens when you have a family. It is not ideal, but it is what it is. – Regina crosses her arms then, Lily can tell she’s still pretty pissed but she’s still concerned about her, it’s nice. Like Mal was, right before she told her to fuck off - You have shown more grief at being criticized that at the whole trampling over Ruby’s heart. Exactly how callous were you last night?

Lily scratches at her forehead and darts her eyes to the door between them and the rest of interested dragons, but if Regina wanted a spell she would’ve cast a spell, so she explains – I couldn’t do it
last night… we just slept, but still. And then this morning I told her It happened because I was curious and that the issue wasn’t her… but it was a fucking mess. You know, ‘cause I was born to fuck up. - She lets out a long breath and slouches on her seat, already starting to wiggle her leg so it’ll turn, her go-to nervous tick when on the kitchen stool

Regina nips that right in the bud, holding onto the stool’s side – You were born to rule. – She moves to force Lily to straighten her back again and lifts her chin with two fingers to be able to look her in the eye – I want you to stop losing it as often as you do and stating your age just as you’re about to behave like a child. This scale between an angry misfit and crumbled mess is not cute, add some variety to the personality shelf, will you? – She releases her. – When you were drifting through the world I bet you used this kind of outburst often, a triumphant exit of sorts. Well not anymore. These people are fixtures in your life now. Get your shit together.

- Y- yes. – Not even a pity pat on the shoulder, she really fucked up this time around.

Regina gives her a once over and takes a step back - Stand like you want to be standing. – Lily stands all right, back straight even. But uneasy still – No jittering. Shoulders back, chin up, firm stride, direct eye contact. Do not stutter, do not backtrack, cursing loses its emphasis when you indulge in every sentence. - It goes completely against her natural desire to keep a low profile and do her thing without people bothering her, but she has to admit she enjoys the puffing out a bit, feels like when she’s gotten to push on people that don’t think she can until she does; even looking at Regina like that in her soft clothing and with her three inches less is enjoyable, she looks even cute. That lasts two seconds tops. The woman turns her full attention to her face and that eye contact she needs to hold gets a lot harder – See what will happen is that today Mal’s family will leave and tomorrow Mal and I will go in our honeymoon, Henry will stay with Emma and you’ll stay here by yourself, a pariah once word gets around roughly half an hour after the woman whose heart you broke calls Snow White, it probably already happened, and you’ll have only a busy Zelena for company. This sounds daunting, but if we come back here and you have run away not only will we be inconsolable, I will be very disappointed. We do not want that. This won’t kill you, but it will make you miserable for a while, don’t give the townspeople the satisfaction of a public display like the one you just gave. You will conduct yourself like someone who has sense and decorum and fix this mess with your chin up, firstly with the room of people you just yelled at, then with Ruby, with Granny, you might even have to apologize to Snow to keep the peace. I do not care. There are outside consequences to your actions, your self-loathing sessions fix none of them. Are we clear?

- Yeah – Mostly. What’s decorum? But what else was she gonna say?

Regina releases her from the prison of being under her gaze for a second, she turns around like she’s casually sweeping her eyes over the kitchen appliances - What will you do first?

- Um, go tell the others that I’m sorry I was rude

She pins her down with another glare - No ums

- Yeah, yes. No Ums. – She straightens her back some more and it does nothing to fix Regina’s demeanor

- And don’t make me monologue ever again.

She nods and takes one deep breath - I’m sorry, for yelling at you earlier.

- Quaint. Do better with the others.
As expected, dragons have tough hide and they were more amused than anything else at the whole situation. It seems they were really fond of Lily after their time together and as the (third) youngest of their clan she is just a cutie for at least another five decades. Regina opens them a portal and they go one by one without as much as one emotional good bye like they’d be seeing Mal and Lily the next day instead of god knows when. Regina hands the one temporarily human baby to her mother with a wave and sees them disappear as the bright revolving circles closes in itself and sighs at the kicked expression on Lily’s face, Emma had not been quite as responsive to her repentance and had left after confirming when she should come by to pick up Henry without a glance Lily’s way, it probably hurt. And Zelena, flexing her magic muscles, had transporte right out with a cackle, on brand. But Regina is still far from the merciful version of herself so she just taps Lily’s back twice on her way in and nods when Lily straightens it under her hand.

She sprints up to her room, her apology to Mal drained every single cell of her body, eye contact is a bitch and the sheer energy it takes to stop herself from breaking down in tears in front of her warrants a good, long, exhaustion nap. To recharge for her ‘I am a piece of shit’ world tour she plans to do late in the afternoon, after Emma’s had a snack and when Ruby is tired enough to listen without trying to fight her on her shitty reasoning.

Thank god for blissful sleep because she misses as Mal follows Regina all the way up to their bedroom and traps her against the door as soon as it’s closed – I am inspired by what I’ve witnessed today, no strange teas or concoctions in any honeymoon of mine.

The breath that leaves Regina makes her lose an inch as she slumps against the door – After the mess that one just made?

- After you fixed it so expertly – She smiles, and it lasts for a while, to make it convincing – She doesn’t need me, we are good to go.

- Oh darling – It must’ve really wormed its way in her because Mal lets herself be led to the bed without any complaints, and lies down with no resistance as well – It’s always the ones we care about most that get it the worst when we lash out, we know they won’t leave and we try our hardest to test that. She loves you, more than she can handle.

- You’ve turned me soft - One long sigh leaves her and she borrows some more into Regina’s side, the padded sweater filled with Regina’s scent making a good place to rest – I hate to see her so fraught. And for you to have to resort to Cora's reasoning.

- And I hate to see you so trodden one day after we married. – She finds a ticklish spot on the back of Mal’s neck and ghost her fingers over it, smiling when she squirms without wanting to – C’mon, help me pack for our trip to rural Germany.

- It is not rural, it is just quaint.

She still stands swiftly, moving over Regina to go in the closet reminiscing about the snows in December she never lived through and dragging coats out, laughing at animal print gloves packed since the 80s and throwing lingerie out of the small adjacent room in outrageous numbers… Regina turns just enough she’ll be a good audience and as they start speculating about what being in a plane really feels like and how it compares to flying on a dragon she smiles because, even when the first half of her day was a disaster, it was the good kind of disaster. A room full of family to fight with is something she never expected to come after her teenage years.

Mal parades yet another lacey thing in front of her, distinctly not hers, and Regina chuckles – Do
not test me, I will put a baby in you.

- Oh, I love to be threatened. – She tosses the get-up her way and winks, and all is well again.
I wish you’d say it in german.

Mal enjoys ten minutes of her experience on the plane, well exactly nine minutes and fifty-eight seconds from take off to when she turns to Regina with sad eyes because she can only see one side of the landscape and the clouds are nothing of interest if a metal monster is slicing through them with its static wings. It’s hilarious if Regina does say so herself, she’s enjoying her ten minutes just fine, browsing the catalogue for movies to watch before she can fall asleep without it being embarrassing. She drags Mal’s hand over to her, intertwining their fingers together and fighting off a laugh, it’s hardly anything to be excited about, specially when one has flown the more organic way but surely it could be worse. She urges her to think of the people without room to stretch and Mal nods solemnly, propping up her long legs up on the space in front of her and settling in for the hours of traveling they have ahead, head squarely on Regina’s shoulders and shoes already kicked off.

It’s basically a bed, and from general experience with her fake memories and pop culture It cannot be representative of any type of traveling. The pretty blonde woman who helped them settle in pops up again and offers to bring them what they’d like. Regina asks for mimosas and popcorn as her finger hovers ominously over how to train your dragon and the girl goes, peppily. Mal darts forward to pick the movie next to it, one with a murderer, - I do love how you are risking bankruptcy with these tickets – She cannot even see the people who’d come in with them and got in the other booths

- Bankruptcy? Please – She laughs and tunes in completely into the movie, she does love a murderer, they’re all so terribly written, and blood doesn’t move quite like they think it does.

- I’m just living my dream right now, I always wanted to marry rich and be a trophy wife.

Regina lifts their joined hands to lay a kiss on the back of them and chuckles as the man on the screen guts the first unwitting teenager just before the title screen flashes – I will buy half of Berlin for you, if you so desire.

The girl comes back then, to deliver their refreshments and Mal gives her one second to remove herself – Darling stop, I have to live with this underwear for the next ten hours.

- Your first mistake was wearing any underwear at all.

Mal sits up slightly then, to glance around – How private are these booths?

Regina reaches for the popcorn laughing and hands it to her, shaking her head slightly – If you get us banned you’re taking the vintage way back. Bus to the nearest port and then a month in a ship filled with fish guts.

- You are the one who started something you can’t finish! - Mal sighs dramatically on her spot sipping at her drink with her free hand and adjusting the popcorn on her lap

The plot unravels before them and Regina releases her hand to point excitedly at the screen – I bet this one will die first.

Mal moves, turning to the screen and lifts her arm for Regina to get under it, and Regina goes willingly, changing the hand holding the mimosa and lifting the free one to tangle with Mal's over her shoulder absentmindedly. Mal will need to find an optimum time to suggest they get a TV for their room. It is very comfortable. – Of course he will, he’s black
They have access to the lounge room in London while they wait for the second half of their flight and Regina powers up her laptop to check on Henry as soon as she’s settled but it seems Emma’s house comes with the privilege of sleeping well into noon, so she entertains the idea of checking on Lily briefly but refrains, glancing Mal’s way and motioning to the computer, not that she realizes for a moment since she’s entertained with a man all the way to the back. Regina pinches her arm – Will you facetime Lily?

- Oh, she’s fine. – she lifts her phone in her hand, texts on its screen, and narrows her eyes in the man’s direction – I think he’s looking at you.

Regina eyes him for a second and he shifts his gaze, so she turns back trying to read the messages on the screen – No, he’s not. Maybe he’s looking at you.

- Dear I am wearing sweatpants. He’s looking at you.

The screen turns black and Regina reaches for the padded fabric with a smile and drags herself closer to Mal, shaking her head of anything not-honeymoon – You look absolutely delicious in your sweatpants. Don’t sell yourself short.

Mal wants to tell her she knows she looks just fine in the sweatpants, but the man stands and it raises her shackles - Oh, he’s coming over, prepare to fight. Are you wearing your ring?

Regina laughs, gesturing with her thumb towards her wedding band and only about 30% ready to fight some stranger in an airport for whatever reason Mal is anticipating, can’t they be normal out in the real world? The man approaches with a backpack on tow even, and smiles brightly in what is clearly not Regina’s way. She supposes she could maim him easily if he chooses not to take no for an answer, but then what? They become fugitives. A verbal scolding will do. No need for too much excitement in what should be a calm, winter magic trip.

He reaches them and leans down to hug Mal – Mallory! Wie geht es dir?

She gives him an instant shove - Ich kenne dich von irgendwoher? – She frowns for a second turning to her wife – Regina, I speak German.

- I would suppose you do, german as you are.

The man looks between them with a confused frown - Ich bin es, Ulrich. – He points to himself, all earnest, and straightens up.

In one split second Mal’s face lights up and she stands to loop an arm around his shoulders, they’re both terribly blonde and tall, and it seems to amplify where there’s a pair of them out in the wild. Regina raises an eyebrow at her and Mal pats his chest with her other hand – This is Ulrich! Ulrich this is Regina, my wife. – The giddiness she feels is equal parts the magic doing its thing and the exhilaration at the scope of the curse, did this man even exist before Regina cursed her? How can he remember her? She pats his chest again, marking a beat only they understand, and he chuckles – We used to date in high school.

- Lovely to meet you – His accent is heavy as he extends a hand to Regina and she takes it easily, train of though very similar to Mal’s. How on god’s green earth can there be any memory of her? She eyes him curiously and he takes it with aplomb. Eyeing her a bit back before turning to Mal – America made you forget us… Are you going home or is this just a coincidence?

- We just married, and I want to show Regina some of the sights. – She releases him and sits again
– What about you?

- I was on business here in London. My flight left me, in fact. – He looks down as he chuckles and pats down his perfectly pristine hair – Just until now I thought this was some sign… I hadn’t thought of you in years I think, and then a few months ago – he snaps his fingers and smiles pointing at Mal excitedly – you were all I could think of, that same day my mom asked about you... the kid with the blue hair too, remember? And then I see you here! Crazy. But you have a wife… – He chuckles again, and Regina’s mind bypasses all jealousy to process his words

- Excuse me, – she pops up from behind Mal and the blonde turns to give her more of a visual, reaching out to take her hand in the same move – So you didn’t remember her at all, and then one day you did? Do you have any mementos – his face turns confused and she amends – pictures maybe, something else?

Mal chips in before he can become saddened she hadn’t even bothered to mention him to someone she married, first love and all. - I kept a few things through college – Or so her fake memory tells her, - But the box got lost in a move.

- There should be something in my old room. – The voice in the speakers announces their flight and he stands swiftly – We will check? Mom would love to see you.

Mal nods and gets up after him, picking both hers and Regina’s bags while the brunette closes her laptop and glances to check they weren’t leaving anything on the couch. Mal feels Regina tug on the zipper of the bag hanging from her arm to slip the computer in as she takes something else out and extends her hand for her to take. Regina complies with a chuckle, passing the passports to the other one – We can reach maximum efficiency if we have a four-hand capacity.

- Oh shush, how long could this urge to hold your tiny, cold hand last? Enjoy it while you can. If the flight attendant is as pretty as the last one I might pretend to not know you at all.

They hold hands well into the first kilometer of their drive from Berlin to the tiny town Mallory hails from but at some point frostbite becomes a concern of Regina’s and she takes a few minutes to find a pair of gloves in the part of her luggage that’s accessible and the moment her attention leaves Maleficent she falls asleep on her seat, head likely clattering against the car window until someone bothers to pull her away.

They had chosen to share the cab with Mal’s fake friend and he turns to her from the front seat holding out his own set of gloves – We are used to it. Right now it is okay, but you need to prepare! Christmas is hard for Americans…

- Oh no, - She locates her own gloves finally and pulls them out – We need to be home by christmas. I need time to plan Christmas for our children. so it’s a tight schedule already.

- There is children. – She catches him gaze wistfully out of the window as he puts his gloves back on, and refrains from laughing before realizing she’s made a huge mistake – What are their ages?

How old are they? Oh boy. She nudges Mal with her elbow so she’ll come save her from this – Early teens. Both adopted, obviously.

He glances back at her with a nod – When we were young we talked of marrying and having three kids after university.

Mal groans softly as she comes to and straightens up, pulling Regina closer with an arm over her
shoulders and slipping her fingers into her gloves up to the palm and under the collar of her coat as far as they will go, to warm her up like god intended her to – And I was adamant on naming them after renaissance figures, like the ninja turtles. So, you my dear – she lays a kiss on top of Regina’s head before she can tug a designer beanie over it – retain all creative rights to our third one’s name.

- I want that in writing.

Regina has to admit it is straight out of a Christmas movie. She refrains from gluing herself to the window when they enter the village and the small wooden cottages start appearing sprinkled through greenery, lit with warm lights and with rooftops covered with snow inches thicker than it was back in Storybrooke. There’s a few people sitting on porches with steaming mugs and kids kicking up snow here and there heavily bundled, and as the car slows down she can see some small store fronts lit but closed her and there, pastries and winter items.

She waits until they’re off the ride and Ulrich has helped with their luggage and gone on his way to turn to Mal - This reminds me of The Enchanted Forest, somehow. If we had made it past strict candlelight.

- It is lovely. – She lugs around easily the four bags it took Ulrich two trips to dismount and glances at her – But not as lovely as you.

Regina rolls her eyes as she stands there, weightless but surely one pin drop away from her frozen body breaking into shards, magic is a functional furnace she supposes, out of town she’s a mere mortal afraid to bend her fingers - That’s cute. Get me inside.

The hotel is a building made out of stone and wood, bigger than most around it but still small, and thrumming from the inside, that much is clear the minute Mal pushes one of the big heavy doors and Regina crosses the threshold. It’s a bar of sorts, or at least there’s a lot of people sharing drinks in big cozy seats and at least one woman with a tray. Regina walks behind Mal as she crosses the space easily, asking for room her and there, clapping a few shoulders and grunting a few times and when they make it out of the rowdy bit there’s still another room of calmer drinkers to cross before the small one that holds the desk and a wall of keys in numbered shelves. There are only 20 but Regina’s mind still has trouble trying to comprehend where 20 rooms would be in such a place.

Mal greets the old woman jovially and she answers back with the same enthusiasm, it goes on for less than a minute before the mood drops and Mal frowns turning to her – She booked us a room with two twin beds.

- Darling, I would rather die.

- I know you would. - Mal chuckles and finally drops her burden on the floor to hug her close – Do you want to go try our luck somewhere else? – She takes one second too long to hesitate so Mal knows it is a no – Do you want me to verbally assault her for thinking my reservation was for siblings?

She takes one second to laugh at anyone looking at their passports and thinking siblings because of the last names and releases Mal – The website defeated you? – It was much better to call and make a reservation, but she had insisted on being modern - Tell her we’ll triple whatever the people in the room with the biggest bed are paying. She can move them somewhere else and make up an excuse.

Mal lets out a low hum with a smirk – Of course, My Queen. – She tugs her back in and barely
looks up to glare at the woman eyeing them form the desk - Hör mir zu, du wirst bewegen, wer in
geheiratet – She undermarks whatever that was with a wink and the woman sputters before calling
some men from the back who scramble to pick up their bags from around them

Regina watches them go with a smile and turns to Mal – You are very German

- You are very powerful – For one split moment she gazes down at Regina with a small smile
before deciding that yes, embarrassment is the way to go, it is their honeymoon after all. She bends
down swiftly and picks her up by the waist, making her yelp and let herself be thrown over her
shoulder – We have several layers to peel off you and I am in a rush.

The men who went one minute ahead of them can barely get the room open and the sheets stripped
of the bed before Mal catches up to them carrying all hundred and something pounds of bundled-up
Regina. Mal refuses to put her down even when in the room and they laugh with each other in their
strange guttural language, one of them apparently one of Mal’s until-now fictional classmates
surprised that girly and delicate Mallory can suddenly hold up a fully-grown human being that
insists on wiggling on her arms to make the job harder. She explains the situation and he chuckles
some more as he goes around her to greet Regina and lets the other two know they better fix up that
room quickly.

It does the job and soon enough she can toss Regina in the freshly washed duvet and climb on her
making quick work of her own light jacket while Regina makes her best impression of herself in
the midst of a bad mood – I don’t enjoy being tossed around.

- My dear, dear wife, being tossed is a hobby of yours – she stands, to get rid of all four snow
boots present in the scene and Regina laughs on her spot pulling her legs this way and that, helping
nonchalantly

- We are not even going to unpack?

- You’re wearing half the luggage as it is. As long as it ends up on the floor, it’ll be unpacked

She sits up and huffs – You brought me to the north pole. My genetic pool craves the opposite of
this, daddy was from far east, we are sunny people. - Mal climbs back up on the bed and smirks as
she sits back and gives Regina space with a smirk, the woman break in less than a minute as
predicted, and moves to get on top of her, kicking off the boot that’s barely holding onto her foot
and straddling her, throwing both arms over her shoulders – You won’t even let me play hard to
get?

- There are much more enjoyable ways you can punish me for robbing you of your beach vacation
– She leans up to kiss Regina and manages to pry the coat off her shoulders with a smile. She can
definitely forfeit being on top.

Regina winds her arms around Mal’s neck again and pulls back to take a breath, it comes out more
like a deep, dramatic sigh – I wish you’d say it in german.

Mal laughs as she reaches us back up to kiss her a few more times – Tired of understanding my
witty remarks?

Regina gets rid of her own jacket, digging her knees in the bed for a moment – You are the most
alluring when you sound like a mail order bride. – Mal laughs moving to take the sweater off her,
and drops her hands to her legs to move them up and down with a bright smile so she’ll sit back down, and Regina melts, she did her few minutes of playing hard to get. It gets old. – I love you, very much. – She brushes off a stray curl off Mal’s face

- And I adore you.

A trip to the market means tasting several kinds of meat and beer in a short span of time and Regina complies as much as possible if only to see Mal’s excited expression as she buys yet another sausage she wishes will trigger a memory. She is having too much fun recalling Mallory’s life and giving her a tour of the spots she used to visit when she was some young version of herself that never quite existed. It is curious, people under the curse had memories of things that never happened but also 28 years of very real occurrences under their false identities, everything Mal recalls is false, and yet she drags her to a little alley with a grin on her face to inform her she had her first kiss there when she was 14 and her father was just on the other corner buying bread, hell bent on recreating it. Regina herself has no false memories swimming in hers, she woke up with knowledge of the world she was in and nothing to back it up; she spent a few days in the library learning everything she could about her fake identity through public records, and visiting a dragon that wouldn’t look her way, of course.

Dragon who now presses her face to the window of the house she didn’t grow up in to look inside, parents dead in a car crash when she was almost done with college, and the house empty ever since she chose to never go back. She kicks the frame of a side door a few times until a rusty key falls from between it and the wall, and she bends down to pick it up with a wink and a disregard for the decades of built-up dirt – In case of Ulrich-related emergencies

Regina chuckles as they go inside and Mal passes her hands over the dusty surfaces in the room with wide eyes, reaching for something with a smile – Regina, you truly are… remarkable.

Regina moves closer to look over her shoulder and see what it is she’s looking at. She remembers she can’t ever hope to do that and circles her wife, to see her holding up a picture frame. She’s dragged a hand over the dust and a girl can be seen, maybe Henry’s age, all unruly curls on a bike – Is that you? Did you ever look like that?

- I believe I did – Christ, it was so long ago since she’d been a child but she’s almost certain mirrors showed her that image when she was – How did you do this?

- I loathe to admit I can’t take the credit for most of the work… I just throw in some herbs in an oversized pot... say some words in an ancient language… ask for a few critical personality traits and such – She hands Mal the picture and reaches for another, a graduation one – I don’t design the lives or the towns… or the hairstyles – She holds up Mal’s monstrosity of a perm surely from the end of the 70s and laughs at her as she tries to yank it off – These are all coming back with us.

Her bedroom is a pink monstrosity under the faded yellow the dust has left and Mal cringes at the various items dropped around, specially the diary she finds hidden between the boards and the mattress, thankfully unreadable to Regina who still mocks the starry glittery design on the cover and points at a few other constellation inspired items as Mal remembers her obsession with the night sky and bends under the bed to take out an old telescope, metallic pink of course. She removes the covers to lay it down on the only slightly less dusty bedding underneath and laughs – Do you think Lily will want it?
Regina almost snorts – You’re passing down your fuchsia paraphernalia?

She eyes it almost forlorn before returning it to its place under the bed and laying across it with a contented sigh – Let’s defile my childhood mattress

Regina laughs as Mal resolutely uses her feet to remove some of the matted stuffed animals still standing, and moves to lay by her in the tiny bed, the fluorescent stickers in the ceiling coming into view – When did you last wash these sheets? Are you sure it was after the last Ulrich related emergency? They don’t aim too well in high school, I’ve heard

- How dare you? This bed is pure, pristine, untouched. You’d be the one and only. This is the opportunity of a lifetime. – Mal bounces a bit just to test its resistance and laughs, remembering something even worse – Unless we count my torrid love affair with my Olivia Newton John poster over there. – Regina turns to the mentioned picture and laughs a full belly laugh that makes her sit up – I was convinced if I went to school in America I might just meet her. If you love me, you will help my find my sticky copy of grease.

- I used to sneak up rags from the stables to think of Daniel.

- Whatever did you do with the rags?! - Mal turns to watch Regina rub her temples and gapes, reaching up to pull her back down and trap her in with a leg – I want fully fleshed out details.

- Me? I am not the strange one here – She laughs as Mal huffs with indignation and Regina starts wiggling her feet to a random beat – Summer loving, had me a blast. Summer loving, happened so fast.

She takes a sharp breath - You need to get me pregnant right now.

Every bit of knowledge is important, Regina realizes as Mal lets herself be rolled onto her back easily and with a laugh just because she surprises her with knowing the lyrics to a song from an old musical. She smiles as the last stuffed animal gets jostled of the bed and goes on - I met a girl crazy for me.

The lightbulb is long dead and the light coming in from the street lamps is tenous at best through the heavy fog and the dust-stained window but they stay under the old covers regardless, intertwined and breaking the silence every few minutes for very important matters like the trolls’ language or that year Michael’s Jackson Thriller came out and the world kinda stopped.

Central heating is barely missed when one is wrapped in the arms of a dragon and she never thought she would be so comfortable breathing in decades of stale air while laying on a layer of ancient dust, but Regina has no intentions of moving from her spot on Mal’s chest, with the strong heartbeat under her ear. – What do you think we’ll be doing in a century?

- Maybe we can take a trip to the moon. Imagine that, the marvels of the land without magic. – the astronomy enthusiast in her fake memories sings – But I am sure it will be mostly the same we do now; squeezing into twin beds, holding each other, hoping your hair will grow.

- Will you be combing it? - Mal grumbles by her side and she chuckles, laying a kiss on the skin closer to her – Then it is an accurate prediction. In a century it will continue to be short.

- What do you think we will be doing in a week?

- Paris. I have the tickets already.
She laughs for a few seconds and it makes her shake under Regina’s weight – Shopping? Perhaps we could use your newfound longevity to build a multi-billion empire or sorts, to support your hobby.

- Why don’t you find me a long-forgotten treasure? Make yourself useful.

- I will keep my nose open for any caves full of gold.

Somehow, she’d been roped into lunch with her wife’s ex-mother-in-law. Whatever it was on her plate at the moment she could not hope to enjoy it as much as Mal and Ulrich, and their conversation is obviously being weighed down by their desire to be polite and keep it in English so she’ll understand them. She’s not that interested if she’s being honest, everything they can discuss is fake and the few pictures of Mal they had are safely in one of her multitude of pockets. So, she excuses herself with a smile that lets them know she’ll be just outside.

The deck outside is enclosed in glass, the people in the small town obviously well off if the obvious work of an interior designer in most of the windows she’d peered through is any indication. She takes a seat and wrestles her phone out of its place in the coat she wears even inside to hover her finger over Lily’s contact for a minute, before settling for Henry. Who’s perfectly fine and content without her being around apparently, and seems to worry more about the fate of Christmas than anything else, including Lily’s wellbeing, he's apparently barely been in the shouse and she looked 'Ok', he guesses. He’s forgiven so much of all of them for the sake of family that this small thing giving him any pause at all has to be the work of Snow and maybe Emma, always trapped in the middle. Regina urges him to go home a few nights, he can easily use the lack of parental supervision for some scheme and Lily wouldn’t let him die in the middle of the night, would she? It moves him a little.

But eventually, after checking some texts, her thumb goes back to hovering over Lily’s name, last message a grocery run inquiry sent before her and Mal’s own vacation. She doesn’t want to discuss anything via text but a phone call would expose her to the resentment Lily must be feeling after she scolded her, for all intents and purposes, in front of her family. Mal snatches the phone of her hand and locks it without even a glance at the screen, sitting on the armrest and bending to lay one sweet kiss on her cheek before her new best friend appears in Regina’s field of view bearing a warm cup of coffee.

- Sorry to keep Mal, she’s just so fun! – He takes the seat across from hers and drops his feet on the strong wooden table between them

- Oh it’s fine. I would monopolize her time after decades without her as well. – She takes a sip of the coffee to find it like she takes it, surely Mal’s work. She can’t cook too well but coffee is something she gets just right.

It’s tea in Mal’s hand as she chuckles - Oh no, it will never come to that, ever. They’d have to hold me captive underground.

- And what kind of monster would? – Regina’s earnest expression turns to the man before both of them

Ulrich nods as he mulls it over and Mal refrains from laughing at him – If it were the attractive kind of monster, maybe I’d allow it.

- Where will you find a monster more beautiful than her? – He tilts his head Regina’s way and
shrugs

- There aren't any. Trust me, I'd know - Mal’s warm hand tickles the back of Regina’s neck, passing her thumb just under her hair line - I’ve come up in the world since school, have I not? – Regina presses her head back to get more warmth and Mal lets the smile in her voice come out in full bloom while Ulrich huffs

- You are always so mean to me. – His arms cross over his broad chest and Regina appreciates the boyish smile he has, he’s had an already good life made better with whatever memories of the happy child she wished Mallory to be, a white little lie that harmed no one. A new kind for them. – Regina, when you get tired of the mocking you know where to come find me.

They walk back to their cozy little hotel, Regina’s gloved hand entwined with Mal’s bare one, with more than one pit stop in the way to recall some other specific events in Mallory’s life. Regina’s only one scarf away from zero visibility but she obliges happily, in awe of the nostalgia in her wife’s voice as she retells the time she fell on a frozen poodle wearing thing pants and she had to go home with a gaping hole by her thigh. Maybe they should take Lily wherever she grew around so she can take a breath, away from the town’s prying eyes. Mal seems to want to recreate the scene though, sliding this way and that over the large, smooth stone that makes the step in the path and Regina’s mind drifts back to the moment and urges her to tug her away from the gathering snow, lest she breaks a bone and they don’t make it to Paris.

- What has gotten into you? - She gives her one stern look that would level Henry to the ground but Mal smiles

- You and your witchy, curse-y ways. - Regina raises a frozen eyebrow at her and she pulls her in, all the way to the sludge, for a kiss - English isn't my first language.
Doesn’t Lily like it like this?

It is absolutely fucking freezing and worst-case scenario Regina has rigged up a camera in the hallway just to scold her for the exact thing she’s about to do. But since Regina isn’t home and she probably has better shit to do than check the theoretical recording Emma decided they might as well just pop in inside the house, bypassing freezing their asses off. Somehow that backfires. The house is at the same temperature than the outer world, every light is shut off, and she’s pretty sure the back door and a few windows are open.

Henry’s head retreats between his shoulders and he rushes upstairs to get what he wanted to get and probably a coat on top and Emma goes to the kitchen as she debates venturing into Regina and Mal’s room, risking her life for a borrowed designer coat, but she settles with remembering one long fluffy thing she left over the back of the couch and calling it to her, slipping it on as she looks around the place, far from spotless. She climbs the stairs to find Lily and ask her why she won’t turn the heat on, or tidy up a little bit. It seems she’s become a mom. Nice.

Her bedroom door is closed but the knob turns easily under Emma’s hand, and she pushes inside without as much as asking whether Lily is there or not. Which, she probably wouldn’t have gotten an answer. Lily’s face down, big headphones covering about 50% of her head and her look consists of a sports bra, dark jeans and heavy boots, one of which she is thumping against Regina’s wall with no regard for the paint job.

Emma eyes the room from her spot, mess on the floor and on the other surfaces, the bed rumpled and food containers on it with half-eaten meals. Emma is kinda afraid to touch Lily’s back before she knows she’s there, she might turn around and swing at her and she’ll die on the spot probably. She moves in to see if she can yell some or wave her hands frantically but she’s halfway up by the bed when she spots the little bags on the night stand and loses it. Yanking the headphones away from Lily’s head. Music blaring out of them.

It’s a testament to her state of mind that she only turns around slowly and looks up at her with a frown – What the fuck?

- What the fuck?! – Emma yells, and she glances at the door quickly. It slams shut. – What the fuck? – She points at the pills and the… cocaine? And her fists ball up – You what the fuck. My kid lives here. What the fuck is this?

- They’re just like some uppers. You have to chill. – She sits up slowly and sniffs as she drags a hand over her face, it looks almost painful. But the she reaches for her headphones again and Emma swats her hand. She leans down and grabs her head with one hand, she’s close enough Lily has trouble focusing her eyes and they roll just a bit before she blinks them a bit more awake – You are not on fucking uppers.

- So I took some other shit… What’s up?

It’s been over a week after Lily blew up at them and Emma had kept her distance. It was bad enough Red was scourging the earth for a couple of beans to leave town and Snow was losing her mind over the whole thing, she had to deal with the town’s ridiculous winter-related issues and manage to wrangle Henry around without the imminent threat of Regina. She chose to let Lily sit in her own pile of shit, after all they weren’t related. But this is well past Lily. Regina would blow a gasket if she saw the Snow melting on her wooden furniture downstairs.
Emma snatches the drugs off the table and starts opening the drawers for good measure, more stuff stored between the trinkets there. She must’ve driven out of town to stock up for the winter like a bear about to hibernate. It’s gonna take a few toilet flushings. – Regina and Mal fucking trusted you to stay here and in a single week you have the kitchen turned into a warzone and this room looks like the back alley of a fucking strip club. I know you don’t get cold but this place is about to take ice damage and god, look at all this shit – She kicks at a Chinese food box on the floor and scoffs – Have some fucking respect, this isn’t a crack house.

She groans on her place and starts reaching for a discarded, disgusting t-shirt – It’s my house too. That’s what Regina says. Does she know you’re here? – She’s slurring it out but her movements, and her tongue, are sharper. Whatever it is probably can’t last too long for her. Maybe that’s why she buys in bulk.

Emma huffs – You are an ungrateful bitch. They’re giving you a place to stay, and clothing, food, nice shit, money on top of al of that, and putting up with you with a smile on their faces and this is what you do? Get fucked up and start ruining the place?

- Poor Emma, always trying to get adopted. – Lily’s eyes roll back of their own volition, but it looks disdainful enough Emma’s blood boils at it coupled with the phrasing, it’s something the Regina Mills of 2011 would say. Yes, she always wanted to be adopted. Not that Lily could understand that, running away from a perfectly okay-ish home as she was back then, and fucking up a good one now as she is

Henry knocks then, and it maybe stops Emma from starting a fist fight she can’t finish. She moves to the en-suite bathroom to get rid of the myriad of drugs she managed to find and yells out to him that she’ll be right out. She finds Lily rummaging through an old bag of fries and scoffs – That kid out there has never had to see this kind of shit, and you better keep it that way because I swear to god I will kill you. Get your shit together.

Lily laughs sardonically around her stale fries, moving towards the phone discarded on the middle of the bed and shutting off the music – I’m sure mommy is so proud of you.

Emma takes one deep breath, willing her fist to stay by her side, and moves to slam the door on the way out. She has to take a minute to collect herself before facing Henry, who’s blissfully playing with one of his many portable consoles on his bed. She smiles at him bundled up in his coat and scarf without even making a move for the thermostat – Hey Kid, don’t know how to turn up the heat?

- Doesn’t Lily like it like this? We’ll go soon anyways. – He shrugs

Emma’s conscience won’t let her leave, who knows what they’ll come back to. She sighs – Hey, why don’t we do something nice for your mom? – He looks away from his little screen – Why don’t we set up everything but the tree? Turn up the heat, order a pizza, put on some music. – While she cleans the mess Lily’s left in the few common areas she’s ventured into.

- Uh, sure! But we need cookies! Mom bakes the day we set up Christmas.

Once again Emma Swan is reminded of her own mortality - Thank god Luke is on call.

In a good couple of hours Emma manages to clean up the kitchen, swipe and mop up both floors, learn to work Regina’s state of the art heating system, cook one pot of pasta for them and even check out a photo album in a shelf, Henry’s maybe three on it and he’s all pudge. And while she
does all that Luke bakes and helps Henry with his exclusive task of setting up the decorations like Regina likes them. One would think she does it by interior designer and professional crew, but apparently they just do it by hand every year, ladder and all. She always thought the thing had come built in with the curse like the rest of the contents of Regina’s garage but now the wall with power tools suddenly looks suspicious.

She drops herself on the couch and smiles as she watches Henry and Luke working together. With the situation(s) in the town they’d only managed one of the three christmases she had lived through in there, and it was cool and all spending Christmas with her parents but she kinda just showed up… she had never had a Christmas of her own, or anyone to want to help her set up. And as much as she wanted to spend it with the kid, it was probably Regina’s right to keep him, even more after like two weeks in Europe. But Luke seems to be enjoying it with a cookie in his hand, maybe they can go get some Christmas stuff and set up her place too, and his, which are definitely not the same place.

He smiles down at her as he passes Henry the mistletoe, he insisted on being the one risking his life. Luke passes a lot of it – Her Majesty loves mistletoe.

- Is this a known Regina fact? – she frowns on her spot, how would the baker know that?

Henry hangs a third bundle making a pretty row under some lights – Yeah! We hang it all over.

- Who was she trying to trick into kissing her?

Henry shrugs – Me I guess. Maybe now Mal will just do it and I can skip it. You can’t just hang one piece you know. When are we doing your house?

Luke turns around to her again, he likes to plan his week ahead so he needs an answer stat to be able to move his basketball game at the gym accordingly, to lose in another evening. Emma considers his usual piss-poor team and the grocery run, plus Neal’s coming over to be babysat on Wednesday… - we can do Thursday. – what has she become?

- What about that dinner you owe me? – She had bet against the wrong team and he would not forget

Emma shrugs at him and bundles herself up in the throw Regina’s so tastefully draped over the seat she’s in - There’s pasta in the kitchen ready to be served, say when

He shakes his head and holds on to the curl that goes rogue when he does that - No. You promised me a second thanksgiving meal

- You know I can’t make any of that! It was my hubris talking. Thanks, word of the day app.

Henry finishes the mistletoe extravaganza - Mom said you’ve been talking a lot better the other day

He says it as he moves down the ladder for another cookie and Emma grins, she knows Regina saying anything nice with Henry around means she really believes it. She didn’t start reading the dictionary app daily for Regina, but she was a kinda tired of discussions breaking out and having to listen to every former royal speak in grandiose statements she then had to translate. So, it felt nice. Being acknowledged. For reading the dictionary app. What has she become?

Lily drops by then to remind her that at least she’s not that still. Looking like hell but at least freshly showered and with clean-ish clothes she drops herself on the other couch and drapes her sopping wet hair on the back of it with no regard for the upholstery, another word of the Day app gain. Henry offers her the cookie plater and she takes one before speaking with a rough voice,
maybe booze was in the mix and Emma had just missed it. – So, Christmas.

You do like Christmas, right? – Emma asks

She shrugs – you know how it is, shitty.

Emma does now, but Henry does not. So she should not be talking about her shitty Christmases. She stands, still wrapped in the heavy wool – You know, there’s gotta be a chainsaw I once dropped in the yard somewhere in the garage. The two of us could go get the tree after all.

Luke dusts his hands off on his jeans and Henry perks up at chainsaw as he takes one step around the box of things to be hanged – I’ll help you out – he’s stocky, strong even when he can’t for the life of him do cardio. And he’s an all-around gentleman that sometimes reminds her of David, he wouldn’t let her carry a fucking tree even if she could.

But Lily interjects first with a mocking laugh – I think between the dragon and the witch, we’re good.

Emma stands and moves to him, looping her arm around his waist and kissing him in the cheek – It’s okay, we’ll do it quickly. Be right back. – He’s rarely angry, and even when he is, he’s just a big frowning teddy bear Emma thinks

- I don’t like her too much – he takes one breath but glances away from Lily and her dismissive stance where she stood by the couch

Emma gasps dramatically – You dare say that about Her Royal Highness the princess, first born to Regina Catalina of the House of Xavier, Queen of the Western Realms of the Enchanted Forest? – his eyes open quickly as she remembers himself and Emma pokes on the side with a smile, kissing his cheek again – she’s fucking awful. Finish up in here. I’m sure Regina will give you a gold star for your trouble.

He nods and gives her waist a playful squeeze - That’s not her title.

- Shit. She’ll deduct that from our coupled gold stars for sure. We’re back to zero.

At first Lily was just going at it with the chainsaw, a protective barrier in front of Emma to stop all the flying little chips her poor technique was producing. But halfway through she seemed to, you know, lose it, and dropped the thing by her side to start planting her foot against the bark over and over again, winding up for the kicks with enough force to trample someone’s skull into a mush. Unsurprisingly the tree budged, falling to the side with a cracking noise as the wood splintered. It made a mess of a cut, and Emma knew she couldn’t count on Lily to fix it up so she took the chainsaw from the floor to make the straightest of a line she could and only watched out of the corner of her eye as Lily dropped herself in the cold and damp forest dirt, huffing out smoke and with her face set looking forward

She spoke over the noise – So Ruby’s going out of town then. Looking for the Kansas girl?

Nah – there goes the word of the day app’s work – She wants to find some more werewolves in the forest. Mulan is going with her. Aurora is pregnant.

She huffs with more force and fire follows the smoke briefly – You ever feel like you forgot what the real world is like? Talking about werewolves and Disney Princesses?
Emma plants her feet better on the floor, securing her stance and taking out her shit on the tree’s bark as well - You don’t have to bring your bullshit here to feel like you’re in the real world.

Lily shakes her head slightly - You and I don’t belong here. You’ll do some dumb shit eventually too, and then it’s right back to turning tricks for you.

- You don’t like it here? For real? You wouldn’t do anything to keep it? You won’t try to fix your shit up to keep Mal and Regina and Henry, shit, just the fucking bed you’re sleeping in has to be better than anything you’ve ever had… you’re just dumb if you can’t even see how at least acting right is the best decision you could make. – She doesn’t answer to that and Emma resumes her cutting, for only a moment – Call them. Regina used to burn trees or something, and I think Mal had drug issues too.

- I don’t have drug issues – until she finds whatever it was that actually did it for Mal. She should’ve thought to ask Trivio, their alcohol did hit the spot

- What you have is parents that would understand your shitty mind if you talked to them. Use them. Before you do something we can’t fix. – She sinks the blade in the wood again and the shield in front of her grows stronger with the urge she has to get the fuck away from Lily

It takes her a whole minute of that kind of thick silence that can only fall over two friends that can’t speak to each other anymore - I’m sorry, about the other day

Emma stops like she didn’t hear her but speaks before she repeats herself – You’re not. Don’t apologize, I’m helping you for Henry and for Regina. We are not anything to each other anymore, remember?

Ah, so much for the savior’s bountiful mercy, Lily thinks - You’re kinda overreacting. I was just yelling shit without thinking – what did she even tell Emma? That she’s not related to them? Shitty but true, the others had it worse. She called them monsters.

- No, you knew that would hurt me. Like earlier when you said I was always trying to get adopted.

Lily scoffs - Regina tried to kill you.

She shrugs, letting the chainsaw fall altogether - And I killed Mal, dead. And neither had that kind of malice behind it. – She takes one deep breath of the sharp air around them with a cold look – we put this tree up and you can feel free to delete my number.

Lily supposes she deserves it. Whatever it is that’s the scale of things in that town murder seems to be a thing you laugh about some months down the line but anything else was judged with the severity of a capital offense. Never had Mal once complained about Zelena knowing she had tried to delete Regina from existence a few times but she spent her last hours on American soil outraged at her comments about Leopold before shit hit the fan. And Henry, he was just desensitized about hearing who else Regina had chopped up into bits but he lost it when she grounded him for three days when he didn’t deserve it, like she was only now becoming a tyrant. She had cheated on her girlfriend and yelled at her family, so obviously she was now the worst thing the town had ever seen and she supposes Emma’s right, helping with the Christmas tree is the least she can do to soften the blow.

Ruby had listened to her meager speech with a glower in her eyes and Granny’s expression made it sure she can’t ever show her face in that restaurant, Ruby or not. Emma hadn’t acknowledged her since she left the house that day and the rest of the town was squarely on the wolf’s side, talking about her behind her back like she couldn’t hear them a block away. She had driven out of town to
get away, just for a moment, and she’d been gone three days without anyone realizing. The drive
back was a trial, every mile she could simply turn back and disappear out there, the whole think
was most likely a hallucination and she was driving a path with no markers, with no more money
and no food, death wouldn’t even bug her. But there she was, lugging the tree into her mother’s
house with someone who not even when fated to be her friend would do it anymore.

Emma has Luke and whatever percentage of Henry she gets, Ruby can go find her farm girl
whenever she wants to, and Regina and Mal can make one baby from scratch at any given time,
one that behaves, it was only a matter of time since they all realize that. She can stick around until
then, for the free food. But she’ll never be what they want.
What good will a crutch do?

Henry shuffles this way and that, anxiously waiting for Regina to come around the corner. He’d never spent quite so long without his mother around, even when he was taken and it was arguably worse it was just maybe three days, so when she shows, followed by Mal with a lot of luggage strapped to herself besides the two suitcases she pushes at her sides he kinda jogs up to them, holding onto Regina a bit more than can be considered briefly and then reaching out to throw one arm over his new step-mother even.

Lily’s approach is much more conservative. She moves up to them with a casual walk and stands just off to the side so they’ll notice she’s there, but Regina reaches for her regardless and Mal’s long arm moves across the space so she can loop it over her shoulders too, the kid moving away from in between, taking his mom’s suitcase and reaching for one of the bags where it hangs on Mal’s free shoulder.

He takes it with a grunt and Lily grabs a couple more, so Mal has just her suitcase and a heavy backpack looking completely incongruous with her look, and Regina carries her handbag with a smile – I could get used to this.

- Dear that’s the most weight you’ve ever carried in your life – She reaches for Regina’s hand with one of hers, and puts the other softly on the back of Lily’s head

- You’d be surprised how heavy Henry was for five years, one day I just gave up and left him there on the floor – She looks at him pensively – Maybe you’ve been given a new lease on life, Mal can still pick you up and carry you to bed when you fall asleep on the couch.

He struggles to turn around under the sheer weight of Regina’s gift shopping – Why don’t you just float me up?

Mal chuckles – Seems like making you pop out of existence to clear the couch would be easier. Maybe she drops you on your bed, maybe we never see you again. That is where the beauty of it all lies.

Lily trails them quietly, glancing around at the people around them. They’ve gotta be weirded out by their conversation, shit isn’t normal. But before she can realize they’ve gone all the way to the parking lot, and Henry drops what surely is a designer bag on the rough floor with a grunt. He’s kinda grown past being polite around her, so he jostles her arm by tugging on her jacket – Dude, pop the trunk.

The keys. Deep on the pocket of her pants, past the two monstrosities of luggage she strapped to her body. They have to travel from these depths to her hands to the keyhole of her trunk, and there, they will be the instrument to finally revealing to her parents how bad she truly is at keeping shit clean. Who knows what her trunk will hold? Not her. She shuffles and moves and wiggles and opens the thing to find some ancient artifacts she didn’t know she still had, amongst them a weird tarp that’s better than whatever the sticky substance seeped onto the bottom of the trunk is.

Henry is the one to set that down for the luggage’s safety, wrinkling up his nose – So, can we get a new car?

Mal, privileged enough to be allowed to drive Regina’s pristine Mercedes, laughs – You don’t like Lily’s car?
He doesn’t ask for shotgun but that’s where he’s headed as he speaks – It smells. Plus, there’s like many of us now, and Mom’s car is kinda old too.

- My car is in perfect condition.

Mal opens Regina’s door and watches her duck inside with a small smile – You’re denying his request? On Christmas? After weeks of separation? – She gets inside the car for the first time and notices that yes, it does smell. – You’re no longer the woman I married.

Regina rolls her eyes at her as she takes her phone out, checking the weather and hoping Lily’s prepared for snow or ice on the roads – Dear, what you can’t see is his masterful plan to casually start asking for a car so in three years’ time I’ll either have already budged and I’ll hand it over to him, or I’ll finally break and buy him one. You can’t even indulge the idea, or you’ve lost already.

Mal hums on her seat excitedly – You have a devious mind Regina, perhaps the boy just wants to ride a car with a novelty speaker. On all flanks of family, he’s listening to FM radio.

- My speakers work. -  is the first sentence of Lily’s mouth since they showed up. And it kinda renders them quiet as they leave the general area of the airport and get onto the road, she could hook up the aux and turn some music on to prove her point but she could also make them stop acting like nothing is going on. A closed space with three hours minimum of permanency and with three people is where she would never do it but, she’s got homework. Regina keeps tinkering on her phone while Henry tinkers on his and Mal’s eyes look out on the view and Lily breaks the silence – I’m going to the shrink.

Mal’s preternatural calm gets disrupted and her head makes an abrupt turn in Lily’s direction, only the first stop before she turns to Regina. Therapy, ludicrous in her eyes, but any step towards self-improvement is a win, she guesses, somehow. She can’t stop herself though – Why?

Lily’s eyes find hers on the rearview mirror – Because my life has been shitty as hell for this world’s standards and everything that’s happened in my adulthood is probably a reflection of that? And Mom said it helped her and she got it way worse.

Ah, mom as in Regina, the first stab of the reencounter. Regina reaches for her hand across the seat and Henry taps contentedly at his screen – It helped me too. I was right about the curse so not with that, but I was also kinda adopted so yeah.

Lily frowns - Kinda?

- Mom is my great grandma so like if three people had died she would’ve gotten me anyways.

Regina wants to laugh at his terrible view of their situation, but she remembers the child at hand – I didn’t have the privilege of millennia to slowly solve my issues, a third party was needed if I wanted to get it done before Henry was a teenager and his issues came in play.

Mal sighs, Lily’s barely stumbled around, what good will a crutch do? - And what does he tell you? Dr Hopper.

Lily glances at her with the mirror’s help again – I drive out of town, for the shrink. It’d be awkward, he knows who I am. The woman I go to just tells me… stuff

Regina tacks on - It’s confidential darling

- Surely a hint isn’t a felony
- I think it kinda is, in Law and Order – Henry does love himself some Olivia Benson.

- She just told me to start making amends where I could and be more mindful of my words and my actions…

- Regina had already told you that.

- But I understand the need to have a licensed professional give you a more accurate assessment of the situation – She drags herself away from the window and towards Mal with a clipped look and goes on - We’re very proud of you for taking this step, we know reaching out is hard. You could’ve used some therapy when I got to you.

- And here I am, no therapy and all is well.

- You are suggesting we lock Lily in a cave for three decades so she can sort out her thoughts?

- Well, Henry too if he thinks Snow would’ve left him to you after her death.

He shrugs on his seat and goes right back to his phone for a while, silence wrapping around them all again. Regina’s stern face contrasts wildly with her tucking onto Mal’s side and the blonde caves in no time with an eyeroll. She takes one deep breath and engages again – It must be a challenge to redact the last months of your life, wouldn’t Dr. Hopper have been a better option?

- I mean, yeah, she asked if I could bring my parents in for a session and I don’t know how I’d explain getting there with you two with your forty-year old faces... but still.

Regina harrumphs – I look thirty-five at best. – Mal chuckles by her side and Henry whips his head around to them with the startled look of a boy who's starting to get comments on his mom from the other boys at school, a nightmare only accentuated by the entire Mal situation. A burden he carries alone, and tenfold since Emma’s philosophy has reverted to picking him up wearing tank tops some afternoons if it’s not too cold. Lily takes her shot to put on some radio and off they go, having left that first awkward confession behind.

Regina was already happy with them both, between them going to pick them up at the airport, Lily going to therapy and Henry asking about their trip and paying attention, things were going well, but they reached a next level when she crossed the door behind all of them and her luggage between them to see the house not only seemingly intact but also decorated. Mal’s Christmas spirit, well Mallory’s, was never the best but she appreciates the effort nonetheless, patting Lily’s head with her one free hand like she enjoys doing. But Regina’s excitement is palpable as she takes the place in and smiles brightly her way, Henry’s long gone to put down the bags so she gets the full force of the hug, even over the luggage, and Regina looks at her so warmly she doesn’t even remember the woman who was so pissed at her she only waved when she left for Europe.

- Oh this is perfect! How did you two manage?

- I kinda only helped with the tree. Swan, Henry and Luke did all the rest basically. – She sniffs in what she hopes is an inconspicuous manner, always true to her word Emma Swan was a ghost to Lily. Not one whiff of blonde hair since they’d put that tree up.

- Well remind me to thank her. It is lovely.

Regina takes mercy on her dragons and the bags vanish off their bodies. Mal twisting her neck this way and that for dramatic reasons and pointing up with one single finger – I see lots of these up in
various places. You might want to invest on some Chapstick.

Lily groans, it feels like home again. Like the home she’d had for maybe 1% of her life but home. And Regina glares from inside her coat – Well if my lips are so dry why did you marry me?

- Texture is not the be-all and end-all of food. Taste is so much more important.

She groans some more – If I get the therapist to sign a note that says I have to get my own place you can’t get mad, right?

Regina huffs at her as they reach the couch, undoing her coat and scarf and glancing at the imposing tree magic helped them get into the living room. Rounding her Mal approaches the fireplace and breathes just enough fire into it it catches and grows steadily, warming the place. In less than one minute they’re settled into their eternal position, the smaller one leaning against the other one, both against one side of the couch, hands loosely entwined.

And Lily, she’s big enough to admit she’s kinda missed them, to herself. Knowing damn well it would’ve been easier if they’d been around to help her through the fucking mess had terrified her, she’d never needed anyone, Emma maybe, but she’d been a teenager then, she would’ve needed anyone who kinda smiled her way those days. She stays, and sits on the same couch, it’s the most she’s willing to admit. And Regina blinks her eyes slowly to keep awake, fighting off the fireplace’s warmth on her front, Mal’s at her back. She smiles – You’re doing well then? I’m sorry I was harsh before we left.

- It was really shitty of me. I’m sorry I said I don’t need you and all the other fucked up shit.

Mal nods at her as stiltedly as possible, to keep her hold on Regina’s head probably, but ends up moving away just enough to speak – You didn’t answer, are you doing well? Surely with therapy and all?

As much as going to a shrink has been kinda of helpful she’s still not good at speaking about anything real without her voice cracking in three different spots through one phrase. But apparently that’s nothing to be embarrassed of. Bullshit. She goes in anyway, shrugging and turning her eyes away, baby steps – I was kinda in a rough spot. Ruby left, like right out of this dimension and everyone was just… gone too. So, I was kinda fucked up – She swallows through the knot in her throat and starts wringing her fingers – I don’t have like an actual addiction thing, but yeah. I was- It wasn’t good. I just don’t want you to hear it from Emma. She flushed my stash, and Henry didn’t see anything, and I’m all out. I’m so sorry, I know it’s your house and all-

Lily misses Mal fastening her arm around Regina’s middle since she barely looks up, the most she does is glance forwards to the stockings hanging over the fireplace. Henry made one for Mal but Lily didn’t let him make one for her, it seemed presumptuous. Mal’s voice drags her back to them – Lily, you must know by know we’d never abandon you or anything of the like. Don’t respect the house because it is Regina’s but because it is yours, like your body, and your mind. – Out of the corner of her eye Lily sees Mal point to her own temple and when she still doesn’t look at them she takes a breath and moves on – I was very good friends with Aurora’s mother, and when she fell in love it consumed her. She saw nothing outside her precious Stefan, and he convinced her I was a monster to be slain. Rage consumed me, after the deed was done and the princess was cursed I had… nothing. My family far away and seemingly wanting nothing to do with me, no other friends around, no will to read, no need to trade, that castle you saw all to myself. It could’ve been a decade or it could’ve been a month, I wouldn’t be able to tell you. As soon as I felt the high fade I would take the next dose. The castle became a pigsty, dust and mold, rotten food, I was bathing only once my hair pricked my skin in my sleep, the windows were either shuttered or broken… That is no way to live. – Lily looks sideways at them, whatever dark past Emma knew of was
probably worse, judging by both of their expressions. Mal shakes her head slightly and Regina takes her hand over her own midriff – I am not an addict either, maybe it isn’t even possible. One day your mother showed up and I was fine in a week, physically if not mentally. And it is not like I need to refrain because of the pull of it. But I’ve come to love refraining. You know what is much better than running away from mental pain? Focusing on that brisk boyish smell Henry has, and hearing your heartbeat call out to me from across a room, feeling Regina’s pillow soft surfaces under my fingertips, that sharpness is invaluable, to enjoy what you love instead of dwelling on what you’ve lost.

Lily nods on her spot a few times. She’d never quite had the money to let it get bad but checking her room once she had gotten fully sober after Emma had left had been a big… yikes. Maybe she should still do a 12-step program, just for kicks and giggles. Sometimes the weight of living for an eternity pins her to bed, she always thought she’d be dead by then, unlucky as she was. Now, some self-discipline would come in handy. What could she accomplish if she worked out? If she trained her magic some more? If she learned how to fly better? If she could control herself like Mal does?

Mal whispers something on Regina’s ear Lily doesn’t quite catch and she turns to them, Mal still holding onto Regina to prevent a hug that would’ve turned her into a puddle of tears, they don’t give Mal enough credit. Well, Lily doesn’t, yelling at her as she was, Regina probably thinks the world of her. Lily blinks the few tears she did produce away ready in case Mal releases her and she wants to come in with the hug and hair stroke combo. But instead Regina stays put – Where was Zelena during all of this?

Mal prods her on a side – I gave an excellent speech, you cannot be focusing on that.

- She didn’t come, and I guess I just… didn’t go either.

Regina’s bypassed all worry to settle into anger on her behalf and Lily finds her expression a bit funny, it’s the warm knitted clothing and the way she’s still wrapped onto herself with Mal encasing her. She knows Zelena is going to be yelled at soon enough but for now, it looks like a tantrum. Mal kisses the top of her head – Zelena is a basket case herself, perhaps it was for the best.

Regina’s thunderous look remains though, acknowledging nothing, not the kiss not the attempt at a joke and Lily cracks a smile at the way they can circle back to this kind of ridiculous thing after discussing whatever it was they were discussing – Henry and I made some dinner! I’ll text him to come down.

Regina softens just a tad and Mal rolls her eyes over her head - You can’t simply walk up and fetch him? What is wrong with children these days. I used to be sent to fly hours to ensure Sybylla and Kajetan’s presence at the table for dinner time.

- I have a feeling your parents just wanted to be rid of all three of you.

For a moment she stills behind Regina and then, when it all seems to make sense she takes a sharp breath – Do we have enough groceries? I’m sure we will be needing groceries Lily.

- Dude aren’t you tired? Did you even get to see some of Europe?

Regina chuckles lightly and tries to stand up to see some of this alleged cooking. The kitchen, it must be wrecked. But Mal holds on, steadfast - Groceries. A lot. You just, take your time. Nutrition is very import. Read the labels. Dinner can wait.
All your body parts function correctly

- Sister dear, I’m delighted to see you, please do come in. – Regina is already in, bypassing any walking from the car, Zelena supposes she gets it, it really is too cold outside. So she just takes it in stride – I’ve missed you so - she smirks just enough Regina will know she’s barely been missed and continues kneading bread unrelentingly against the counter – where is the dragon? - Probably waiting with forlorn eyes, that’s for sure

Regina glances around – Let’s skip the piss-poor attempt at pleasantries. You can’t pick and choose when to be related to me, you either are or aren’t.

She looks up quizzically - Sadly I am. We have the same eyes, wouldn’t you say?

She gets an unamused eyeroll for her excellent joke - Then you owe me the courtesy of helping my daughter when she needs a hand, wouldn’t you say?

The bread captures her attention for a while. She can’t genuinely remember what it was the small Regina needed? Her mind has been all over the place - Oh? I’ve hardly seen her since you left, a run in out on the town and that’s all.

Her sister’s voice gets testy, well, some more - And you don’t think that strange? You couldn’t bother to check in?

Zelena shrugs just as Lily had and Regina’s yet again reminded of mother’s faulty genes. They must be at play here. – Listen to me very carefully – in one split second the dough disappears from under Zelena’s hands and she takes one steadying breath to glare at Regina more calmly as she goes on – this takes reciprocity. You give, and you get.

She plants her fist on the surface to keep it from crossing the room and planting itself on Regina’s face, whatever it is that’s gotten into her, just up and vanishing her dough is highly disrespectful of the little brat. Before Zelena can tell her off the lock rattles and Regina turns stunned to watch, spells probably already gathering in her chest just in case. She visibly relaxes when she sees It’s only Robin, but her face goes through a journey as she realizes it’s only Robin… with a key? Suddenly a myriad of little things register. One strangely big boot on the hallway, one strangely small boot by the bathroom door, beef jerky by the sugar on the counter against the wall, wood chips on some of the furniture… she blinks the surprise away when he comes in fully – Do you live here? - He looks up startled after his daily battle with the modern locks and his cheeks turn red in a single second, darting his eyes to Zelena and then back to Regina with a pursed-lips smile. Regina doesn’t have the time – This is what I mean. I bought you a house, fully furnished, where you’ve now invited Robin to live in, the least you could do is be nice to my children when they’re going through a rough patch

She sees it then, a wide-open gap for her to plunge a knife into - Will you be nice to my children? – It is exaggerated punishment for temporary dough kidnapping and Zelena realizes it as soon as it leaves her lips.

It takes Regina a few seconds to interpret that, her eyebrows knit - Will I be nice to your…? - suddenly another myriad of things register, well, nothing does, not really, it is a complete surprise and an awful way to wedge it in any conversation. Zelena sees Regina’s expression fall for a microsecond and unfurls her fist to press her palm on the leftover flour on the counter but it’s too late, she’s fucked that up. Robin, who urged her to wait to tell her in person and be nice about it, freezes in his spot, probably expecting some screaming or something beneath Regina, with the bag
with the pharmacy logo still in his hands and his jacket only shimmied a bit down his shoulders. Regina eyes him briefly, the oversized bag speaking of his indecision about modern medicine, she’d had a cold once. She refrains from all sort of outburst – Well, from now on if there’s risk of any of us undergoing any sort of mental breakdown, make sure to check in. Lest you alienate us, and your child ends up being babysat by a stranger.

Her sentence is barely finished when the dough appears by Zelena’s hand and Regina’s gone, leaving only a cloud of smoke behind her and the bag of gifts she’d appeared with. Zelena hangs her head as the mist fades and waves Robin away – It just came out. I’ll fix it… later.

Back in Regina’s car Mal startles with frown when she materializes and says nothing for a while. She tries to prod – I saw Robin go in the building, did his presence cut the reunion short?

- Just… drive. Let’s get this done – Next time she’ll just mail everyone their gifts.

Five hours after the entire thing Mal grows bored of her book and decides that Regina might require some needling, after all she’s locked herself down in the basement and skipped lunch for her troubles. Some distraction is sorely needed.

The sight that greets her eyes is definitely worth the trek. Regina’s pinned her hair up somehow, three layers of clothing discarded to leave her in the satin shirt she wears under all her general going-out-in-public armor. It’s tucked into the pencil skirt she wore but the heeled boots are gone and replaced with loafer, the ones padded on the inside, very flammable and a hazard around the fire she has roaring under what can only be described as a cauldron that Mal didn’t even know was in the house.

Regina doesn’t feel her come in, back to the entrance and head bowed low to eye some dusty book angrily. Mal comes in with every intention of dragging her out to catch the very last of the daylight but the way Regina’s neck is bared before her stops her, she chooses to slink closer and drop a kiss to the spot where her spine tilts, above the clasp of a thin chain that cost what a car would, and Regina jumps just enough she can play it off, but Mal still laughs at her, trapping her against the table with her arms – What might be so interesting as to keep you down here for an entire day?

Regina sighs and turns around in the limited space Mal allows her, her front even better than her back, her hair floating around her face outside the hasty bun – I am doing some research.

For what? – Regina closes her eyes shortly and Mal brings her hand up to pass a couple of fingers over her cheek, so she will at the very least cheer up a bit. She eyes the book over Regina’s shoulder and then tilts her head towards the big steaming pot of an acrid smelling thing – Should I dive in then? Soak up the green mud you’re preparing? Or is it more of a salad topping? – she smiles to let Regina know it’s okay and gives her no space to run away from the conversation, if anything she slides closer and forces her to open her eyes

And Regina breathes in deeply – You know it’s not about Robin, right?

- I know love, - It’s about Zelena stumbling into a child with her soulmate in a couple of months, whoever that placeholder might be – But I want to hear you say it, with a little pout, like the brat you are

Regina fails at controlling her face and the ensuing glare makes Mal chuckle, and Regina huffs, but relents with an eyeroll tacked on top – I am envious of how easy it was for her.
- If you want to get me pregnant to one up your sister all you have to do is ask – Mal winks and drops one quick kiss by the corner of Regina’s lips

Regina grabs at Mal’s sweater – No, I clearly don’t have to just ask! – and then lifts her chin haughtily, Mal wonders what Zelena and her would’ve been like if Cora had raised them both, surely they would’ve been even more competitive – You stopped taking your – She whirls her hand around – week’s ago! This is clearly not working. We have an issue here!

It is a miracle it even happened in the first place, and who knows if the amount of magic will allow anything in that land, the book on the table looks like it’s on fertility of…crops, and how long had it been since she’d insisted on birth control and said they should make sure Lily was okay on the first place? But Regina doesn’t need to hear any of that after her sister decided to rub her sudden unplanned pregnancy on her face, so Mal drops another kiss on the skin before her, toying with the thin strap and pulling the barely-there shirt free of the skirt to sneak her hand under it – Perhaps it is the furniture of choosing. Lily was made on my lovely couch. The fight for balance must’ve been the secret ingredient– She knows better than to manhandle any of Regina’s almost sentient books but she does manage to nudge it just far enough Regina will be able to sit, and lay down, comfortably. It’s seems like a good, strong table. A desk if one will.

- This will solve nothing – She says as she lets herself get hoisted onto the surface and Mal smiles by her collarbone

- We need to exhaust all options – the fluffy loafer falls to the floor with the ruckus and it serves as an excuse to kneel if nothing more

- And pray-tell how this will work when you’re the one with the functional uterus – Empty words when her hands are already getting Mal’s blonde shock of hair out of the way

- What would you know? You weren’t even taking the equilibrium variable into account. Your math is rudimentary at best.

Henry has full command of the tv controller that night but they still sit on the living room watching the channels fly by before they can even read the little informational pop up that tells them what they could be watching, and in attempt of something her therapist told her Lily had dragged herself into the room and claimed a chaise off to the corner, reading one of Regina’s books, Mal had wanted to ask what had led her to pride and prejudice but Lily’s an animal better left un-poked. And Regina is still morose by her side, a much more pressing issue.

Mal rearranges herself so Regina will come tuck herself by her side – Regina, you understand making a child is by no means extraordinary and it gives Zelena nothing over you, don’t you?

- Easy for you to say, all your body parts function correctly

- It doesn’t make you less of a woman if you took one misguided potion once… less of a man if don’t get me pregnant soon? – Suddenly a thought sparks in her mind – darling have you hit menopause yet? You might be shooting blanks, as they say –

Lily’s book slams close and they look at her, Mal with much more mirth Regina can muster at that second. But she calms herself and a shimmering bubble appears around her instead of her usual stomping away. Mal chuckles at that and hugs Regina closer nodding in Lily’s bubbly direction – you accomplished the impossible once, even if it doesn’t happen again it’s more than Zelena can say. She’s going to come begging for forgiveness soon enough and as soon as you grant it to her
we can all be happy for her…. or even better, eventually the child will definitely love the wealthy aunt with the dragon wife more, revel in that

Regina smirks by her side - Roland certainly does

- See, a silver lining in everything. We’ll get our baby soon enough

- And you’ll wish we hadn’t. I’m sure the half-human ones do not respect the dragon daylight schedule

Mal thinks it over - You’ll just have to take over at night

- Yes, take over your side of bed and reclaim half the closet, the floor of my library where you’ve been stashing books in an unkempt pile…

Mal laughs wholeheartedly - How very violent, I love it.
Slippery soil then?

Regina holds her head completely still and refuses to stop the glide of the pen over the piece of paper in front of her, but she gives Mal a consolation price, throws the dragon a bone so to speak, acknowledges her attempt at annoying her by speaking in a clipped tone – If you value your hand you will remove it from my ear’s vicinity

She hears nothing, continuing the path from lobe to tip with her fingertips – Darling I’m just so terribly bored, I want to play.

Regina huffs as the blonde plants her free hand on the back of the chair, so terribly close to her hair being held up by the flimsiest of knots – I have a job, who no one does quite right in my absence. Absence we’ve prolonged for ludicrous reasons.

- Well Christmas is a holiday, so is New Year’s. Everything in between doesn’t quite exist, does it?
- She bends down to whisper softly by the ear she’s been toying with – And now we’re on winter break –

And to avoid visible goosebumps that will give her away Regina has no option but ducking away and dropping her pen, she holds one finger up – Children are on winter break. I need to ensure the streets get plowed, the powerlines don’t collapse, and the people who insist on living in the woods don’t die of frostbite. I have no time to entertain you – She glances to the side and grins – Regardless of how cute you look pouting.

Mal straightens to her full height then, glowering down at her and tugging at the flesh between her fingers – The way I see it we either play this the hard way: I lose a hand or you lose an ear, or you come with me to see pedestrians fall in a puddle I’ve been eyeing.

Mal’s hold on her ear is just shy of painful, so, her exact point of insolence – I don’t think you’ve dared look outside the window today. You won’t find any puddles in this weather.

For one second she tugs a bit harder, before realizing she’s losing the psychological warfare there and Regina’s only planning to rob her of the little of sunlight out there, if she pulls any harder and Regina gets any more bratty they end up in bed and the day is over. Mal releases the ear altogether and all but pulls her up from her seat - So we take turns melting some Snow. It can’t all be easy in this life Your Majesty. – There’s plenty of nighttime for that anyways.

At least she got free coffee out of it, Regina thinks as she refrains from bouncing her legs up and down to get some warmth. She positions her nose right above the steam rising from the cup between her hands, and chances a look in Mal’s way as she closes her eyes contentedly and tilts her chin up like she could sense some inexistent sun ray on her face, she looks peaceful, that can’t stand. Regina elbows her on the side – I don’t see anyone. Perhaps sane people are at home.

- You’re saying the rabble is sane now? – She turns forward, there’s this one spot on the park’s path where the stones have sunk in over time, there a puddle forms when it rains and it is now a sludge of snow and dirt trampled into it, perfectly hidden from view until it is too late. And someone will come, she’s sure. She blows enough fire it’ll melt just a tad more and sits back against the bench comfortably glancing at Regina from the corner of her eye – Can we agree we need some more mischief in our lives?
- If it were me who almost met my doom via mild pothole in a public park, I would sue the town.

Mal chuckles and passes her coffee to her left hand to loop her right arm over Regina’s shoulders – You, sure, but who else would dare anger the might mayor? - Regina’s too busy glaring when the first unsuspecting teenager skulks over the puddle, cursing up a storm as his boots are rendered useless against the elements. The kid barely even notices them as he pulls angrily at his skinny jeans that stick to his legs even more when damp. It’s not anything to write home about, nothing like when they used to go around setting fire to piles of kindling and leaving it dangerously near peasants, but Mal’s mirth is contagious nonetheless. Regina feels a finger dig into her cheek as if looking for a dimple it will never find – Is that a smile? Over that young man’s misfortune? Who would be so cruel?

Regina rolls her eyes and drops her weight on her wife, but holds her head up, one of the eventual plaintiffs might sit in court, under oath, and say they saw them cuddle and where would they go from that? – You must really want to lose that hand after all. – The blessing of fire running through your veins is skin that is almost warm, Mal wears no gloves and the contact makes Regina’s goosebumps that much worse as Mal moves her hand to lay on the side of her neck, stroking the back of it.

Mal doesn’t get scolded for that because a woman skids a good couple of feet after she barely avoids the pothole by an inch and tries to avoid the mess of the puddle, she moves at an alarming speed, with her arms flailing around herself as a counter measure. A tree stops her, more or less, she continues moving but downwards doesn’t seem to be the direction anymore, it’s just a matter of grabbing onto the tree at the other side of the path and she’ll be fine. A pile of Snow falls onto her head when she does and Regina almost laughs out loud and gives up their plan. Her small snort might be an innocent cough to the ears of a woman preoccupied with snow trickling into her coat. Mal’s chuckle is so eerily calm it barely rings over the woman’s less colorful expletives – She’ll be traumatized for life. But that was nothing like the squirrels attacking people when the weather warms up.

- Is that honestly what you do when we leave you alone? Goad squirrels into attacking my constituents?

- Who said I goad them? Squirrels are vicious by themselves, and these ones must not be completely normal, who knows what magical breed of critters you have in here – She shrugs and takes the chance to sip her coffee, which might need a reheating. She taps Regina’s neck twice and the liquid becomes hot enough to scald again – Would you rather have an army of small rabid squirrels that do your bidding or fight on slippery soil only you and your men can overcome?

- What on earth…?

Mal turns with a serious expression and drinks the lava from her cup for a second – This is the battle that will decide a war. This is the future of your kingdom. Your people have gone through decades of hardship and only this last, brutal bloodshed stands between them and a prosperous age that will last centuries. Which do you choose?

For a few seconds Regina wonders if perhaps Mal is high, but this must be Mallory and Maleficent mixing into a strangely playful medieval fairytale villain. So, she plays along – Well who is giving me this choice? What is the price of each one?

- Darling, please. Whichever local caster with a penchant for dramatics. You wouldn’t know the price until it is too late.
She nods - Do I get my men and the squirrels, or am I marching into battle with squirrels only?

It gives Mal pause, what’s an appropriate men-to-squirrels ratio? She hadn’t considered that – No men, just you and the squirrels. But keep in mind, they will obey blindly.

Regina frowns pensively and reheats the coffee she hasn’t even tried to drink, using it as a heater as she is - But how do I control them? Am I just to give one universal command, or do I have a direct line to each squirrel’s mind?

Of course, it would be Emma Swan who ruins the mental exercise with her inane need for physical exercise. In their reverie they completely miss her coming from further up the trail, hurtling towards the puddle and focused in her music more than anything else. Just as Regina is about to give her final ruling on the important squirrels vs slippery terrain debate Emma’s path meets the sludge on the floor and she not only steps and sinks in it, it sends her careening to the ground, where to avoid taking damage to her face probably she spins once, twice, thrice until she lands with all her limbs sprawled around her and each wireless headphone in different quadrants of the planet.

It takes them a beat to react. The whirlwind of movement doesn’t have a face until the groan sounds familiar and in that second Regina just breaks. She laughs loud enough Emma notices their presence from the floor and cranes her neck towards the noise with a hurt expression that only gets her more laughter. Regina’s coffee, doubled in half as she, just spills out of the cup and it is a miracle she doesn’t get any on herself. Mal’s chuckle makes her shoulders jostle up and down as she stands to at least help Emma up. She realizes then she’d have to crouch or something of the like and decides against it, lest Emma decides to attempt to pull her down and she’ll have to murder her for the mere insolence. She’s fond of the blonde. Its must be a minute or more and Regina’s barely recovered, her cheeks are reddened with the strain of movement on that weather, but she looks twenty-five again and Mal enjoys it even more than she did the sheriff’s chaotic fall - Slippery soil then?

She takes three huffing breaths and dabs a tear threatening to spill out of the corner of her eye, repositions her hair, sits impossibly straight and sets the now-empty paper cup by her side neatly – If I can single out a particular squirrel and communicate with it when I wish to, squirrels. I would simply instruct them all to go for the weak spots of the armor and penetrate it, under there a few men will simply wound themselves in the mayhem, how does one defeat a squirrel in hand-to-hand combat? Then the squirrels could start maiming them some more by damaging the blood vessels with a few well-placed bites, we can even find us squirrels carrying some viral disease. We would decimate the population in one swift move. Damp terrain would only make for a messy and boring battle, they fall, we walk around cutting heads, then we go home and polish our amours, where’s the fun in that?

Emma’s found one of her headphones, and she’s given up on life, sitting on the damp snow, clattering, prodding at a superficial cut on her knee and glaring at them both – What the fuck you guys?
That would imply there’s two of them

She often has to remember Regina’s shorter and can’t really keep up with her if she wants to walk at full speed, on top of that it’s still cold late into January, the soil is more damp than anything, and Regina insisted her heeled boots were her footwear of choice for wherever she was whisking her to; but even knowing all that it still takes Regina clutching at her arm for her to slow down. She chuckles as Regina huffs and the cold makes it visible in the air – Darling let me carry you.

- Counterproposal, you remove this blindfold.

Mal settles her hand over Regina’s – No. – She takes three more steps before deciding… it’s only a few more feet, and Regina won’t really remember afterwards… She undoes two of those steps to pick her up in a bridal carry and refrains from chuckling at the first few seconds of agitation followed by surrender. She should really get used to it when even Lily has found it to be a quick solution at times.

It’s barely a ten-minute walk from where they are to the cave she’d scoured the woods of Storybrooke for, she’d managed a small hidden rocky spot were one person could stand, maybe, if they were Regina’s size, she’d find out in a second, and she could be in it comfortably with other two of three persons who wanted to crouch for the pleasure. It would do. After all they wouldn’t be storing anything large on it. Just the one thing, barely bigger than a small suitcase.

She sets Regina down carefully and for a second she sees her feel for her arm again, it’d be sweet if her intention was anything other than smacking her for her trouble and then pinching her, still she doesn’t remove the blindfold and Mal takes her hand to nudge her forward just one more step and move behind her to untie the silk scarf she dug from the depth of one of their drawers. She is quick to replace it with her hands though and smiles when Regina takes one deep calming breath – I know you struggle with impatience.

- Understatement.

- This is a surprise you will love. – She takes one more step forward, pushing Regina with her, and moves to the left so the sunlight will have a clear path in – but first, you have to promise no more violence will be inflict on my arm, just because I do not bruise easily doesn’t mean sheriff Swan will let this fly, I deserve- Regina cuts her off with another smack and it makes her drop one of her hands so she laughs as she releases her altogether and before anything the brunette turns to glare at her while Mal smirks – So testy, won’t my beautiful wife turn around?

As is expected, she chooses to hold her glare for another few seconds – Whatever is behind me better be the second coming of Christ. –

When she finally chooses to turn around spurred by Mal’s huge grin she has to duck to enter the cave anyways but the effort is well worth it, the gasp she lets out is enough satisfaction for Mal but still she whirs around at break neck speed and barely avoids hitting her head on the pointy outcrop above her head – You just found it here?!

Mal laughs – No love, I laid it.

- You laid it…- for a blissful moment Regina’s expression remains mellow and she turns slowly to take in the egg, further inside the cave. It’s huge, looks like it’ll go up to her knees, the shell looks like sheer rock and its purple tint has some kind of inherent shine to it… and the way it reflects the few rays of sunlight coming in from the outside… she takes a few steps forward and can hear Mal
coming in after her – You’re pregnant? – she asks with her eyes still fixed on the egg before her but Mal chuckles easily

- That would imply there’s two of them. I was pregnant for about a week but yesterday I decided I just wasn’t going to do that this time around, so there he is.

- He? – she’s still misty eyed, but it lasts less than expected – You were pregnant for a week?! - Well she was only sure for around five days, plus where’s the excitement of just telling her without nothing to show for it, but Mal can see how admitting to any of that would be a grave mistake – And you left the egg here overnight?! – Well, eggs do better on nature and it is a well-hidden spot she’d spent the five days looking for, plus if no one knows there is an egg to steal why would they go looking for one in Storybrooke, Maine. But Mal can also see how saying any of that is not wise either.

So she smiles softly from her uncomfortable position – If you can successfully fake a cave, we can move him?

Regina reaches over to smack her again, but the intention is lost somewhere along the way and she ends up just rubbing her thumb over the fabric of Mal’s blouse – we could take him home with us? Will he be fine?

- He needs some heat occasionally, I can just raze some trees and turn in the backyard.

She nods absentmindedly, trees be damned, and crouches some more to move closer to it, she looks so mesmerized for a moment Mal focuses on her too, before remembering she needs to intervene. She crouches right down and settles her hand just under Regina’s palm when she’s about to touch it – You’ll scorch your hand.

- I can’t touch it?

- If you can fake a cave, I’m sure you can find a spell for this as well – she kisses her temple and shrugs – oven mitts are an option as well.

She doesn’t know why she thought being the mother of Regina’s unborn child would grant her protection, specially when said child is not in her, but she thought it’d count for something. It obviously doesn’t because Regina takes the opportunity to nudge her and she falls right on her ass on the mossy rock under her and lets out an oof. Regina laughs at her as she avoids actually touching any of the things around her while moving closer, it’s a feat to do that in heels. Mal eyebrows knit together angrily as he brunette beams from in front of her – I can’t believe I’ll be forced to co parent yet another child with an asshole like you.

- I never said it was yours. – She smirks her way, relaxed even when her jeans surely are ruined beyond repair

- The purple shell is a giveaway – she reaches forward to play with the loose curls by the sides of Mal’s head and the blonde’s expression softens into a smile as she reaches for Regina’s knees

- Many casters like purple, it’s a cliché at this point.

She shrugs – I suppose we will just have to wait and see then, experience shows your genetic material tends to be overpowered. The child will reveal the truth.

- And meanwhile?

- You grab this egg and bring it home with us.
- I must admit, I thought you were reticent to have kids but you seem elated – between smothering her with kisses, building a facsimile of a cave on the basement and cooking dinner Mal is surprised Regina is still standing

She pops out of the kitchen with her oven mitts still on and moves for the egg in Mal’s arms – What do you mean? I’ve been on board, always.

- I thought perhaps it was just for my sake… it did take a while, you know how easy it is, to speculate – her eyes remained fixed on the invaluable object on Regina’s hands. Many would do unspeakable things to get their hands on a dragon egg; and keeping Regina’s involvement in mind it becomes once again a stroke of the impossible, an event so rare she’s never heard of a third occurrence in her long life… her family didn’t comment on it though so perhaps it’s only her who finds it extraordinary. But still, Regina holds the universe in her hands covered with oven mitts, now more than ever.

She approaches with a smile – I’m sorry if my enthusiasm was not clear, I want nothing more than this family with you. If I stopped, if I asked we delay this little one it was out of concern for the existing two that didn’t seem to be quite ready – she manages to pass the egg to Mal who sets it carefully by her side on the couch using the very useless protective layer of a copy of the mirror, reading Regina’s intent to straddle her and set both hands on the sides of her head – I want not for lands not for glory, I have no one left to take vengeance from and my lust for power is mostly gone as well. Us and whatever children we might pick up along the way, that’s what I want.

Mal leans up to kiss her softly and Regina surrenders all too easily, specially when Mal loops her arms around her lower back. It took them a while to figure it out, but for the first time nothing looms over their future and unlike its siblings, that child will be born into a stable and whole home.

Too whole Mal realizes when Lily comes in followed by Henry to interrupt a promising moment. She was tasked with picking him up from Emma’s place, not that she’s still allowed in there. She only makes it one step into the room before she spots them and groans – Oh, gross. C’mon! And why are you wearing oven mitts? – She remembers Henry and covers his eyes – You know what, we don’t need to know! Why does this have to happen in the couch we all use?!

Regina gives Mal one last peck before standing up with a chuckle – I just put a pie in the oven. So you should be thanking me for a delicious dessert. I was briefly distracted, is all.

It was so close to a pun, Mal doesn’t know if Regina realizes. She can’t contain herself from grabbing the egg and seizing the opportunity though, lifting it above her head for them to see – And a bun in the oven as well! You have a brother coming!

Lily drops her hands from Henry’s eyes – Mom, you’re pregnant?

- See, that would imply there’s two of them. Just the one. - She motions to the egg again

Henry rushes from his spot- They’re born from eggs?! Cool.
Maybe we should invest in swings?

Regina knows the curse had really fostered a great economy under which everyone could make a
good honest living, but the fact that Charming had managed to buy Snow a house with a front and a
back lawn, big ones, on the deputy’s paycheck was baffling to say the least. Still, she had been
invited to the housewarming party and in an effort to be civil it seemed both Lily and Zelena were
too, and perhaps everyone else in town, but her two black sheep were a more direct concern than
Rumple or Cruella at the moment.

Which reminds her – Today, for all intents and purposes there is no egg, no brother to speak of.
- Not even Henry? – Lily says from her spot, sullen about being obligated to attend this thing at all

He harrumphs – She obviously means the baby!
- Oh, so you’re not a baby?

Mal’s attuned to them by now and knows when to turn in her seat, extending her arm between them
before Henry tries to smack her and Lily retaliates - This is information we don’t want to disclose
just yet, it would put him in danger and all of us in guard duty. Besides Princess Snow would loathe
us for stealing her thunder, however small it is. You two understand?

The nods don’t seem too convincing and Regina frowns in her seat looking at them with the help of
the rearview mirror – Not even Emma.
- Yes, mom. – They answer in unison, each already clawing at their respective door deciding that
even if they hate it in there at least it’s better than in here being scolded for something they haven’t
even done.

Inside, the mass of people who deemed it reasonable to arrive on time was already in full swing
and as in any of Snow’s functions, barely inebriated; and as much as they will always have a hefty
respect of the imposing figure Regina cuts when she enters a room flanked by Maleficent of all
creatures, it’s not as much of a thing if Henry and Lily undermine the effort by trying to trip each
other as they walk inside. Regina sighs as her daughter almost falls in her effort to dodge Henry’s
boot in her way and Maleficent’s arm shoots out to hold her in place by the back of her jacket
before pushing her imperceptibly forward when she’s stable, the unofficial signal that if they can’t
behave they need to disband before anyone comes and greets Regina and herself.

Lily goes, gratefully, because she sees Snow approach and Henry show her his tongue with the
pride of a kid of Regina’s that Snow tolerates. He stands right in front of their shared parent, and
Regina lays both her hands on his shoulders automatically and in her eagerness to get the greeting
out of the way she doesn’t even see him raise his middle finger to Lily or her laughter at the
gesture, learned and adapted from her language.

-Hey hey hey! - Lily whirls around to find Emma with four tilted wine glasses in her two hands and
a posture rigid enough to let them stain her clothes before she jumps out of the way – This place is
fucking packed, no reverse!
- Sorry, you want any help? – She offers out her hands and for a second Emma doubts it, before
handing her over half her load and motioning with her head.
Lily follows for a while and they arrive outside, where Luke sits with two other young people Lily’s never seen. They hand over the glasses and it’s more than clear there’s no intent to introduce her or ask her to join in, Luke does spare her a greeting smile and she sends her best one back before asking Emma to give her a second of her time. Snow white’s new house came with all the fixings essential to her, so in the back of the lawn there is a small playground with a small slide and a couple of swings that look almost sturdy.

Emma sits sideways on it, one leg in the front and the other in the back like the swing is a horse and Lily mirrors her and listens for the groan of the structure before deciding that it can take some of her back and forth movement. They’ve been there before, not quite there but in other pair of old swings going against their natural movement and looking straight at each other, daring the other to apologize, they used to have a spot. Its her turn, almost always – I’ve been going to therapy.

- Regina told me.

It’s just Lily coming close and then far away from her until she halts to a stop – Swan, I was… I don’t know what yet, or why. You know I’ve fucked up every good thing ever, and there were just a lot of good things then and I couldn’t handle it-

- It’s about control, you wanted to be the one to ruin it instead of it getting taken away from you.

She chuckles – My shrink agrees, I think I’m doing better now and I want you to know I really am sorry for the stuff I said and how I was acting and shit… Look- I lo- Dude, you mean a lot to me.

- Ugh, not this gay shit. – She holds out her hand and turns it into an accusatory finger before Lily can shake it – You get one more shot, but if you ever hurt my fragile little feelings like that ever again I swear to god I will cut you off for good, and I’m gonna tattle with Regina. – Lily nods through a chuckle and takes the hand finally offered to her again, pulling Emma to her in a one-arm hug, and then pushing her way so the swing will start doing its job however sideways it’ll be. They fall in sync there for a second and Emma raises her foot to push Lily and herself by reaction some more – Ruby’s around.

The dragon points to her nose – I know.

- Mom made her show up for this lame party. Cross-dimensional travel for pigs in a blanket. Regina would never. – They smirk at each other and Emma tacks on – When they die I get this house, I don’t want any blood in my walls. Try to avoid her.

- Like the plague – She salutes. – And this is obviously the kid’s house. You get the shitty apartment.

- Right after I fucking told you not to hurt my fucking feelings.

From the kitchen Regina smiles as she sees Emma and Lily kick at each other some more to keep on swinging, she doesn’t need any enhanced hearing to see it is clearly friendly violence and at worst she’ll have to play for a set of swings for Neal to play with when he starts toddling around properly in his newfound space. She reaches for what looks like a mini hotdog from across the counter – Isn’t that adorable? Did you have swings in Germany?

- Did we have swings in Germany? - Maleficent laughs at her. Why would she even? They were having such a nice time. And now this is where they were in the span of one second. She takes one finger to trail Regina’s spine as she becomes upright again, the tiny hotdog-like snack forgotten,
and her eyes narrowed at the outrage of being laughed at. An excellent look, in a truly boring soirée. Before Regina can tack on anything Mal takes one step closer – Darling, we had the best of swings in Germany. Really robust.

Regina lets her splay a hand on her lower back and goes back to her tiny snack – Your sister’s twins didn’t seem to get bored at all, but they had each other. Maybe we should invest in swings?

Mal chuckles as she pulls Regina impossibly closer and gins down at her – Ours will have plenty of company as well - Zelena had wobbled twelve feet away from them and Regina’s body temperature had gone up because of the sheer rage filling her veins, so even in the face of success it seems it remained a touchy subject and honestly, with boredom, Mal was not above ruining surprises – Would you keep a secret? My nose caught a curious thing earlier

- Well that depends on what it is it caught, doesn’t it? – Regardless, the grin Regina was throwing her way let her know she was waiting almost eagerly, nothing better than being mildly devious at a completely pedestrian get together. Mal’s sure Regina shares her sentiment.

She leans down to press a slow kiss by the side of Regina’s neck and exhales softly by her ear, mindful of all the people milling just outside the kitchen’s threshold - The princess is pregnant.

- Already?! Neal can’t form one proper sentence. – She leans out of her embrace and Mal chuckles, her arms chasing after Regina to bring her back

- I am positive ours will be the most adorable one, though.

Regina seems to mull that over – I wouldn’t be too sure, Snow White looks like an infant even now, and Robin has proven to produce verifiably effective puppy eyes and dimples…

She takes one dainty bite of her dainty hot-dog as she weighs this information and Mal can’t help to grin down at her for a while – But by the gods, look at you, with your chestnut eyes and your lovely curls. I’m sure you make some lethally cute children.

Regina laughs as she finishes her food – Children? What are we going to do? Make another fire-breathing infant?

- We might grow bored later – Mal bends down to kiss Regina’s jaw playfully, nipping at it as she grabs one of the little things from the counter now that they passed the test of her wife’s exquisite appetite -. Let’s name him after my father.

- What’s your father’s name?

- Drazenko. We can call him Draz for short even.

- Oh dear... – she laughs some more stepping away and watching as and Mal grabs another tiny hot dog to drown her disappointment – Do you have an uncle?

Snow gathers her house-warming party is going well. David is grilling with the other guys, everyone is milling around just fine in side and by the alcohol runs she’s seen Emma made everyone must be having a great time outside too. No magical incidents and no sounds of glass being broken accidentally, it adds up to a very successful get together. So she’s very cheery approaching Red on the couch David insisted they kept, Snow sits by her and grins - So… anything
Red shoots down her glass of scotch like it’s water – Yeah, that Lily’s been in this house recently. And since this is a brand new house, I have to think you’re cavorting with the enemy, today.

– It was rude to not invite her if I was having Regina, Mal, and Henry over. Have you seen her? Because I haven’t.

- Well the sheer smell is fucking annoying me, so.

She nudges her with her shoulder – Maybe you could smell something else?

- It doesn’t work like that, if it’s annoying my brain won’t focus on anything else.

- Oh goodness – Snow had known her fair share of heartbreak but never the romantic kind, she had laid eyes on Charming and he had been it for her. But for Red it had been different, after Peter she had seen her give herself to so many relationships from the start only for them to end poorly, Snow would never know how that felt. But still, with unrelenting will she would try to get her very best friend to see what had come and gone, but would always be there for her – Red, have you tried going to Kansas?

- I’ve told you, I did not know that girl enough to like her let alone fall in love with her.

- You don’t have to know her to know, not when there’s true love’s kiss. – With a small smile and her hands low on her belly she regards Red, who gives her… nothing.

- Well fuck me then, I’ve got a wife. Don’t know what I’m doing here at all, I should get going home… shit I think we’re out of fabric softener! She’s gonna kill me if I don’t pass by the store before it closes!

She sighs almost imperceptibly and her head lands on her friend’s shoulder, hosting a successful party is no easy task – Wasn’t Lily a stranger?

- A stranger I chose to get to know, and then started liking, and then chose to date, so then she could choose to stab me in the back. See, if don’t do the initial choosing then it will hurt even more when the other person chooses to stab me in the back.

It’s a waste of time, Snow decides, the stretch in the forest hadn’t helped quite yet. With her head still leaning against Red she sighs – I’m pregnant, congrats. You’re the godmother.

- Oh! Honey – she hesitates for one second but when she recovers she has the mind to drag a coaster over and drop her glass on it, and loops an arm around Snow to trap her in a hug and drop a few kisses on her hair – I am so sorry Snow, look at you! You are pregnant, oh god, I am so so so sorry. I’d love to be the godmother! – The crushing celebratory hug continues unbidden for only a few seconds because Red tenses up and lets out a sigh – She’s coming.

- What? Who?

- Lily. Emma. A baby?

- What baby?

Red finally releases Snow and in their spot they both look up to catch Lily and Emma making an abrupt stop as they spot the wolf, whatever joke they shared dying. She looks at Emma with a raised eyebrow and the blonde just shrugs minutely as she mouths a Sorry her way, so much for
not speaking to Lily. Red turns to the dragon, and frowns – Why do you smell like that? – Bypassing all the other issues at hand.

She looks down, at herself and comes back up perplexed – Hey, Ruby. I was kinda… avoiding you… but if we can go somewhere and talk? I am trying to do better and-

- Oh, so now you’re getting your shit together? Real nice. Hallelujah thank you Jesus, she is saved! – she throws her hands up in the air for a second and Snow loops an arm in hers to hold her down

- Shit, you didn’t deserve any of this… but c’mon don’t be a bitch about it right now. It’s your friend’s new house party thing – Lily dares point at Snow, who she apparently hadn’t even greeted when she came in and goes on – I am super fucking ashamed, and so sorry… you can beat me up another time if you want to.

- I’m being a bitch? Oh my god. Fuck your new enlightened self, how about that? – Snow’s grasp is stronger, but honestly if she wanted to beat her up she would’ve that first morning she confessed her fucking sins and she certainly can’t now that she smells of… kid? She narrows her eyes at her - You smell of hormones. Yes… baby dragon?

Lily’s entire body tenses up by Emma’s side, she doesn’t like whatever is building up in the room, interrupting is a mercy - How do you know what a baby dragon smells like Rubes? – And why the fuck is everyone avoiding the feet around the glass coffee table? Someone to stand between them and break the menacing eye contact would be good

- Well it’s a dragon, but small. – She finishes with force, not to be questioned apparently. – Snow stands and gets in front of her, shielding her of whatever it is that she wants to stir up with Lily, but the wolf can’t be stopped – Are you pregnant?

- Am I preg- Lily laughs – We are born out of eggs; how would you even smell an egg?

- You’re born out of eggs? – Emma pulls a face, a distraction while she does the same her mother did, gets in between them in case she needs to stop something. Lily wouldn’t budge either.

Ruby presses again – I’m sure they need attention, which means your body would produce some weird stuff, so, do you have an egg somewhere in your pockets?

- Are you accusing me of fucking some dude now?

She finally stands up and chuckles – Oh no, That’s unreasonable! – She motions to her from head to toe, and back - Obviously no dicks are necessary. It would explain your sudden need to go to therapy.

- Maybe I’m just trying to get better.

- Is there a baby? – Snow is no barrier for Red trying to get up in Lily’s face

Emma holds her ground some more and Lily answers from behind her - There is no baby!

- Well you obviously don’t care about me at all now because you can look me in the eye and lie. – She hisses it out and the whole situation escalates enough that Charming and Granny appear from some remote corner of the party ready to break up whatever people are starting to whisper about

They all kinda ignore him and Granny harrumphs as Lily presses her front to Emma’s back – Ruby you’re making a scene for nothing! And what if there is a baby? What the fuck is it to you? We broke up! – She really is doing better, when she’s not being spoken to like that
- It’s been like two months! But you’re right, why do I even think you’d care? We didn’t just break up you screwed a stranger while we were still together! Finding someone to have a kid with this quick isn’t even the worst thing you’ve done, I bet it’s true love even, right Snow?

Snow, long pushed to a side and almost in pain at seeing her friend driven to whatever this is, feels somehow worse at being pulled into the whole thing and doesn’t even get to formulate an answer before Lily pulls back Ruby’s attention – Oh yeah, you’re super fucking holy because you didn’t run to your destined girlfriend and chose me! I told you to fucking leave!

- Guess you were right, If I had maybe I’d have a kid

- For fuck’s sake! There is no baby!

Ruby lunges forward bounding over the table and pushing Emma to the side with a strong nudge that makes her trip on her own feet, David reaches for her to no avail while Granny tries to talk Red from doing anything rash. Still, her eyes flash yellow as she keeps going forward and Lily glares at her for it holding her ground, for one second it looks like they might really fight right there in Snow’s new living room, but before Ruby can reach her target Maleficent sweeps in from one side and stops Red’s advance by putting one hand on her chest and giving one strong push back – The child is Regina’s and mine, Lily’s merely been spending time with the egg. You need to calm down.

Snow sighs relieved in her spot, somehow she had forgotten their existence altogether. Regina appears by her side frazzled and she turns to her, so Mal’s pregnant? Well, she’s… whatever. That makes three then. She doesn’t really say anything, she can announce some other day. She tunes back in to the show, Red takes one step back but still looks like a caged animal – Your daughter-

- Did an awful thing to you. And I am sure she’s been infuriating throughout this discussion, it is a genetic fault of her – Regina rolls her eyes and glances to see the damage, no one hurt, every onlooker expectant. Mal’s preternatural calm is at least working on the wolf, she tils her head forward at her - However, it doesn’t need to come to blows. – She glances at Lily, and then at Granny - We will walk away.

Lily throws her hands up – I was just minding my business and she attacked me! I know I fucked up first but-

- Lily, walk. - Mal nudges her in the opposite direction of Ruby – Sometimes you have to let them attack you. We didn’t gift you with that bone structure for you to rile up a mongrel into breaking it.

- Do you want children?

Red drops herself in the kid’s slide on the backyard and Snow sits gingerly on the swing closest to her, watches her pass her arm over her eyes and laugh sardonically – Sure, not as an immediate thing, but family is important for me, for wolves. – She groans – And don’t get me wrong, you know I like Regina, I do. But Jesus fucking Christ, that woman was the devil for decades! And she gets to have children… impossible magical kids, plural? And Zelena! Did you see how pregnant Zelena is? And you know, - she flings her free arm in Snow’s direction – Just seems like I’ll always be behind the curve is all. Life doesn’t work out for me.

- There is no curve Red!

- Do you see any of our friends still dating? Can you think of one without kids? Even being like
very loose about the word friend… Mulan and Kathryn? That’s it. And for one of them it’s voluntary. I have nothing going on. – She sits up and hangs her head between her legs – And I know what you’re about to say, Dorothy… It just feels like giving up, like I couldn’t do it on my own and I just gave in to whatever the universe said, or like no one else could put up with me and she has to.

Snow would be lying if she said she doesn’t see what Red means, for as long as she’s known her she’s lived for someone else’s cause, and in their story she’s a sidekick, then the curse relegated her to a servant of sorts and even after it broke there’s been nothing but helping them with their monthly crisis and serving them coffee the next morning. – I… understand. But I am sure that if you give her a chance you’ll see that even if those two things were true it wouldn’t matter, because it is so good, so right, that you know that given all the options in the world there is no one else in the universe you’d rather be with. Red you are one of the few lucky beyond measure to find something as strong as true love! A lot of people we know are married and they have children too, they kiss day in and day out and nothing happens, you found someone so attuned to you that before you knew each other fully your bond was stronger than everyone else’s. Don’t you want to at least try?

She sits up straight this time around, tilting her head up and dropping her hand to pass over the blades of grass between her fingers – You know, I disagree. What’s stronger than knowing you choose each other, day in and day out? Back in the Enchanted Forest and every day in that cave Maleficent held on to the last shred of humanity she saw in Regina and waited for her to come back to her, not because that was her only option in the vast sea of dragons and humans and everything she’d ever met, but because that’s the woman she chose to spend every single possible moment with; and every morning Zelena wakes up and looks at a man marked as her sister’s soulmate and decides to foster a relationship with him despite that bit of doubt nagging at her because at some point she decided he was worth getting over herself; and Kathryn and Fred agree that them having each other is all they need every single day without as much as a piece of paper to tie them together, all that freedom and no one roams anywhere. Sure, I’ll probably end up in Kansas some way or another, and I’ll want to be with Dorothy after we spend some time together, it’s not rocket science after all… but the whole thing robbed the choice from me, and I think that’s the best part even when I’ve been making shitty ones all my life.
Handy when you can trust your family

After roughly an hour of selecting the best-looking ingredients for the pot roast Regina’s promised her for dinner Mal can’t wait to get started on it, or for Regina to get started on it as she hovers annoyingly in the kitchen watching the process. She spots Regina outside on the stairs with a book and a blanket draped over her shoulders and lifts the four bags of things she’s bought when Regina spots her, sighing at what’s to come for her afternoon.

It seems like divine punishment then, when the iron on the gate burns her hand and something throws her three feet back at full force, few of the potatoes rolling down the sidewalk with a carrot on tow when she lands on her ass. At least Regina is on her in one second, small mercies. She takes her hand on hers and the cooling feeling begins almost immediately as she crouches by her side instead of helping her up

- Mal! Oh god, I am so sorry! Are you okay?

She points at the potatoes with her free hand – Now I want that pot roast with more than a little spice. – Regina rolls her eyes when she sees she’s fine – Failed with your spells dear? You must be feeling all kinds of embarrassed now. The children laugh at me, but you bear that shame alone.

Regina turns on her spot towards Lily’s widow, and she ducks almost immediately, leaving Emma and Henry squeezed against the glass and wide eyed. She motions for all three of them to come down and helps Mal up as they do, picking up the stray vegetables and putting them in their bags, kissing Mal on the cheek for her trouble and still clutching her burned hand between hers.

When they come through the door and down the path Regina produces a knife from thin air and Lily stops in her tracks when she sees it. Emma who’s been the victim of more than one assassination attempt from Regina figures one more can’t hurt and goes all the way up to her with Henry in tow. – Did she cheat? Are we banning her from the house? Should I take the bags with the food?

- Well aren’t you eager, Miss Swan. – Mal eyes her as she rubs on her hand, Regina releasing her at last

- Someone has to be blonde around here.

Regina passes the bags to Henry instead, heavier than they look like. She checks on his stance and when she’s sure his back won’t suffer too much she goes on as she coaxes Lily through the gate – Blood magic, for the baby. I need you two to cast the spells.

Lily frowns and stares at the knife some more - Blood magic?

- It took me years to get here and your daughter gets the lesson at the same time? She doesn’t even know what it is! I want a refund!

- My god, are you always on? – She changes her knife hand to grab Lily’s arm and pass it back and forth over the threshold easily

- Well that solves that mystery. She didn’t cheat… then. For now, congrats, the kid is yours – It’s such a funny quip, they both turn and give her the exact same unamused expression even. And then Regina does the same to Emma, and she puts up a fight – No, no… grab Henry! Grab your wife again! She’s sturdy – Regina pulls her to the gate anyways and holds her there for a hot excruciating second to show the protective barrier in action as she squirms, and her skin starts to
burn – At least let it throw me away!

Henry’s eyes open up wide as Emma begs – You wanted her to grab me?

Regina releases the arm on her hands and Emma stumbles back, doing her best to remain standing and immediately healing her little burn, scrunching up her nose while shrugging in Henry’s direction – It’d be a new experience, I’ve gotten my hand burnt before.

- Blood magic, it only allows blood relatives to access whichever counter spell for whichever situation. Handy when you can trust your family. – She looks at Lily pointedly and smiles – Lucky mother is dead then. I need your blood to ensure Mal can get inside the house, and Emma’s to ensure Henry can. It seems I didn’t think this through when I casted them a few minutes ago – she turns her arm and raises her sleeve to show to a cut there and prods at it, pitch black as it is – Seems it was for naught.

- Oh shit that is… not encouraging mom. Can’t you heal it? – her hand lifts of its own volition to touch the ooze and Regina moves her arm back

- All magic comes with a prize – Mal recites and helps Henry with some of the bags now that her hand seems to be back to normal – Perhaps we should just sit here. You’re out now, you can’t come in until this is done.

He drops his bags happily and sits on the sidewalk by Mal, looking up at whatever is going to happen - So, people who aren’t blood related to us won’t be able to come in and take the egg…

Lily motions Emma’s way - what about… um… Mary Margaret and David, and other relatives of…

Emma gasps dramatically – How dare you imply my noble bloodline would ever! What about Zelena?

Regina glares at Emma and reaches out for Lily’s arm – There’s no reason to distrust any of them right now, and as far as we know we’ve all reached a wall when it comes to extra relatives. We need Henry to be able to come in.

- And me. – Emma ads, cracking her knuckles

- You I would cast off if it meant never hearing your running commentaries again but knowing you, you would start texting.

- You love me. It’s only a matter of Mal cheating soon.

She laughs from the floor – Soon?

- I’m sure you have options. If it didn’t mean too much blonde energy together, I’d consider it.

Mal looks at her almost pensively - I am almost positive you dye your hair

Emma’s hands shoot up at her curls - Take that back! - Mal’s laughter rings around and Lily rolls her eyes at them, almost in sync with Regina’s own exasperated huff.

And the brunette crouches in front of the gate, with one palm splayed on the floor and the other pressing around her wound until almost-black blood starts running from the cut to it. It’s less than a minute before it touches the floor and a strange looking circle with lines and stuff inside of it appears and glows purple for one second before it fades, leaving a burnt print on their floor. Regina
smudges her blood across it and takes one deep, dramatic breath before standing back up and finding Lily tilting her head towards it with a frown.

- I’ve undone my spell - She explains and holds her arm up to the show the skin knitting itself back together slowly - You need to trace it. Half a circle each.

Lily sees the cut, looking nasty as ever and pulsing even when it’s healing. The veins around it carrying something to it, and shudders – Right. Let’s get this shit done then. Hand me the knife.

Emma breaks her staring match with Mal and jumps over Henry to come over to the circle – I know this one. If you’re gonna do like co-op blood magic you cut each other, and take each other’s blood, but don’t mix it, and trace the rune at the same time, and the cut doesn’t close until we undo it, and we’re basically married now.

Regina turns, surprised - You read mother’s books.

Lily turns, horrified - We’re married?!

Regina mollifies her by putting a hand on her arm – Often magic runs in the family, so at the time the book was written the only use to commingling blood magic was marriages between casters of different families that needed to get something done. It doesn’t marry you in any way.

- Ah but it assumes we’re married. Stab me sweetums – She presents her forearm and Lily wants nothing more than to do it and plunge the finger in the wound, so she’ll stop being so annoying but then she remembers how gross the entire thing is. Still she takes the dagger from Regina and cuts Emma where Regina herself is cut, and watches her do the same, letting out one harsh breath through her nose at the small pain.

Emma plants her hand on the pavement in what should be Lily’s half of the circle and Lily follows her lead by crossing her arm over hers reaching for the other side. Mal, Henry and Regina watch as the blood connects with the pavement and the circle glows both very bright white and very dark gray. Emma’s the first to lift her hand and swipe a finger over the trail of blood on Lily’s arms and she does the same. Regina takes one deep breath – Do try to color inside the lines.

At the same time they start tracing the pattern, making sure to cover roughly the same area in their side and to finish on the opposite side of the circle joining their fingers at the end. Staying within the design isn’t too hard, the thing guides their fingers more then they do and Lily watches as something trails down her veins and to her finger as it goes. At the end her finger reaches Emma’s and the design glows once more a mixed hue of their initial colors, light gray with a bit of sparkle too, and it burns itself onto the pavement once more before disappearing as quickly as it showed up when Regina touched the ground earlier.

She feels her mother’s hand on her shoulder and stands again, her cut and Emma’s turning black like hers had been. She eyes it for a second, and her finger then, bright red still. It’s Mal who chuckles – Might as well. – Might as well what? She is questioning herself, but her finger moves to her mouth of its own volition.

Emma gags as she frowns - That is super fucked up and I want a divorce.

- What stops me from munching on you if we get a divorce?

Regina frowns as well – I have a feeling you’ve just made a terrible decision.

Mal stands suddenly, now that she can enter her home freely again and Lily’s taken one more step in every possible direction, eyeing her bags to find the right one – I have just the chicken thigh for
you. It is a delicacy, freshly plucked and from a nearby farm, not like those frozen ones your mother likes to buy.

Henry wrinkles his nose like a boy who’s seen raw meat being consumed more than once but still won’t accept it; and the neighbor slows his pace as he comes from walking his dog eyeing them all strangely. Emma chooses to wave the bloody hand at him with a smile and he bends down and picks up his dog with no rush to get inside, both Mal and Regina wave as well and he answers curiously. Mal resumes her talk of raw chicken and Emma grabs Henry by the shoulders - And she kisses your mother with that mouth.

- After a thorough rinse I assure you.

- No, I bet you scrape it right out with your tongue. Blood and all.

- Ew. – He dislodges himself and moves towards the house, not even waiting for someone to check that the spells were casted well – That’s so gross Ma, Jesus.

They go in one by one until there’s only Regina and her leaning against the gate watching the other neighbors peek out their windows every once in a while. Funny how you can’t spend ten minutes bleeding on your own gate without word spreading around. She nudges Regina with her elbow – Did you guys like to bathe in virgin blood for youth and then screw or something like that?

- Aw, thank you for calling me young, Miss Swan. It's the little details.

- I'm telling people you just said aw

She cackles as she turns and swings the gate open - Good luck with that endeavor.
Our own set of wine cups

- Why doesn’t he just live here? – Henry asks as he comes out of his room with every single item of clothing wrinkled and his hair standing up, and it makes Emma jump from her spot on the couch.

She had been so lulled watching Luke kneading a dough into submission that whatever Henry had said didn’t even register completely. She turns to him as she calms her speeding heart – Good morning kid, what was that?

- Luke – he gives the man in question a head nod as he passes the doorway to the kitchen on his way to the couch next to her – Why hasn’t he moved in?

- Well… - She turns to watch him again, crouching to put the bread in the plug-in counter oven he bought her just to be able to ensure they had freshly baked breakfast goods when he did spend the night. He dusts his hands on his apron that he leaves on the perch by the fridge and takes out his orange juice that’s a different brand than Emma and Henry’s – Well… we just started dating a few months ago, so…

- Mal just moved in one afternoon, like a week in.

- Mal knew your mother from like five decades ago, and they’re weird – He gives her one of those looks that let her know Regina is with them in spirit and Emma shrugs – Kid, that’s a big decision for people, we would’ve had to talk about it a lot and then ask you, and you know, Regina probably…

- I’m only here like five days a month – he rolls his eyes as he dives for the remote as if he owns the place though, Saturday morning cartoons aren’t bad just yet – And mom likes Luke more than she likes you probably

- Wow. That one hurt.

Truth is, Emma had obviously thought about it. The bakery opens one hour later on the weekends so on those days Luke could afford to stay over, they’d eat breakfast and then he’d walk back home and spend until mid-afternoon on the job, sometimes Emma’d go hang out in the back with him if Henry wasn’t her responsibility, she’d been picking up some tricks and could now almost produce cookies good enough to sell. It was beyond nice, but he would have to leave his parents’ place and inconvenience himself by having a commute, sure it’s like ten minutes if he drives but still, he loves living on top of the bakery, it’s been his life for three decades.

And on a deeper level she knows she’s just scared and avoiding the likely rejection she’d get for even asking. Plus, asking would imply she wants to make it permanent, and is it permanent? Is she ready for it to be permanent? Is she willing to get married? Ditch birth control and start trying for kids like he obviously wants for his life, it’s a slippery slope, bringing cohabitation up at all.

She’s chewing on that one when he drops himself by her side, snatching the remote out of Henry’s hand as he goes. It makes the kid jump across her to take it back and she groans under their swatting arms – Shower! Both of you! – for a second they both freeze and make eye contact but the kid’s lighter, quicker and less entangled with her, he jumps over the back of the couch and bounds to the bathroom before Luke can even think to stand.

He chuckles as he turns the TV off altogether – This musk is the flavor on the bread.
- Jesus, I might skip it this morning. - He hugs her with his mildly damp arms anyways and gets comfortable to enjoy his post-baking almost nap, he does wake up super early to mix, knead, let it rest, then knead a bit again and bake. Henry’s wormed his way into her head though, damn kid – Would you want us to live together? Like, not now obviously but like eventually we could like, get used to this and we’d just get up earlier so you can still open-up the bakery?

He pops one eye open before reaching up to drag his curls out of his face with one hand, returning it to Emma’s arm right afterwards – Emma, I would love to.

- You would? – She turns in his arms with a grin as big as she can manage – Me too! Shit, okay. I can start training, like just move all my clothing to one side, all five tank tops. – She motions off to the left by his head and he chuckles moving up to take her hands

- There’s much more closet space at my house – she lifts both her eyebrows and he sighs – My parents are looking for a new place to stay, ground floor or one with an elevator, mom has been getting winded and- he’s always chipper and strong but right there he stops and clears his throat to quash a knot – It might be a silver lining.

- Oh, I’m so sorry – Mrs. Baker is as the men in her life, jovial and loving, very into bread – This is probably all part of her plan! She’s asked me for grandkids three times, she’s getting desperate but we’re smarter, we'll just get a dog, name it after her.

He chuckles under her gaze, and raises their joint hands to kiss hers once, as she settles in his arms again and pats his belly, making him keep his good mood – She was sick, before the curse she had a few weeks left and then for twenty-eight years she was perfect… but it broke and now it’s just… it’s nothing close to whatever it was back in the forest, it’s just old age catching up to her probably

- She’s great. She’s lived two awesome lives, made an awesome man. We’ll make sure to let her know all this and stay by her side. And pay two rents like we’re doing now but in a super effective manner now, ‘cause it’ll be two and two and Henry kinda, and the dog we’re naming after your mother.

- You know, we don’t pay rent anymore.

- But Gold owns almost all the real state in this town, except for places people’s bought from him since the curse broke.

- A handful of us had a different deal with Mr. Gold, we were paying but it wasn’t rent, it was a mortgage to own the place when we were done. Ours was for twenty years – Emma gapes at him and he shrugs - After the curse broke and things settled down, Miss Belle and Her Majesty talked to him, he agreed to waive the contracts of people who had paid their debt… after all the money is in his bank account. He even gave us checks with what we’d overpaid.

- Holy shit, Regina does like you better than she does me

He shrugs under her weight – We were friendly, as much as someone with her position in society could be with someone in mine.

- I think if we redeem our combined Regina-friend points we can get like at least a free vacation or something – she chuckles – oh, a set of wine cups so we feel adult.

He smiles – Our own set of wine cups

She smiles too - For our new place, that’ll probably be your current place after I’m done with the two months of the lease I have on this place.
- Perfect timeframe to think it through.

- I lied earlier, the jackets take up a lot of closet space. Just FYI.
What the fuck do they feed you?

There are only two other lesbians in town, at least according to Emma’s obviously flawed gaydar that Regina flew under for years. Still, she’d had good intentions when telling Lily about the other two lesbians in town: first of them Jenna Smith, daughter of the popular smith in town, very into melting metal into general weaponry nobody really needed anymore, and the other one was called Candace with no relevant last name whatsoever, elementary school teacher and therefore mildly friendly to Snow White (who was on the fast track to becoming monarch of the Storybrooke Public School System if left to her own devices). So obviously, the first one.

Because of her love of hammering things into new exciting and pointy shapes with nothing but her bare hands, Jenna could be found in the local gym often, or so Emma had told Lily before inviting her to work out on Saturday morning, early enough there’s some overlap but not early enough it looks weird they’d show up there on a day in which Emma generally doesn’t go; she doesn’t have a lot of subtlety in her but Lily also doesn’t have plans for the time in question so she agrees.

Storybrooke wasn’t big in any sense of the word so really, it makes no sense that their wellness center is so cushy and well furnished, which is also a thought Lily’d had the one time she went into the hospital and the time she went into the library, so maybe Regina’s curse is just kind on the public spaces. Not only is there a gym, there’s a volleyball court, a basketball one, a tennis one with the proper nets in place to stop the balls from killing anyone playing the previous two sports and there’s and indoor pool which will never see a single hair of Lily.

And as fate would have it, Henry’s invited by his grandmother to play volleyball with the princesses and Regina “hasn’t visited the wellness center in a while” so they all end up going, except Mal who chuckles at the notion of exercise, especially when the new season of a show she likes has just appeared on Netflix as if by magic. Thankfully, they split right up when they arrive, and she goes after Emma tying her hair up as she walks.

Emma grows super fucking tired of her in the first ten minutes of their exercising. Cycling seems like a fun cardio starter, just sitting down and rolling the pedal thingies and just going nowhere? Fucking gold. Except it seems Lily doesn’t really feel the challenge, even with the resistance dial turned all the way up. They’re gonna be there for twenty minutes and Emma’s already flushed in sweat, she turns once to her right to see Lily answer a text and drops her head as she stands to finish her warm up in an ascent, it’s gonna be two hours of hell.

A trainer must see her close to passing out on the bike because he approaches them with a water bottle, Emma holds out her hand as he reaches them… but he offers it to Lily with a smile

She frowns – Dude, do I look like I need some water? - Emma lets out a completely involuntary huff and reaches to snatch the rejected bottle from his hand, letting them do the talking

- I meant no offense, Your Highness. It’s your first time here, I want you to know I am here if you need anything. – he sets both his big hands on the bike’s handles and looks at the difficulty setting, impressed – My name is Greg, you can ask for me in the front desk if you don’t see me.

Lily kinda smiles, a little - Oh, you’re one of mom’s… fans. – Emma huffs, the white kingdom’s citizens are just a bunch of annoyingly nice people she now has to say hi to in the street, but Lily and Henry get voluntary servants all the time.

He almost smiles at her too - I am a member of the royal guard.
Emma snorts – In present tense?

Regina’s workout buddy had been Kathryn, for three spotty decades, she wasn’t particularly athletic but she did like the excuse to meet, bitch and then have an earned drink so, like many other times that Saturday morning she showed up reluctantly, and walked as Regina jogged in the treadmill next to hers – Must you keep this running nonsense up? You had the power of stasis by your side and knew it, and now you’ve got the power of super slow aging and know it… relax.

- You see, you can’t expect your men to die in a war for you if you can’t even ride into battle with them. – She takes one deep breath, to reset her monologue timer - Now it’s just nice every once in a while.

- Treadmill work is what gets men to “die for you”?

- I used to train with them every few weeks, cardio with a sword, shield and the twenty pounds of armor they carry on them, after that there is a sense of camaraderie you can’t shake. – She winks and picks at her thin shirt – This is a walk in the park.

She laughs and tightens her ponytail unnecessarily, it gives her something to do with her hands besides choking herself for agreeing to this, why can’t they ever hangout in her terms? – You were doing way too much, Sir Regina.

Regina turns to her, making her own ponytail chart a strange trajectory –You laugh, but I don’t see any of the gilded guard still milling around you. – Kathryn opens her mouth and Regina rolls her eyes before she can even make her witty regard – Besides the one you left cleaning up your house on a Saturday morning.

As if on cue one mountain of a man presents Regina with a water bottle and a gruff – Majesty.

- Thank you, Greg. Regina will do just fine.

He gives a look that says it won’t do as he bends his head at them just so and goes on his way. Kathryn laughs again – Does he paint houses? Fred can’t manage by himself.

Emma had a routine, Greg didn’t seem to love it but he left them to It, so it probably won’t kill them. Or at least not Lily who had breezed through the first exercise without seeing much to it. The second one was just as meh, so in the third one Lily decides that she’ll double Emma’s weight, just to see if that’s what’s up.

It is what’s up, she goes 2.5x for the second set and she can finally see the advantages to this gym thing, it’s almost fun – Dude, this shit is cool. What do we call these?

- Bench presses… - She leaves her position by Lily’s head to eye the discs on the side of the bar and then bends down to watch her lift the equivalent of a mildly fat person easily – What the fuck do they feed you?

She finishes her twenty reps and puts the bar back in place, sitting up to reach for her water with a shrug – It’s the dragon blood probably… so now this bicep shit and we circle back to these?

- Yeah… - Why is fate so cruel?
- What freak of nature did you spawn? - Regina whips around to glance wherever it is Kathryn is glancing at and smiles as she spots Lily with a set of weights three times the size of Emma’s, not only doing the reps without breaking a sweat but also having the mental capacity to produce a breeze strong enough to make the blonde stumble to the side as she *tries* for a lunge. Kathryn chuckles – If that’s a half-breed… can Maleficent lift a car?

Regina’s actually seen Lily lift the corner of her own car many times, so probably – Mal just… reads. How is it that the saying goes? She’s a lover, not a fighter.

- Regina, are you the man in this relationship? With your queen’s-guard friends and all your swords. Cora would be appalled... well you *did* impregnate her *twice*, I don’t know why I’m surprised

Yes, indeed. Which is also why she can lift her middle finger to her friend before fixing her hair, once the disappointment ship has sailed it has sailed. A thought occurs to her – Would you have surrendered? – Kathryn lifts her eyebrow and Regina motions to Lily – The way it stands right now, I have two dragons to defend my kingdom, Snow’s falls to Henry eventually, kill George and his kingdom goes to David, which means it inevitably falls to Henry as well. You’re all that’s left in the way of my children, we could unify the land. Would you have signed it over?

- Maybe I’d marry that one, how hard can it be? She looks like she’d be easily seduced.

It was apparently super entertaining to watch, in all their circuit Lily had either doubled or tripled Emma’s weight and even done more reps while the blonde caught up. The bits of cardio she’d barely felt and, in the rest, in between sets she was playing with whatever she could get her hands on while Emma panted by her side, hands on her knees and every bit of visible skin red as hell. By the time they got to the pull ups Emma did hers as Lily did hers with Henry clinging to her back, he’d come in to see the show like the other people around the gym that kinda wanted to throw more weight on her to test her limit.

They got to fifteen before Emma gave up and dropped herself from the bar to then just lay on the floor with her arms splayed around. Lily dropped the kid, who bounded off with some beefy dude, and then jumped down easily with a smile – I got a little carried away-

- You broke her – Lily was on the way to an apology when she was interrupted by what had to be the reason they’d even gone to the gym in the first place – And I don’t appreciate that, we train together in the week.

- Yeah…- Jenna Smith, local baby smith that makes weapons for the deranged that are still buying weapons was not like regular TV show smith. For once there was no soot on her body, no extreme body hair and no foreign material teeth, she had nice soft brown eyes and her hair was the perfect step between blonde and chestnut, barely held together in a bun. The only thing they’d gotten right was the muscle, for whatever *good* reason, her workout outfit included no shirt and the sweat really made the abs *pop*. Lily stopped that – Yeah no, I mean, she told me… that she has a workout buddy! Not about you specifically... I’m Lily-

- I know, I’m Jenna. Not that Emma told you. Will you start training with us then? Might have to step up if we’re gonna keep up with a dragon. – she eyes her scrawny little form for one second, obviously about to try to rip her in half… or something
Good that the water bottle is the kind with the weak-ass plastic that wrinkles because Lily reaches for it, drinks what’s left in it in one go and wrings it to the width of a straw while she calms down – Yeah, Imma think about it. Cool meeting you.

- Right, maybe I’ll see you later then Lily. – She glances off the side to Emma – Ems, you okay?

Emma can manage a thumbs up from her spot, lifting her own shirt to swipe the sweat around her eyes as the woman leaves. With her remaining energy Emma manages a swat to Lily’s ankle – Good then? Or is it like two tough ones can’t – she tries to motion scissoring but she’s just so tired

- Oh no, excellent.

Emma Swan drags herself in miserable shape to the treadmills to try to finish her workout with some light walking as Lily decides she might go for a fucking game of basketball with the three dudes that just came in with a ball, and if anyone can play basketball after almost two hours of o workout, it’s Lily. – I hate your daughter – she manages as she passes Regina’s own treadmill, sped up for the last few minutes of her run

- It is almost poetic. Mother was so very ticked by whatever her interactions with Eva were that she devoted her life to making me miserable until I was prettier, better behaved, richer and with better status than whomever Eva spawned, and at the end she still had to sell me into the very family she hated. Fast-forward one generation and I have so effortlessly achieved what she ran us to the ground for.

- Are you going to make us ask? – Kathryn chuckles as she can finally shut off her infernal machine and Emma flings an arm to get Regina to get to the point, how can she monologue while running so fast?

- Is there one single thing in which Lily doesn’t surpass you? – she finally hits the cool down button and the machine slows to a walking pace – It counts as injury to Snow, to mother, and to you… perhaps even to Rumple, whose son was so terribly… unremarkable and whose grandson I had to take in because of his sheer mediocrity at life. It just works on so many levels. I would’ve basked in it in 2011.

She would’ve basked in it more, she means. Emma sighs. Lily is already better at magic with a third of the training, she is obviously physically superior so the other stuff should even count, you know, the sword fighting and horse riding and archery and not having to put on contact lenses in the morning and the many sports they’ve tried jokingly on the weekends… - She can’t swim.

- And you can?

- Well, I won’t drown.

Regina chuckles – And you have much prettier eyes.

Emma gasps and abandons all pretense of walking –Kathryn is here, you can’t get this reckless with it! Maleficent would burn my house if she heard, we need to keep this affair private.

Lily bounds from a side banging on all the treadmills with a grin, ignoring any and all previous conversation and clutching a piece of paper with two phone numbers in her hand – Greg is training me.

Emma groans – What the fuck for? The Olympics?
She shrugs – I’d never exercised a day in my life. If I can do all this just fucking around imagine what I can do if I focus.

Kathryn loves Regina but Regina and all her strays always prove to be too much to bear, she starts getting off the treadmill as soon as she spots Henry glancing their way – Cora damaged you, but you haven’t had enough time to damage her, and the one you could have damaged is just fine over there… that’s how I know megalomania is hereditary.
I’ll find towels, old, of course.

Lily freezes at the sight before her, not only is Mal seemingly cooking but she is wearing an apron and everything, a youtube tutorial walking her through making pancake batter as she bends down to pay attention to the tiny image coming from her phone. Lily laughs, taking a seat on the island and summoning an apple from the bowl with a smile – Wow mom, what’s got you making us breakfast?

- That’s a very wide net you’re casting – she waves an arm back to shut her up – I’m making Regina breakfast.

She snorts – Smart. You gotta kill us one by one so people won’t get suspicious – She takes a few bites of her fruit and waits for Mal to drag the progress bar back before she speaks again, trying to make her fume – it’s not her birthday though.

She pauses the video and turns back with a dopey smile – I love you and I say this as crassly as possible in the hopes that you will leave, and this house will be child-free until at least lunch time. – Lily frowns – Your mother fucked my soul out of my body last night, to the point I was too spent to even repay the favor and fell asleep in a matter of seconds. So, I let her sleep, am making her breakfast, and hope to reciprocate later.

Apple ate completely she has no reason to continue to take the abuse to her mental health in the kitchen, and she does have a workout scheduled, plus an almost coffee date, and even something kinda like a job interview. So, she will indeed get the fuck out. Lily huffs as she reaches into the freezer for whatever raw thing she can now stomach, and Mal gives her a mega-watt smile from her spot, whisk in hand. They love how put together she’s been. – Ok, fuck you too mom. Bye.

- Not this morning, it’s all about your mother!

She’d lied, just enough Lily’d leave. She had no untoward intentions for the morning, in fact she went as far as to get clothed before going down to attempt to cook and her first act after putting down the tray was grab Regina’s robe from its place in the hamper and all but drape it over the comforter before waking her wife up to a kiss on the temple and a poke to the region where the ribs should be.

Regina groans before fighting her eyes open and stretches with a yawn, before squinting up at her – Is it… not sunrise? I must have really worn you out.

- Don’t flatter yourself – She settles down on her side of the bed with a chuckle – I’ll flatter you. Although I woke up according to my regular schedule, I felt the urge to put together breakfast as a thank you.

Regina raises an eyebrow as she spots the tray by her legs and chances one bite of a perfectly cooked sausage – I am beyond flattered. – She sits up even to risk her life with the rest of the plate and chuckles as Mal wraps her in her robe as she goes, Regina chuckles – And surprised. You have somewhere you need me to be?

- Au contraire – she moves under the covers, ditching her own robe over the head of the bed to Regina’s chagrin – I plan to stay in bed for hours yet to come enjoying your fine company. I just miss having you all to myself, the children are getting invasive – Mal says just before moving for
the spoon with leftover syrup

Regina all but pulls it out of her mouth – And unnamed baby number three will be here soon.

Mal hums, oddly focused on the spoon, as she drops an arm around Regina – And they keep hovering. You’d think I was indeed pregnant.

- Yes, we’re practically fighting over you. – Regina laughs over a bite of pancake
- It is exhausting to be coveted like this – she smiles – however did you manage? A Queen is wanted everywhere, at all times.
- Yet, you often abandon me to go do laps in the sky.

Mal laughs as Regina spoons some eggs and hums, very surprised – You often say I should let you get work done.
- And you believe me? Fool. – she kisses her properly, and then puts the robe on – never leave my side ever again.

Regina does not fight asleep if she’s comfortable, so for hours she is in and out of their conversation. It’s hard, when Mal’s put on soft music on the speaker and talks with the calm of the water in a lake, strokes her arm softly and plays with her hand lightly, there’s no noise outside, Henry gone to Emma’s and Lily gone to her errands.

For a minute Regina comes to and lets Mal know this in a low mumble and the blonde chuckles, fully awake and enjoying the dead weight Regina becomes when the ambiance lets her. She moves her hand to the ends of Regina’s hair, where it curls without her permission when it dampens and wraps it around her finger, careful not to tug and smiling wondering if maybe… She sighs as she feels a shudder – Dragons take their time to hatch – Regina hums, still present but not for too long – the process is long, they start stirring and fighting the constrain, and it is generally hours until they finally manage to break free of the egg. But it’s blink and you miss it then. – Regina rolls off her just enough she can smile up at her, dopey, still quite not grasping it. And Mal kisses her nose with a laugh – Our son might be born any minute now, you might want to wake up for that.

It takes her maybe five seconds to open her eyes fully and sit up rubbing at her face – What?! We haven’t babyproofed! And the nursery! And- Well, stand up! – she’s halfway off the bed, and pulling Mal out with her before deciding to just ditch her and move into the closet, coming out with sweatpants and a soft cotton long-sleeve shirt, pulling sneakers on with no socks in sight – Mal!

- Darling, he’ll be born where he is and he will be fine. – She chuckles as she stands and Regina drops the shoes – grab some cushions. I’ll find towels, old, of course. We’ll be fine. – Very calm, for now.

The cushions, turns out, are for them, because they sit on the ground for over half an hour watching the egg roll this way and that, shudders and thuds coming from it. Regina sits with her back to Mal’s front and tries to prevent it from hitting the hardened walls of the cave she’d replicated in their basement. And every few minutes Mal breathes fire its way over Regina’s shoulder making it even more restless, and they wait, chuckling at how they don’t have to protect the baby from the house but the complete opposite.
But at the end, in the 38th minute of the recording Regina had the mind to start with Henry’s equipment a claw breaks through the hard surface of the egg and an entire wing follows, the rest of the shell all but falling apart as he stretches and coughs erratic fire at it, trying to lift himself up away from it even. Regina reaches for him first, leaning away from Mal and for a second he glances her way curiously before clutching at her sleeve and climbing up quickly, she laughs a wet chuckle mixed with a hiss as her shirt is instantly torn to shreds and her arm stars bleeding from the deep cuts he makes wherever he steps – Well, this is going to be fun – he breathes fire again and it burns a hole clean through the other sleeve, at least her fire repellent daily tea does work. She reaches up for him, covered in some warm slick substance as he is – Oh you’re beautiful – she glances quickly at Mal with a smile and back to their son – Welcome home, Drazenko.

Mal exhales behind her, air rushing out of her – Drazenko – she mutters in her guttural language and it pulls his attention immediately, eyes fixed on Mal’s. Regina eyes them both, frozen in their assessment of each other, she chuckles again and sets him down, urging him to Mal who simply watches in awe as she stumbles forward and onto her lap. In a daze she grabs for the towel with warm water she’d prepared to clean him up and tears up as he settles comfortably, still doing his best to torch their clothing – Drazenko – she calls him again in English and he glances up, growling for the very first time in her arms.

It’s a few minutes of getting used to him, Regina snaps pictures through her own tears, nevermind the other camera still shooting, and Mal watches in awe as he moves around, or on them, easily and with no fear of jumping from one to the other. No sooner has Regina healed a cut he makes another mesmerized with the way she can simply make them go away, he prowls around the tripod with distrust and claws at the bits of shell left behind, sinks his toothless gums in their legs and arms… he’ll be a nightmare when he’s teething surely. But Regina can’t fault him for it, delighted as she is as he bats his wings and lifts himself a single inch from the ground confused and trying to jump over Mal’s form where she is sprawled on the floor and luring him this way and that with bouts of fire and another, blood-stained, towel. She’s on cloud nine, has barely said a word and is crying through the entire ordeal but every time she mutters Drazenko and he stands to attention, her lips form a smile Regina wants to bottle up.

In one mildly successful jump though he sees himself in peril when he lifts himself three inches from the ground and the cloud of smoke envelops him, dark green, and drops a baby on Mal’s stomach, who shoots up to support him as he gets used to his new form, wailing to signal he is now living well beyond his body’s means – Oh yes it hurts, doesn’t it? It is quite awful, but we’ll get through it. It’s abysmal, Mal knows it, Regina knows it, Draz knows it and turns to the other mother he has and in the blink of an eye he disappears from between Mal’s hands and appears on the floor, crawling towards Regina with the ease of a child that’s been doing it for months already. – Oh dear, we’re in for a few years of hell - Regina picks him up with a laugh and sees if Mal is disconsolate at his decision – It hurts?

- It’s horrific - For one second it looks like she might even get it together, but she looks at him for a second, unlike Lily his hair was curled and his eyes were deep brown… doesn’t take a lot to guess he’ll look just like the woman rubbing his back, and she loses it again as she drags herself to Regina’s side, dropping her head on her lap and playing with his feet as they kick her way – For so long I’ve wondered… how being with Lily would have felt… this is- she glances up when Regina releases a hand to reach down and wipe her tears and it only makes her more… whatever it is she’s feeling, her voice breaks even – This is transcendent.

With a kid she can more or less handle already on her arm she focuses on Mal some more, reaching for her hand and bringing it up to kiss the back of it – It’s a first for both of us indeed. – She blows
a raspberry on Draz’ cheek and he’s confused enough to slow his crying to a mild sob –it’s only a quick pop baby – her lips pop with the word and he almost giggles at it calming down enough Regina deems it reasonable to return him to Mal, laying him on her chest.

They eye each other with an almost scary attention, and she speaks again – There were days in which all I could think of was how I couldn’t know if she had hatched, they took her and… I wasn’t even close enough to know, I couldn’t feel her – he senses her distress and claps both hands over her cheeks with a loud smack, makes her smile just enough she focuses on his weight again, and his scent, and the fact that they have a healthy boy with them. She’s so grateful for it all, so over these tears that won’t stop.

Regina lays by their side, making sure the cushions are under her head of course – I would burn this planet to the ground before I let anything happen to our family.

- I know – Mal chuckles through her crying and the baby on top of her sighs as he settles down – I love you, and your spawn over here – she takes a hand to his back and reaches up with a finger for his tuff of dark hair
- At least we can be sure it’s mine.
- I’ll notify my other paramours. They will be saddened by the news.

- Regina glances Mal’s way for a while, a uses her thumb to wipe the very last tears away, kissing her on the temple before smiling and standing up – Mal, I love you too. Deeply. – She moves around picking up the mess while she hums and Mal shifts between glancing at her and staring intently into their son’s eyes

Until she stirs and chuckles, setting the baby down on the towel with no blood on it – Prepare.

Prepare? For what? But before she can ask Lily thunders down the stairs loud enough Regina can hear as well, and throws the door open, panting, which makes Drazenko start wailing again for one single second before the cloud of smoke engulfs him again and drops a small dragon in their midst, shrieking this time around, and after his sister Henry follows close behind. Lily points at Mal sprawled on the floor – You got rid of me on purpose.

- Cool!

Mal keeps a soothing hand on the baby’s spine - Surely, we could’ve waited for them to return by their own means

Regina smiles and keeps on tidying up – We had an hour, dear. I had to tell them. - It’s Henry who approaches him first, crouching down and making him skitter towards Regina’s legs. He straightens again and Regina reaches for his arm – You’re going to need a full suit of armor before you can hold him.

- What’s his name? – He still rolls down his sleeve, tugs it to clench his fist over the cuff and shows him his arm just in case and for a moment the small dragon stares and forgets to cry
- Drazenko – Mal says, and Lily repeats in the same foreign, awed whisper Mal had first used. He responds to that and she crouches by Henry to let him climb all the way to her shoulder, liking the height when she stands up. Henry pouts just enough she notices, and she chuckles as she helps him settle on his head, claw coming dangerously close to an eye.

Regina cringes and shoots forward to pry him away, healing the small cut on Henry’s forehead as she does – Okay, we will need to sort that out – Draz bats a wing and she swerves her head out of
the way – Lily dear, can you fix lunch?

- What, is mom out of tutorials? – she laughs at her own joke and Draz’ tries to laugh with her

Mal stands swiftly – I will have you know breakfast was a complete success. I am more than capable of coming up with lunch

- But we need to fix a cave. – Regina says ducking out of the way of the frantic wing-flapping

- But we need to fix a cave. – She repeats pointing at the baby – Take Henry.

- No! she just makes me clean up after her!
Do send Neal with his sister for a play date someday.

Dragon babies need sunlight just a tad more than human babies, but sunlight means people with no protection from the random fire and the stray magical flukes and so, they had been forced to fashion him a bracelet much like the cuff magic practitioners of the town had been forced to wear at odd times. This didn’t seem to faze him in the small increments of time in which they utilized it though, he probably didn’t realize what he was missing at the moment happily smacking at Regina’s cheeks as she held him while they took a stroll through town set to culminate in ice cream from Ingrid’s shop.

Who was indeed fazed was Emma, who’d spotted them a few minutes ago and had taken to accompany them while exposing her case – Honestly Regina, this is ridiculous, I mean, I’m the obvious choice here.

- Kathryn already agreed dear, you can’t expect me to go and recant the offer. – Draz smacks her once more and she smiles at him while answering – We already share Henry, you will have your hands full in the event of our deaths.

Emma takes one long step forward and starts walking backwards to look at them properly, eye contact with Emma Swan is something Mal enjoys greatly, the woman is truly entertaining, she goes on – Kathryn has no magic! And it’s different with Henry, with Draz it’d be because we’re besties, and you love me, and he will love me forever and ever ‘cause I’m so cool. Like Sirius Black in Harry Potter y’know? – she says that looking straight into Mal’s eyes who doesn’t know, at all – Who even is Henry’s godmother?

Regina smirks Emma’s way – Kathryn.

- That is fucked up. I earned this one! And he’s so cute, and he loves me – Draz does in fact like her, and he turns to her with a small, goofy smile – See! I should be the kid’s godmother.

- I was actually hoping it was me… - Snow White, good-natured as ever had approached them on the sidewalk, stopping Emma’s backward advancing while she nods hello to Mal – Since you’re Neal’s godmother. But it’s been weeks and I’m only now meeting him – she tilts her head to a side

Emma ignores the tension in the air - It’s Kathryn, mom! Kathryn! Again!

Snow’s arm moves upwards one inch by her side and Regina turns swiftly and passes Draz to Mal’s arms behind her, the baby burrows happily under her head and she’s distracted by how he settles into her but when she tunes back in, it’s not pretty.

Snow is frowning miserably - Regina, what is going on? Did I do something?

Regina stands firmly between Snow and Maleficent carrying their child – After what happened with Lily, I’d like you to steer clear of us.

Both Emma and Snow gape and speak over each other – I’m not going to do that again! – Snow says while Emma chimes in - Let’s not get mean here Regina.

The brunette takes one step forward towards Regina and Mal shoots her free hand out to hold Regina’s hand back, it reeks of magic already and Snow is clearly come in peace – I thought we were past that – she chances a look up at Mal and the blonde just holds her gaze for as long as she wants it to be held, - I thought you both knew how sorry I am.
Regina still holds up a hand to halt Snow’s approach - I jumped to forgiveness, if you can believe it.
- Regina, we’ve been through so much, this can’t defeat us
- It absolutely can. – She moves to take a step around Snow and Mal releases her hand so she can do so, it’s a surprise, she had wondered why of all visits they had seemingly dodged Snow’s but she had not wanted to ask in case it was simply an oversight in Regina’s part and they were forced to endure hers and Charming’s presence for an afternoon in their house. To be fair, since Mal and Lily moved in if they had stepped in the house thrice Mal couldn’t remember, they had strained to be polite out of Regina and Henry’s relationship with them, but minimum contact was necessary to accomplish that.

Snow blocks Regina’s path and grabs her arm – Why? – It is clearly a bad idea.
- Why?! – she pulls her arm away from Snow and moves forward to tower over the woman regardless of their similar height, furious but now controlled in a way that clearly made it worse, bystanders looking their way as they slowed down enough to observe but not be shameless in their ogling – Because I have now seen how much my son needs parents that understand him and can properly care for him. You want to know why Lily is volatile with people and keeps losing her temper every time there’s a small issue? Because not only did you force her to carry your child’s angst, you doomed her to a lifetime of people who did not know how to deal with her, made her feel like a burden and failed to support her when she needed to be supported. A lifetime of feeling foreign with no one to explain to her why, and a lifetime of feeling trapped in a body too small for her. Do you know what dragons need to eat Snow? What to do when they feel sick? The heat the thermostat needs to be set at so they can sleep through the night? How distressing a bath seems to be for them? Well I am almost certain neither did Cruella and Ursulla, or child protective services, or the Pages. – It would’ve been a perfect moment to leave, but not for an angry Regina, she needed to tie it up with a bow – Which might also be the root of Emma’s various ailments. So no, you cannot hold this child and I might need a few months to get over my stance on this issue.
- I- You were- – Snow takes one deep breath as she glances at her daughter and Emma looks away – The curse was coming close.
- And you had a choice, something you didn’t have the courtesy to award Mal, keep your child or break the curse eventually. Guess you had your priorities straight – Regina moves to circle Snow again but she won’t let up
- You were insane! We didn’t know what the curse was going to do.
- But you knew damn well what happens to children without parents – she throws her a withering glance to match her thunderous statement, but follows it with a sing song tone – Although you’d already sent mine away, so it was only fair you sacrificed yours too, for the loyal people of the White Kingdom. Emma’s twenty-eight years of loneliness and despair were a small price to pay to save these strangers from evils such as plumbing, and literacy, and life insurance. Truly inspiring.

It seems to quiet Snow, who turns to Emma again. The blonde grimaces and tries for a convincing shake of the head – Regina, stop it. Mom, I’m fine, really. Just, you guys go get your ice cream.
- Yes well, fine is a loose term, is it not? Bye bye, Snow – she finally circles her and Mal wills her legs to follow her wife, Draz gurgling happily in her arms oblivious to everything that just transpired. Regina tosses her last line over their shoulders – Do send Neal with his sister for a play date someday.
Ingrid questioned them once about what the fight that the group chat was reporting was about but Regina’d told her it was none of her business as she had picked the caramel ice cream in a shell for herself and a bit in a cup for Draz who had let himself be held by the woman with the sweet concoction happily, until Mal and Regina too had ice cream of their own and the woman posed no advantage to his mothers.

When he is sitting on the table, as Regina uses one hand to steady him and the other to feed him while her own ice cream grows ever liquid by the second, Mal smiles at them and she takes a picture of the mess he’s becoming and Regina’s gleeful cleaning.

She puts her phone away and reaches for the drop of ice cream on his tiny little jeans - That was quite a monologue you gave earlier. I didn’t know you see the situation like that, and lovely as it is seeing you well and angry and speaking in a scathing tone in our behalf, I don’t want you to alienate someone you have worked hard to have a friendship with.

Regina glances her way and releases the empty cup to move to her own ice cream – Our children are… not made to be raised like normal human children. And you are so good with this little one – she pokes his tummy over his shirt with a green dragon printed on it and he giggles – they need you more than a human child needs their parent.

She chuckles - I’m sure any other dragon could raise them

— But where would they find another dragon? Henry didn’t need Emma or Neal because I found him, but Lily… she never stood a chance. Whoever decided to adopt her could have been the most loving, perfect couple to ever adopt a child and it would’ve still not been enough for her. She needed you.

- She needed us. I can’t make anything out of these lilac sparks he keeps making when he claps – that makes him glance down at his now gooey hands, perhaps he remembers he’s missing some abilities and special effects

Regina sees that look and rushes to eat her ice cream, the amount in her spoon definitely a bit bigger than dainty, so it must be a matter of urgency, he must be about to cry, she’d know sooner than Mal. She shrugs a bit – Magic can stay dormant, out of town they wouldn’t even know they have it, but these other needs, they are physiological.

- Lily’s medical history…

- The tests, the pills… And lord, the psychologists…

Mal’s only been to the hospital once and it wasn’t the most welcoming place. A child with no discernible blood type and an ongoing low fever, with tough skin to pierce and who seemingly never hit puberty, always sullen and often in trouble in school. It had not been fun - She has us now, we will mend the damage as much as we can

Regina nods - She’s been doing well, I love seeing her so centered – She smiles, the last bit of ice cream held before her mouth as she stops to do so.

- Dare I say, therapy helped?

Regina chuckles – Only if it doesn’t kill you.

Mal would retort but this baby’s face contorts in anger, surely as he tries to do something the
bracelet prevents him from doing. She lifts him but the battle is lost, and Regina rushes to pay and say goodbye before rushing back and summoning her handy cloud that sends them away and unsettles his stomach just enough he cries harder when his body won’t turn to get rid of those pesky human body sensations he doesn’t love.

He doesn’t vomit though, like Mal’s seen some people do, and the minute the bracelet is off he is a small dragon in her hands and jumps down to curl into a ball on the floor, against a corner to continue to abuse a chewed-up toy

Regina pockets the carved metal and sighs as she reaches up to kiss Mal’s cheek – I will be taking a nap

- Because verbally assaulting Snow White just isn’t as rejuvenating as it used to be – she chuckles

- It’s become taxing even. But someone has to do it.
We know it is hard and we won’t hold it against you at all

It’s a lovely day, really. Sun’s shining through the clouds and birds are singing and shit. She can hear them when she stops for a moment to breathe in the crisp air and give her horse a rest, she closes her eyes even and tilts her head forward to feel the sun on her skin, the type of shit she never did before.

She can hear Regina galloping towards her though, so Lily opens her eyes to watch her approach, she’s good and she makes the shit look way easier than it is, stopping by her and settling down like she shares a brain with the horse. Puppets is more rebellious, or she’s just not there yet.

- Sweetheart, are you okay?

- Oh! – she chuckles and pats her horse so he’ll know she’s okay too – never better. Keep racing and whatever.

- Are you sure? You look a bit out of it.

Well I was reflecting okay? I reflect – Regina starts a slow pace and Puppets follows out of sheer love for her it seems, Lily doesn’t stop him either. She gives her a raised eyebrow and Lily’s face scrunches up – what? I reflect! - it’s come to her attention her face never used to do that before, and her brain never came up with the turn of phrase ‘it’s come to her attention’ or ‘turn of phrase’, well, her therapist had asked because they didn’t seem ‘native to her character’ when they’d come out in sessions.

But she also never seemed to reflect before and now, well those therapy sessions and her workout schedule had been doing wonders for her, coupled with Regina on maternity leave cooking breakfast lunch dinner and cutting up fruit at various hours of the day, she was a week away from achieving peak performance for her, albeit limited, life.

Regina rides her horse magnificently and Lily finds herself trying to imitate her form too before rolling her eyes to herself and relaxing into it even if it means slouching just a little, Puppets gets her, he’s cool if she looks like a rancher or something instead of whatever her mother does.

A strong current of wind blows by and lifts Regina’s hair as she turns to look at her, to perfection, and Lily rolls her eyes at the whole thing but listens anyways - Is reflecting a symptom of something else?

Lily sighs, she’s fine - Are you taking Henry out like this too? Or is this like ‘oh she’s a little in the fucked-up side, make sure you log in your Lily hours so she doesn’t feel abandoned because of the baby’?

Regina only looks at her quizzically - Did you tell your therapist about Draz?

- Of course. Just told her you bought him at the black market.

Regina laughs at her joke and turns again to see where she was heading, which was nowhere in particular in the big ass meadow they kept for beginner classes and whatnot. She turns to Lily again, confident in the horse’s ability not to crash into air - Don’t flatter yourself, I’m taking him out too. Dragon babies are not nearly as demanding as the human ones. I find myself with time to spare for… Harry was it? And you of course. I want to say…Lynn? Truth is, I barely remember.

She laughs and picks up pace to pass Xavier and lift the finger to her mother - Maybe it’s just
because you have help this time around

She smiles sweetly - If anything we are overstaffed; don’t think I haven’t noticed you checking in on him at night.

- He’s a’ight – she nods over her statement and keeps riding by Regina’s side – It’s not his fault I had it rough as a kid, it ain’t your fault either. I’m good with what we have now, you don’t have to like, carve time out for me and she doesn’t have to invite me to fly every time she’s taking him out…

- She wants you there, genuinely. – Part of his development is Mal flying frequently and taking him with her, making sure one of her wings is always just underneath his body to cut the harsher winds and to regulate his height. Every once in a while he tries to dare venture out of the safe space and it ends, without fail, in him losing height quickly and Mal letting him do so for a moment to see if he’ll recover before diving and placing her wing under him again, until she doesn’t have to one day. Lily’d just smashed into the forest for a few weeks until she kinda learned to glide, even now she doesn’t consider herself particularly skilled at flying. Mal’s large shadow casts over them for a second and Regina glances up to watch her quickly – I can’t think of any single thing she’d like more than you joining them. She’s not asking to be polite. She’d simply love to risk both your lives in one single afternoon.

- Mom, it’s not dangerous - She laughs – People do get super killed because horses throw them and stomp on them though. – Puppets and Xavier both take offense and Lily somehow knows

Regina huffs indignantly - Someone shot a spear through your wing.

- And I’m okay. Some hillbilly at one of my schools fell off a horse and he never walked again. Just saying. – She laughs quickly and adds – But, I get your point. And I will say yes next time she invites me. And I really um, appreciate it, that you want to make time to hang out with me. I… love you, mom, um, yeah.

- Oh sweetheart – she stops Xavier and Puppets follows her cue once again – We both love you very much as well. Please, if you ever feel anything negative towards your brothers don’t hesitate to talk to us. We know it is hard and we won’t hold it against you at all.

- Henry keeps eating my leftovers.

- Yes well, you’re going to have to take that up with him directly. – Regina’s horse trots off and Lily has to spur Puppets to follow for a change

- I label them!

- Honestly, I don’t know what to tell you. Get a mini fridge for your room.

- The family fridge should be a safe space mom.
With Drazenko’s newfound existence had come Zelena bearing green gifts and Regina being pliable enough to accept them. And with the very first step a little marathon had followed, who knew Zelena liked an infant so much? Or that Roland loved Henry’s storytelling so deeply? Or that Robin had gathered the nerve to learn to drive to be able to wheel his still-fresh family around as well now that Zelena’s condition keeps her from transporting them without retching over their clothes.

So, bridges had been mended and all three of them had become frequent visitors in Regina and Maleficent’s home, and a dreaded moment is upon them now, Mal thinks as Regina wraps herself in blood-red and reaches for her perfume, a double date of sorts. Dinner, and subsequent socializing after it in Zelena’s apartment while Lily, for the very first time, made sure her two brothers stayed alive in Regina’s house.

She had never been the jealous type, the gods know she was more than willing to allow Regina any type of freedom she so desired when they met and even now that their arrangement was much more steadfast and tangible, she settles on those two adjectives as she toys with her ring, she has sometimes wondered if Regina misses her roaming and finds herself not too convinced by the notion, she seems perfectly content day in and day out; but Robin is the blemish of her existence.

The man branded, by the most primitive of kinds of magic, as her wife’s soulmate, whatever the fuck that means. A man fickle enough to leave Regina for his no-longer-dead wife and then leave her as well to follow up with a relationship with the first one’s sister. Simple-minded and as far from refined as possible without crossing all the way to boorish, far from handsome too if anyone asks her, it’s almost laughable, at least the huntsman had some semblance of strength to his name-

Regina interrupts her train of thought, grabbing onto her tie and tugging just enough she’ll look up in her seat and leave the glass of scotch on the bedside table by her abandoned book. She’s smiling at her, amused – Brooding are we? It’s only a couple hours. Zelena is my sister, I have to keep trying. And she will be the mother of our niece who we will love very much because we are unable to resist to children- Zelena’s not the issue at hand, but Mal nods and moves to take her glass again, only Regina doesn’t really let her, taking a hold of her hand and moving it onto her own waist – And after it’s done we can come back here and unwrap you from that suit

The kiss that follows is tantalizing enough to forgo the rest of the scotch and Mal huffs as she stands – Let’s go about this dinner quickly then.

Regina chuckles, moving her hands to the lapel on Mal’s jacket – You didn’t have to go to all this trouble for a dinner in Zelena’s place – She’s wearing a suit one shade darker than Regina’s dress, matching tie and hair done up.

- You’re wearing Gucci – And she’d be damned if she's going to show up there looking like anything less than Regina’s date, even if there’s only two other people there

Regina smirks as she presses closer - I usually do, though.

- Not lately dearest. – But alas, the end of maternity leave is approaching so she must be getting reacclimated to the tight-fitting business attire and the deadly-pointy stilettos, not that they weren’t missed. – Trust me, I’d know. It’s a constant source of disappointment. – She leans down, just enough to kiss her joke away but Regina summons her handy purple steam before she can make contact and it lurches them through space to drop them outside of Zelena’s door.
Zelena and Robin’s door, she’s forced to remember when he opens for them with his little grin and motions them in - Oh hello. Gods, are we late? – Roland, who’d leaned over the couch's back to see who it was, crosses the room in no time at the mere glimpse of Regina and she shakes her head no at Robin as she crouches to allow the boy a hug, Robin chuckles above them trying to make friendly eye contact with Mal – Let me call Marian, see if she’s already nearby.

Mal takes him in then, rough jeans and flannel, can’t really expect any more from him. Roland holds his arm up and she gives him a high five in greeting, as is their custom for the last month, and they move further inside. Mal spots Zelena still working over the stove, she smiles at them amicably, skill she’s only acquired now in the end of her second trimester, and moves away from the steaming pots to serve them tall glasses of wine as Robin goes around the room packing Roland his weekend bag. – Fashionably early little sis?

- Poison is always the last ingredient, just making sure if you’re adding it you get the dosage right.

They’ve barely taken a sip of the now-suspicious wine when the doorbell rings and Roland rushes to go open the door for his mother, bouncing on the balls of his feet as she stalls picking him up for a second. She spots Regina as she lifts him though and her smile breaks just a tad – Your Majesty. Hello.

- Oh, no – Regina chances a quick look Zelena’s way, she knows it’s still sore for her – Please Marian, Regina is just fine. How are you?

- I’m very well. – She doesn’t sound like she’s all the way to very though

They look at each other for a long second and Regina tries again – This is my wife, Maleficent. – Trying is code for dragging Mal into it. She smiles and nods and Marian nods right back – If you need anything at all please don’t hesitate to ask either of us, we particularly know how hard it is to adjust.

Marian hums and accepts the bag from Robin’s hands, Roland held tightly on her free arm even with his size and she leaves as swiftly as she appeared. Mal chuckles at the rigidness of their one remaining man and Zelena comes by to fill their glasses even more, rubbing his back as she does – Well aren’t we civilized, the club of Robin’s almost wives. Let’s sit! I’ll serve the food in a minute.

There is no passion there, and Regina thrives only on passion, whatever her affairs Maleficent was sure they were never calm in nature. There is no passion there but they fit ever so nicely, his simple mindedness traduces on making the atmosphere very easy-going, he’s charming for lack of a better word and ever since Regina had made it explicitly clear she wasn’t hurt by the situation he’d just went right onto affable buffoon mode instead of apologetic fly on the wall as his behavior could previously be described. Regina laughs easily and frequently at his quips, and even her own become lighter in nature in response to his, it seems he caters to a Regina that was earlier than Maleficent had met her own, maybe he reminds her of Daniel, quaint and lovable, easy now she’s unlearned Cora’s spiel on societal station a tad. She does need him in her life, to unwind and slouch a little, playfully reach for his phone where he has Roland’s drawing of her with three eyes, a little pal to teach her to play the peasants’ games of cards and convince her to traipse around in the woods with proper footwear instead of heeled boots.

- Isn’t that so, darling? – She strokes her arm where Maleficent had rolled up her sleeve and the blonde nods pushing away her empty plate as she reaches for what must be the fourth wine cup
Zelena’s served her

She tunes back in – Sherwood Forest was quite the sight in spring, lovely creeks to dip your toes into.

- Oh it was you who took her – he says with a glint in his eyes and Zelena glances at Mal, who glances back, and he goes on – The first time I mentioned the place she waxed poetry about her time in Sherwood Forest talking about some mysterious lover who kept her company in her travels there with wistful sighs here and there… always thought the lover was fictitious

- Because I’d be so pressed to make you jealous a day into meeting you? – Mal smirks at seeing a bit of claw at last

- I am indeed very dashing. – He smooths his plaid shirt down his chest with a grin, finishing up with a pat on the stomach before he starts gathering their dishes

- Rob, you are rough to look at in a regular morning, I can’t even imagine one in the middle of the woods – Zelena chuckles wholeheartedly and takes a sip of her green apple cider, non-alcoholic of course. She must be hating the new world’s standards for pregnant women

- You really are, Rob.

- I believe them both.

- Ruthless! – he cries from the kitchen – Come serve yourselves this dessert. I am done.

Regina and Zelena look meaningfully at each other and say – Bathroom – at unison. In that moment they truly are one and the same, it’s in the vein of the wave of realization Mal gets when she catches Lily standing a few feet from Regina in the exact same posture, eerie. Regina grabs Mal’s hand to unwind her arm from around herself and stands before Zelena can – He’ll be in there a while. I’ll go serve the pie. You’re much too round to stand so often. – Mal keeps ahold of the hand as long as it’s possible and Regina smiles her way when she has to let go

Zelena watches her retreat with an eye roll and when she’s far away she turns to Mal, now watching her meaningfully for a few seconds – You’re thinking it too then?

- Excuse me?

- Now that they’re friendly again… you have thought maybe this, your kid my kid your marriage, that it’s a temporary situation while they rekindle their ever-lasting love?

Mal blinks away her surprise, read by Zelena of all people, barely an acquaintance, she must be losing her touch – Green with jealousy, are you?

- What I am is frightened. – Mal raises an eyebrow at her and Zelena shakes her head – I’m… this is the hormones talking I’m sure, but I am less than Regina. Her magic is a bit undeveloped – Mal wants to laugh at that – but as a mother, as a… partner, she is well read, she is wealthy, the town eats out of her hand, she’s…been to Sherwood Forest… and I’m just- I am not there yet.

Another side to the coin then, a partner in suffering. – We are with who we’re meant to be with. She does not want to take him away from you. – It’s been made clear the entire night

- I don’t think she does at all. I think he will walk of his own volition. How can you not fear that? He doesn’t have to actively try to take her from you, like last time they might just fall into it. What if I hadn’t brought Marian back from the past? No reason for them to split in the first place, do you
She has been chewing on it for a couple of days perhaps, since he’s become a frequent visitor, a repeated texter in long-winded paragraphs. Regina never failed to come back to her before, what bothers her about him is that he has an innate claim over her when Mal has earned hers, even Emma Swan had to claw her way into Regina's affections, people have ruined their lives trying to make Regina as much as like them, it ticks her off but she doesn’t doubt what they have – Regina’s left many a liaison to run back to my arms, I assure you. And there’s nothing to fall into here, they’re friends, loneliness led them to that relationship the first time around- Zelena rolls her eyes at her and drops herself unceremoniously against her chair and Mal sighs – I will reward your honesty with my own. I thought about it. But what you say she has over you is exactly why they’re not a good match, maybe they’re an easy one but you must know, your sister doesn’t enjoy easy.

- So, you’re hard to love and she loves the challenge you keep posing? Is that it? That’s your insurance? You roll over like a lost puppy when she as much as glances in your direction.

- I meant we don’t love each other because fairy dust said so, we’ve been standing by each other’s side for a while now, that’s hard to walk away from for a man with rudimentary understanding of who you are as a person. And I’ve never been compared to a dog before, what a strange feeling. – but to prove her point all four servings of pie float onto the table and four cups materialize with a pot of coffee just in case, and Regina comes to stand behind Mal’s chair, hands on either side of her neck and thumbs stroking the back of it, it makes her drop her head back and Regina bends down to kiss the top of it

Zelena scoffs at the whole thing but recovers quickly – You just couldn’t carry these then? Bit weak in the arms?

Regina pouts mockingly at her - Oh are you cranky? Is the baby giving you a hard time? Have some pie, maybe it’ll help.

Mal retrieves one of the hands massaging her neck and kisses the back of it – Darling, have some mercy, she’s carrying a human being.

- Christ, did you two become friends while I brewed coffee? – A shout of “cards, then” comes from somewhere inside, Robin probably out from his post-meal bathroom ritual, whatever it might be. And Zelena stands muttering about how he never even knows where the damn cards are, taking her plate with her though and Regina bends down again, kiss by the side of her head this time around – I couldn’t help but overhear, just a little. – She whispers while they listen to Zelena bossing him around to speed up the finding of the cards – You are it for me, you have no competition. There isn’t as little as an easy match worth salvaging out of anyone after the bond we have.

- That’s nice dear – she chuckles as Regina drums her fingers around her neck some more, it’s always fun to be keenly aware of the fragility of your windpipe. – But you might want to reassure your sister.

- She can sweat it a bit more, working harder to be good to him. He deserves someone that’s trying, and something’s gotta drive change. – she strokes Mal’s jaw once more and straightens up finally – Don’t eat the pie, it’s not poisoned but it is bad. – She vanishes more than half of hers as she moves to sit – If you talk you walk home.

She points at her plate - Well, vanish a piece of mine too.
This is really like borderline into crazy territory

Chapter Notes

Someone uploaded something about knives for kinktober (?) and I'm sorry but I just couldn't fucking help myself. To whomever that was, you're my inspiration.

- Surely this can be less boring – Mal sighs as she dices an onion, making quick work of it while Regina works on tomatoes

She rolls another one her way, it’s either her or Lily, which also means it’s either onions or baby duty, and there have been a lot of days plentiful of baby duty for both of them – We can put on some music if you want

The new onion gets woefully ignored as Mal turns on some music from her phone, the saxophone low and wrapping around them, Regina raises an eyebrow as she reaches for another one of her own vegetable but says nothing more, so Mal slides closer – I was thinking last night, about how we haven’t done quite a few things in a while –

Regina stills her own hand with a grin as the tip of Mal’s knife starts moving up her arm, pressing just enough she feels the cold – We live in a suburb dear, you’re holding a vegetable knife, it doesn’t even make it all the way to butcher’s, or any other kind of exciting blade really– She chuckles and the movement makes her shoulders shake with mirth, awful timing since the trek of the knife was just reaching one of them and she ends up helping Mal nick her skin, she should know better than to laugh with a blade by her skin but really, they live in a suburb. Her chuckle fades into a low hiss – Fuck. – she turns to inspect the damage and tries to reach for a paper towel with her free hand but Mal grabs the hand and pins it to the counter

She traps her with her body, and moves to clean the blood off the small wound with her index before Regina can heal it – I would apologize, but you know it would be dishonest – she chuckles at Regina’s glare and takes her finger in her mouth, chasing it with the bloody tip of the knife – I haven’t forgotten the taste – she whispers by Regina’s ear

- Maleficent. – She rushes out almost angrily and without breath, but she also can’t muster the strength to move away when the blonde dips to lay an open-mouthed kiss over the still-bleeding wound, and starts moving towards her neck, attention now precariously split between the kisses and the knife that returns to her forearm and starts tracing the veins there. Regina stifles her moan and closes her eyes, fist closing over the handle of her own knife with a white-knuckle grip – We don’t have time for this, what are you doing?

- Yes! What on god’s green fucking earth are you doing? – Emma’s voice rings from above the music and Mal snaps up from her second pass by the wound as Regina startles and gets cut, again. They used to be better at this, no one would ever get hurt until way into upper thighs territory when you get just plain jumpy. Emma drops her cargo of dinner buns Luke so graciously bakes them every time they have that family dinner – What the fuck?

- Miss Swan, how did you get in here? – Regina tries to recover, finally reaching for the paper towel roll and stepping from inside Mal’s arms
- Henry opened the door. Henry is in the living room and you’re in here what? Sucking the blood out of her shoulders? – Mal licks the knife clean again with a filthy look Regina’s way and ignores the question turning towards her onion and Emma shouts – Don’t keep chopping the fucking onions with your kink knife! Oh my god! What the fuck you guys? Seriously – She’s not even angry, her face is split in two by a shit-eating grin – how does it even work? Eating raw meat evolves into sucking blood out of open wounds to get off? Holy shit what were Red and Lily doing?

- Miss Swan! – Regina booms and she has a knife in her hand pointed Emma’s way, and as someone Regina’s tried to kill… she should be more frightened

She raises both her hands in surrender and laughs – Oh come on! I have to kinkshame a little! Like, what the fuck?!

- Leave before I-

- Well she’s only curious, dear – Mal chuckles from her spot and rolls the knife in her hand to point it Emma’s way too – Tell me princess, have you ever been tied up in bed? – she uses her hip to push herself off the counter and takes a few steps to where Emma stands by the island

Regina rolls her eyes and tries to act like whatever is unfolding isn’t strange by returning to her chopping, they won’t have dinner on time otherwise. Emma hopes for a hidden camera or even Lily walking down so she can experience this shit with someone but she can only shrug at Mal – a little I guess… I don’t even know what you must call tied up after this shit

Mal smiles beatifically - Let’s say it was sufficient, it felt precarious right? Made you more aware of the situation in a way - she’s all but looming over Emma by then and she’s making no move to bend down even a little – but you can still move, trash around, in a bit you forget about the pain in the bindings and focus on the pleasure

Emma looks up at Mal and scrambles for a joke - Boy you are tall tall. Regina must climb you like a squirrel going up a tree – who doesn’t even acknowledge them, stomping on a couple avocados with a heavy rock that looks like it came from outside and hoping she’s not blushing

Though she turns when Emma takes one sharp breath and Mal lowers her voice – You can’t move if you have a knife to the carotid though, and how could you ever forget it’s there? Go on and swallow to undo the knot in your throat – Emma does as asked and the knife presses onto her skin some more, Mal tuts – carefully Emma, you don’t want to bleed out. The minute you lose track of where it is, it finds a way to remind you.

Regina! – Emma manages to get that out from behind gritted teeth and without moving her lips, only her chest heaving. Well, more like Regina manages to interpret her name out of the harsh rush of air out of Emma’s mouth.

Mal, enough – she lets out admonishingly, but continues with her guacamole

The dragon smirks for Emma’s benefit only – It is simply a little demonstration, educational really – she tips the knife and starts moving it slowly towards Emma’s breastbone, all the way to the collar of her t-shirt to drag it down a bit, she keeps it there as she starts circling – You see, not only are you still, you’re aware of everything that’s touching your body, specially the ones light enough they could be anything else, the hair by your face, the sleeve of your shirt, my breath on your cheek, that phantom walk of a bug by your ankle maybe – suddenly and without warning she rakes a fingernail just under the sleeve in question and Emma jumps forward, practice helps Mal remove the knife quickly enough though and she uses the free hand to hold her back by the nape of her
-Jesus fuck! - but there’s no peace, she startles again as the knife returns to her neck, flat on its side and lifting her chin – this is really like borderline into crazy territory

Mal let’s out a hum by her ear, way to low for her, she must be leaning down but Emma’s kinda scared to check. She feels the warmth retreat just a bit but the voice is still very close - Yes, it makes it all the sweeter, the taboo of it – she eases her grip with chuckle and tosses the knife towards the sink – Let me know if you want an extended lesson. I might have a dagger with your name on it.

Regina huffs – I am standing right here.

Mal refuses to step back from her, fingers drumming by her pulse point even – So? You have exclusive rights to the princess here? I say we both do our very best to seduce her and when she finally bites, maybe I’ll find it in my heart to share.

On one hand Emma is trying to remember when, if she had ever come closer than hand shake distance to Maleficent, on the other, she was so warm. It’s like standing by a cozy fire on winter. Lily wasn’t that nice to stand next to in homoerotic tension.

Regina laughs as she motions between them – There’s no variety to gain here. Whatever do I do with two of you?

Again, Emma’s soul kinda jumps out of her body when Mal reaches up to tuck a curl behind her ear, making her tilt her head to a side as Mal lowers her hand - She dyes her hair, I’m sure we will see proof the night in question.

It definitely breaks their burgeoning romance, ruined before it had the opportunity to be something good. Emma steps forward to be able to half turn and point angrily up at Mal’s dumb smirk – No I don’t! The carpet matches the drapes, okay?

Mal hums, deriving meaning out of context surely and still giving her the exact same look she’d given the knife with Regina’s blood on it – And I’m supposed to take your word for it? Strip and I will check thoroughly

Regina laughs again and Emma sees the fool, the absolute buffoon she’s been, she has been played, bamboozled, made uncomfortable until Regina got over her embarrassment about being caught mid twilight kink. She takes one bun out of the basket and jams another accusatory finger Mal’s way - I am friends with your daughter, how dare you? I’m telling the school counselor you tried to touch me in my private areas – she stomps right out of that kitchen eating her bread and sweating just enough she can say it was just a lot of stove tops in use in there
This is you having the nerve?

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Some puppy police force TV show has become Drazenko’s preferred form of entertainment and when he becomes unbearable it is the only thing that can revert him to his agreeable self, it mesmerizes him to the point all magic, fire and any other kind of outburst stop and he stays human for long periods of time, sometimes the sound or sight of it triggers transformation even. It is remarkable.

He stomps a tiny foot on each of Mal’s legs to the beat of the theme song and she smiles at his antics as she holds him by the waist with one hand and combs through his dark curls with the other to reorganize it after his rubbing against her front. He drops to his sitting position as soon as the tune is over and leans comfortably against his Mal-shaped seat again, he often clutches a crocodile plushie bestowed upon him by Emma Swan, miraculously it escapes his wrath when in dragon form, only so it can be squeezed and stretched mercilessly when he turns human. There’s a method to his madness. Mal hands him his toy and he begins absentmindedly trying to rip its head off as the show goes on but his peace lasts only a moment because Lily comes to sit by them in the couch, dropping herself down like a sack of dead weight

He turns to her for a swift moment – What? What’s up dude? – Not one for baby talk. They stare at each other. He thinks she’s Regina for a moment, Mal’s sure of that. His eyes start going back and forth every time the two of them stand close by; but then his other senses catch up and he turns back to the TV – We need to stop it with the paw patrol or he’s gonna be all ‘Oh I wanna be a cop’

- What’s wrong with police officers?

Lily turns to her with a wrinkle on top of her nose – Ugh mom, you were a Disney villain, I was so excited for that and look at you. – She shakes her head – You know who’s a cop? Emma. Do you want him to end up like Emma?

Mal chuckles, truth is Emma Swan isn’t all that bad, really, but whoever says it first inside the house will never live it down. So, she rolls her eyes and continues to comb through Draz’ hair – We will start showing him other shows as soon as he loses a bit of interest

Lily gets more comfortable and reaches for her phone inside her pocket – Maybe I’ll just tell on you and Mom will make you stop with the Netflix completely. - Her scrolling now tinted with a menacing undertone

- You wouldn’t dare.

Lily laughs – She at least tries with the storybooks before letting him watch the show. – Regina is less indulgent, but how vile of Lily to pick and choose when she dislikes it, food and drinks, and when she enjoys it, her brother’s TV habits. Before Mal can say anything though Lily turns her phone her mother's way showing her a gym video – Look! I’m benching like two hundred already, but only like five reps with good form.

Mal understands none of that, but it seems Lily’s sat down to make small talk? Mal smiles at her with an encouraging nod and it propels her forward, she sits up and shuffles closer, now zooming on a frame in the video – I’m thinking of asking Jenna out – She points - Her.
Mal squints – Do you have any more footage? – It's the right question to ask, in a matter of seconds she changes apps and has hundreds of pictures at her disposal. It seems like she knows where she is going too because she scrolls at a speed that won’t let the pictures show until she has the one she wants to show Mal first. It’s another one of the gym pictures, she stands by the weights with a big grin and Mal nods again – Very impressive. Is she a regular woman? No magic, no shape-shifting…? - She's beautiful, and seemingly very strong, well adjusted with friends and family by the look of the rest of her pictures

Lily lets out a burst of warm air from her nostrils amused, and Draz turns around to glare at her when it tickles him. She growls at him playfully and Mal turns his face back to the TV, pinching his cheek as she does. Lily goes for a more candid action photograph where she is with a couple of big men. Mal recognizes one – Is she one of Regina’s soldiers? I can’t stand them.

- They’re all super nice to us though – Lily goes back on her app and scrolls some more

- Too nice – Lily frowns and Mal chips in – They are fervent to the point of being perturbing. And she was sleeping with a few too.

- No fucking way – She looks up from her phone, gaping – Which ones? Shit, do I even wanna know?

Mal shushes Lily as she looks down, pondering if she wants the sordid details, Mal would disappoint anyways – I don’t know which ones exactly. But I am sure.

- God. You’re just jealous because they keep opening doors for her and reaching to kiss her hand and shit, aren’t you? – she laughs and goes back to her browsing – Well Jenna’s not one of mom’s groupies, she’s a smith.

She has a video to prove it too, where she’s submerging a red hot iron into a small container and the steam rises promptly, the fire of the forge makes the sweat on her skin glisten, each muscle on her arm tense as she retrieves the pointed metal from the pit – Well, no one can accuse you of bad taste. I would try myself if I wasn’t married.

She groans - I’m telling mom

- Aren’t you always?

She pulls a face and lets her weight fall down again, locking the phone screen and lifting her arm to put it behind her head with a sigh, she drops her phone on her chest and tunes into the show for a second – So? She’s cute right? Plus she’s very good at the smith thing and she’s super disciplined with her routine, I mean she’s running to the gym at like six am five days a week and then doing a full set and running back, and she’s been spotting me and being extra nice and we have coffee sometimes but nothing like romantic… you think I got a chance?

- I think anyone would be very lucky to have you.

She rolls her eyes - Don’t give me that shit, mom

Mal will always feel awful about the circumstances that led them where they are, but she’s sure had Regina raised Lily under her militant no swearing around the baby policy she just wouldn’t be as entertaining as she is now – You can’t cheat on your partners. If you feel underwhelmed, end the relationship. – Lily nods one time too many, exasperated – Well then, we are not cowards in this family. If you want her you do your best to have her.

- A’ight. – She drums her fingers on her stomach for a moment – So should I… text her…? Call. I
should call. No. Well… No. I’ll text. – She sits up, grabs the phone and unlocks it, before locking it again – So you think dinner or…?

- Why don’t you ask her tomorrow during your work out together? – Mal smiles at her, keeping her laugh at bay

- Might’ve lost the nerve.

Mal chuckles then – *This* is you having the nerve?

She groans, and drops her forehead on Mal’s shoulder for good measure, back to scrolling aimlessly on the pictures app – I’ve never asked anyone out before, to like… a real fucking date

Mal extricates her arm from under her and uses it to circle her shoulder, it forces her to look up but she doesn’t move away and that’s beyond a win. She passes her fingers through her hair – Perhaps you can make it less of a real date so the jitters won’t show as much. She must like sports as you do, a screen in the middle means you can leave silences be every once in a while.

She seems to mull that over – What was your first date with mom like? - They didn’t have any screens back there

- No. - Mal laughs at the sheer absurdity of that question- At first I would just sit and gaze deeply into the side of her head trying to understand how her mind worked and then turn around hastily when she glanced at me to ask why I was so quiet. It was magical. Then we moved onto exchanging painfully edited correspondence or appearing ominously in each other’s residence and going back and forth with pleasantries in a charged environment, if often resulted in a tidbit of information that changed our outlook of each other in an earth-shattering manner. Then I kissed her and we just kept doing that, and here you two are! – she bounces Draz on her legs and he clutches at his toy when he sees his stability threatened

- What?

- Yes we were deeply in love by the time the cutesy activities rolled around. I apologize, – she drops her hand on Lily’s shoulder and jostles her too – you *are* showing a lot of nerve! I say you call her and let her know we have all kinds of sports subscriptions and she should come by to watch a game of a sport of her election.

Lily sighs, opening the messages app now and letting her finger hover over the contact in question

- You had it way too easy.

She looks down at her daughter with her eyebrows raised - There was a lot of unpleasant situations peppered before, in between and after the cutesy activities. A lot. We were going through quite a lot of strain around that time in our lives.

- You still married her though, so how bad can it have been? – She opens the conversation and manages to type up a hi, like that, not capitalization or punctuation. Whatever happened to writing a letter three times until the proper wording came to you?

Mal sits back more comfortably and makes sure to hold onto both of them so they’ll follow – Well then, that’s hope! It matters not how horribly you botch this first attempt, if you’re meant to be you’ll marry her in four decades.

Lily laughs at that as she types something and gets a quick response, the hardest step is the first… hundred or so, but still she manages. The TV however stops and asks them if they’re still watching and she snatches the controller from besides Mal’s thigh real quick and lets it know they are *not*
watching and looks for something else quickly as Drazenko turns around in a whirlwind to see the source of the magic changing the show. She keeps on going – What dude? You gonna cry? – he swings the crocodile at her and she tugs at it – we take turns here. You’re lucky Henry is at school, he would demolish you to get at the TV. – she pokes his tummy with the remote, and he breathes fire at her as he shouts and Mal pulls her away just in time, patting at where her jacket caught fire just a tad – Oh what a baby. Screw you dude, we’re watching cooler cartoons now.

Lily releases the plushie so he can turn back to the TV moodily squirming on Mal’s lap as she holds him in place, and Lily hides the remote under a cushion even to stop her from giving him his paw patrol again, but she settles back down against Mal who glances at her out of the corner of her eye. Unlike Regina she’d never been told I love you by her, and hard as it was she’d been trying to not let it get to her or bring it up at all, it is a matter of Lily feeling like saying it in the moment after all. But the fact that she would choose to sit there with her and her brother and lean against her as they watched cartoons designed for infants, share about her feelings for this woman, it spoke volumes.

Mal tamps down the quiver in her voice, hopefully - What did she say?

- We’ll catch the playoffs at a bar. I can’t invite her here, you people are fucking insane.

Well, just because they’re sharing a moment doesn’t mean she’s not Lily. Still, Mal was more than glad to act as furniture for her children, plural, as Dora the Explorer tried and failed to teach them all Spanish.

Chapter End Notes

We've hit 60! I feel like 60 is... a lot.

If you're not one of the ones that started reading way back and you sat there and saw 60 chapters in an unfinished work for a show that's not even airing anymore, and thought hey why the fuck not? and started reading AND made it all the way here, I respect you. And I appreciate you.

To all of you that have been reading from the start and keep dropping comments, I love you guys, you keep me going.
Did she do that to you?

- Regina you have too many social engagements – Mal looks down at the back of her wife’s head. At least she doesn’t insist on driving places and does her the favor of transporting them outside Emma’s door. Draz tilts his head at her over his other mother’s shoulder and she crosses her eyes at him, making him giggle – I don’t see why we couldn’t skip this one. – We being the baby that was close to falling asleep and the mother that trailed after him all day.

- Emma would never shut up about it. It’s momentous for her, acting her age. – Regina rings the doorbell with no more discussion about it and Mal sighs behind her and fixes her hair a bit, it hadn’t been a priority and Regina had just waltzed into the house at 8 at night and told her Emma was having a house-warming and they were expected. Was she underdressed? Not really, but was she going to start holding herself to the standards the likes of Emma Swan and the local Baker hold themselves to? Absolutely not.

Henry opens for them, soirée in full swing behind him, a big grin on his face and a baby in his arms. He doesn’t say much past exchanging his uncle for his brother with Regina when he sees the bracelet in his Draz’s wrist, he doesn’t get to hold him for long when he’s not wearing it. Regina, still somehow at war with herself to quash her discomfort at seeing him play the dutiful Charming son smiles at him and even coos at Neal, mollified. He does it less often the more time passes really, and some afternoons helping Emma move their stuff from the old apartment to this one and planning a party are justified. But still he opens the door and retreats inside like they’re any other visitors and it stings just a bit regardless of that fact.

In a sudden bout of common understanding they settle on a corner to avoid the grunt of the socializing with matching glasses of bad wine, but the constituents have different ideas. Regina Mills’ rule over Storybrooke is beyond thorough, no interim mayor has ever been able to get even close to her efficiency and it is showing once again now that’s she’s back in the office after mildly neglecting her job for months. Between the wedding and the honeymoon and Christmas and maternity leave, it’s been months in which she hasn’t been as focused as she usually is, and it shows in the state of things. But fixing that has meant four days she’s come home to a sleeping baby and a dozing wife, and both Henry and Lily sometimes there sometimes not. She has a family! And she doesn’t quite like bureaucracy keeping her hostage and away from them.

Mal drags a couple of stools over and in the second she’s gone Regina’s overtaken by a small rotating crowd. It’s remarkable seeing the politician in Regina come out even if she doesn’t want it to, these people seemingly lost all fear of god and like to come up with menial prompts and questions and she won’t outright get rid of them. Mal doesn’t understand how they can’t see her strain to bear with them, or if they do how they can risk their lives talking to Regina when she’s straining. But remarkable doesn’t mean bearable and smiling and nodding at these people, who aren’t even the quota of friends that comes with Regina, is a waste of Mal’s time when she could be at home doing anything else or just resting.

She had every intention to talk to Mal over their glasses of wine, but the idiots in town can’t monopolize her entire night, probably. At least the weekend is coming, and she’ll give the people of Storybrooke only half her Saturday to get some paperwork done from her home office, Regina thinks as she downs her glass of wine and spots the bottle across the room to be able to summon it. No sooner has the bottle materialized in her hand Mal tuts – You have to get us home soon. Don’t go messing up the navigation system now.

- I am perfectly capable of regulating myself – she says as she pours her glass, tall.
Mal hums from behind her and reaches for the bottle to pour the rest of it in her own, unfinished cup – Soon was the part you needed to reply to.

Lily appears an hour later, her previous whereabouts unknown, and her first act is looking frantically around until she spots them and shuffles up to them, looking over her shoulder the entire time – Jenna is here, no weird shit… actually, we are not at meeting the parents so like don’t… meet her– No hello, no explanation.

The woman in question comes in and glances around much more calmly and Lily turns hastily, she moves to retreat, and Regina laughs sardonically, few more wine glasses in her system by now – So you invited a woman who you’ve been in one date with to an event both your parents would attend, hoping we just won’t meet?

- Swan invited her!-

Mal drawls, tired and miserable and keeping an eye on her other child from afar - You’ve been trapped into introducing your girlfriend to us then?

Lily lets out the longest of shushes at them - She’s not my girlfriend! – The woman in question has long gone to mingle, in her hands what is obviously a vase poorly wrapped. Regina keeps her eyes on her, she’s perfectly fine she supposes, must definitely be somewhere in her 20s though, hopefully upper half.

- Careful dear or your mother might take a go at her.

Mal turns to Regina with a raised eyebrow, her tone could’ve been playful at the very least to spice up this dreadful evening, but she chose poisonous instead. She turns then to Lily with dawning understanding – So when you say you’ll tattle, you fully intend to tattle.

Lily looks between them – I’m- I Just- What? Why? It was a funny joke I just... you know. What the fuck is wrong right now? Who has the baby?

Neal has the baby, well they have each other. Playing on a rug in plain view with a couple other babies. Across the room Snow glances their way and lifts one hand in a feeble wave and Regina glowers at her, daring her to go try to pick him up probably. Mal bodily turns to Regina with a frown, trying to block Lily’s view – Are you angry for some unfathomable reason?

She laughs - Is that the best excuse to leave you can come up with on the fly?

Mal would love to say yes just to rile her up some more, it’s a tug and don’t release when they both get like that. She doesn’t get to though, because Jenna finds them and sidles up to Lily with a smile, introduces herself even, when their daughter retreats into her usual bundle of nerves – Madam Mayor, Mrs…. Mills? – she nods at them both and recovers quickly - Jenna Smith.

- Maleficent is just fine, dear. – She rolls a hand and reaches for Lily’s drink in her hands.

- Not the daughter of Alastair the Smith? Is it you who closed a perfectly profitable electronic store to continue producing swords? - The woman nods and Regina chuckles with a gesture in Luke’s general direction looking at Lily again – I thought you hated literal last names. – Lily glares at her mother

- Were you not who named them? – Mal points out
The curse had a sense of humor independent to mine. – Yes, lighter.

The woman looks between them, bewildered – I don’t mind. Literal and to the point. I was in training in the Enchanted Forest, my father had put a lot of effort into me. I thought: why I should continue selling phones when people can drive out of town to buy them now?

- And swords have to be profitable, right? – Lily finds her voice again and powers through the word profitable to cut the tension

Jenna smiles at her, nodding – They’re practically luxury items. I make all sorts of weaponry really, and I even ship out of town, got a few thousand Instagram followers. I’m doing fine. If you ever need anything, let me know.

Regina gives her a hollow grin, done with the interaction for the night. In any other day she’d probably be nice enough to charm all information out of the woman, she’s learned to catch the flies with honey or whatever, when she has the patience, but what are the odds Lily and her will last long enough it’s necessary to get to know her? For tonight, she wants her gone. - Your father fled with you and the little two miscreants on tow. I don’t think he’d be fond of you working for the enemy.

- Lily does need a sword, though – Mal cuts in because really, too much open hostility this early might cost Lily whatever she’s trying to build here, and to poke at Regina some more, of course.

- I need a sword? – but their daughter won’t let herself be helped

Mal looks at her briefly, baffled by the sheer confusion, how can she be related to either of them sometimes she wonders - Yes, of course. You are already very gifted with a sword. You should show your friend – Lily’s mouth opens slightly in understanding and Mal eases her gaze and turns back to the smith - Gilded family crest on the hilt and I’m thinking dragon carved on the blade? Bit of flame towards the tip even.

Lily scratches at her hairline - We have a family crest? -

But Jenna smiles up at Mal, with all her teeth– That sounds amazing. Can you draw? If not, one of the miscreants does design for me. – Mal doesn’t quite understand and Jenna chuckles at her – I have twin teenage brothers. One of them draws and the other just, he’s a valued member of the family.

- You have siblings? – Lily pipes up by their side and Jenna’s smile carries to her – That’s cool. Me too.

Christ. Mal sighs - Dear you’re a predator, don’t embarrass yourself. – Jenna laughs a bit and it is absolutely the wrong move because Lily harrumphs and Regina is fuming by her side. Mal rolls her eyes – We will find that family crest for you, come by whenever to settle the matter.

- I will. – She nods again, Regina realizes. And she’s not simpleminded at all but really, a smith? It’s like they were granted the gift of literacy and tossed it in the trash as soon as the curse broke. – I’ll… go get a drink. It was very nice to meet you. – She looks at them both and then lands on Lily with a lingering smile and turns around and leaves, clearly not completely at ease. Small mercies.

- So now we’re commissioning a sword and you’ve invited her to our house – Regina looks up at her and Mal looks right down

- Something had to salvage that pitiful conversation. - For one second Lily considers staying, maybe even mediating. But she could also go play with the baby and replay her excruciatingly awkward contributions of the night on a loop on her mind, so really, it’s a no brainer. She shuffles
away quietly as Regina and Mal continue their squabble but keeps an ear out. Who’s gonna know? Mal snatches the wine cup out of Regina’s hand – What has you like this? We could have done this at home, but the one free second you decide to grant me in a week you use to drag me here and sit me through your meandering conversations with whomever, for what? Why?

- I have a job to get to, surely you understand the concept of a job even if it goes against your entire philosophy of life. – she motions around with her hands – Excuse me for dragging you here, I must’ve known you’d rather do nothing, forgive me for disturbing you.

- Regina I am exhausted. Our son is a handful, I love taking care of him but this is around the time where he finally peters out for the night and I can as well, and you’ve disturbed that for this pointless party. Your hopeless pet of a friend hasn’t even realized you’re here. I’m leaving. You deal with him after the cocoa Henry just slipped him.

Mal turns without any more to the argument and Regina stares in shock at her as she reaches the door and leaves, not coming back apparently. She grinds her teeth and swears at herself for how the entire night went - God, where the fuck is Emma Swan when you need to see her?

Emma Swan was much too busy trying to host her first medium size gathering but with Mal gone, Lily and Henry entertained and the townspeople’s grievances aired early she’s free to sit on the couch she’d bought them as a house-warming gift with Draz in her arms, dozing in and out of consciousness even after the cocoa. It’s a small revelation every time, looking at him and Lily. Regina twirls one of his curls between her index and thumb, the hair hers and her father’s before her, and ghosts a finger over his nose, Cora’s nose… she sighs and focuses on his steady breathing. He doesn’t sleep in his human form, bracelet or not, never anything but a nap in the car. Maybe he’s gaining control. And she’s missed the week of his life in which he’s done it. Henry was a daily visitor in the mayor’s office but she doesn’t have the excuse of being a single mother anymore.

It must be another hour later, when Lily’s disengages herself from her date and comes sit with them with a tentative look on her face, like she’s waiting for Regina to chew her out for something she hasn’t done yet. It breaks her heart to see her tip toe around her like that. She tries for a smile – Sweetheart will you get us home? I seem to be tipsier than expected.

- I brought my bike… should I borrow a car? – she remembers herself – No wait, you mean disappear. Shit, sorry. – She looks downright miserable for a second there as she cringes

Regina disentangles a hand from the baby and rubs her arm – It’s fine dear. To the attic, please. - She hasn’t been up there in years but maybe taking down some of Henry’s old things is safe now that Draz seems to be able to stay human… there must be a crib up there, a few beanies with animal ears on it. – Think of your room, just a bit higher.

- There’s stuff in the attic? – She makes a face, but she still grabs the hand Regina extends her way and helps her stand, a billowing cloud of ash-laden smoke engulfing them as they change locations without as much of a goodbye to the hosts.

Regina doesn’t register passing the sleeping baby to Lily, too busy glancing at the boxes upon boxes of stuff around them. She does however see her daughter sit gingerly on the floor holding onto the charge in her arms, a dust cloud engulfing her. She waves a hand and it blows away, Regina smiles – Practical magic?

Lily glances at her hand with a frown – oh shit, am I getting used to this ‘superpowers’ thing? –
Regina chuckles her way and picks up a little box from a bigger one without saying much, Lily frowns – You good? You and mom looked like you were getting into it... and now we’re in the dusty attic full of stuff no one’s ever mentioned.

She lifts one of the Henry mementos from inside the box and waves it around - Didn’t throw away a single toy. One of these boxes has an unassembled crib we can get in a regular bedroom for Draz…

Lily looks around again – Kids need a lot of stuff huh?

Regina lets out a deep sigh and reaches for a dusty book in bright colors – I wanted him to have everything…

And the kid does have everything, he has more shit he knows what to do with if Emma’s aggrieved texts are anything to go by, there are more boxes of Henry’s shit than there are of hers and he doesn’t even live there really. Why does Regina look so fucked up about that right now? – I mean I’m all for recycling. I’m sure Draz won’t mind if he has second hand stuff, who’s gonna tell him? You’ll save some cash. – not that she gives a fuck judging by the way they grocery shop in that house – plus he doesn’t care about furniture all he does is fling himself off it and have mom chase him up and down the house. She must be wiped the fuck out.

Regina smiles, but it seems sad - I should have been around to help her. And Lily, I am sorry for how I acted earlier tonight… It’s been an awful week… and…- she trails off

Lily frowns - You’re a god tier mom, mom. It’s cool. We get it. You need to work.

She shakes her head – I don’t, not really – well, maybe she’s rich but… - I convince myself that the town needs me, but they will get by with any other mayor. I’m just clinging to power for power’s sake and ignoring my children’s needs like… like mother.

-Hey, chill. It’s not like that – Past the name and the fact that she was apparently hell Lily doesn’t know much of Cora, but Regina is not even close to hell so whatever the comparison here is, it’s way off.

Still, Regina is looking off at the small window, the moonlight coming in, hand over her mouth and Lily frowns as she watches her speak as if without realizing – It’s mother’s birthday today. By my count. – It’s what she meant to clarify earlier, but really, isn’t it a little late to keep justifying her awful behavior on Cora’s effect on her? She wonders if Zelena knows, if she should have told her.

- Did she do that to you? Your lip – She’s been grazing the scar there with her fingers like a memento for a few minutes now. Lily’s hold on the baby shifts and she presses him closer to her body to the point he changes position, nuzzling onto her chest.

Regina snatches her arm down – Yes. Magic couldn’t quite mend me that time. It’s fine. – she beat her up! Of all the things that moms could do to kids, working too hard for a week doesn’t even register in the scale against beating them up hard enough to leave scars.

Back when she spent that first night with Henry, Regina had some kind of epiphany masked in a panic attack: not only had she lived a nightmare under Cora Mills, she had become one. She swore to ask herself at every moment what Cora would do so she could then do the exact opposite and thus ensure the exact opposite outcome: a happy, well-adjusted child who would love her. And at the end she still ended up trying to gaslight her son into thinking he was crazy.
It makes her wonder sometimes if she’s really able of change, not even when trying her hardest to be vigilant and in a world that only required of her to care for Henry she managed to be a good mother. And even now that she’s lauded as one of the ‘good guys’, some days her mood rears up and she becomes that woman she knew decades ago, unfit to parent or love. It terrifies her how close she is under the new and improved surface, a bad week and a meaningless number in a calendar and she becomes unhinged, makes her child scared to approach her. Lily and Draz were coming into her life when she’s allegedly at her best, when she has a Maleficent also in her best shape as a loving partner, and there are other people to provide her comfort as well, and she still can’t shake Cora Mills from under her skin?

Regina’s so perfect most of the time that watching her all disconnected and stroking an old teddy bear is almost eerie, and Lily swallows enough of her own discomfort and her own history to try and cheer her up - Mom, you had a shitty week but this place is better with you in charge, and Henry and Draz need a good town to live in. I don’t know a lot about your mother but Jesus Christ you can’t even try to compare to that shitshow. These two kids lucked out big time. – She lifts her brother in her arms just a bit and smiles as well as she manages to when feelings get involved.

The unsaid is clear and Regina turns back to Lily, whose childhood is also something better left undisussed. She will have children eventually if Mal’s assessment of every dragon needing a small army is correct, and odds are those too will come out with trace amounts of Cora Mills in their face. Do they inherit anything else? Is it diluted? Can it be rid of completely?

She’s seen a few alcoholics swear by their methods of one day at a time, and unlike them a day of being awful doesn’t send her life into a spiral if she manages to rear it back in. So, she takes one deep breath and shakes her head to clear it, it must be well past midnight so it must be well past the fateful date – Well, enough of that. – she stands and moves for another box down by the very back of the small space above their house, back to her usual self just like that - How are you dear? I’ve barely seen you all week and Mal’s been busy with the baby…

- I’m a grown ass woman, I don’t need babysitting. I shouldn’t even live here with you guys to be honest. – she takes the cue, and blows away some new dust Regina’s stirring up as a box cutter materializes in her hands and she starts opening up a big box.

Regina chuckles – Eager to sneak your new girlfriend into your room, are you? She huffs - She’s not my girlfriend!

Eventually she finds the box, the white crib had been turned into bits and pieces by Graham’s hands, who also stored them in the box and carried it up the frail attic stars jovially. He’d bellowed ‘You can’t throw it away. Maybe you’ll get another use out of it!’ after Henry had become too much of a big boy to bear it. They were sleeping together regularly those days, and he’d often glance at her with a kind of hunger unrelated to that fact, hunger she couldn’t quite place on a man without a heart in his chest. So she told him to step back, just until the curse would reset his indifference and he could forget all about second uses of cribs. And then she crushed his heart to dust a decade after.

The box floats down before them and Lily takes one look of the stairs and transports them down as well. Box following and dropping itself by the door to the one remaining bedroom upstairs. They’d have a full house when they finished that nursery. Regina smiles tiredly at Lily as they stop by her room – Did you have dinner?

She chuckles as she passes her brother and nods clutching at her knob with her free hand – It’s like
2 AM, if I didn’t I’m not gonna- She opens her door with a last amused smirk and turns back - Hey really, you’re good.

Regina smiles at her and glances down at the sleeping bundle of a baby, respectful of his dragon schedule like they didn’t think he would be - Thank you dear. I’m sorry about today. – Lily’s parting gift is an eye roll and Regina lets her go with a small wave.

In her room she settles Draz down by Maleficent’s side, noticing every pillow thrown from the bed with various degrees of force and the woman sleeping face down, covered up to her ears. Regina manages her own magic to change into sleepwear, sitting on his other side after, debating whether her make up was significant enough to go grab a wipe but she catches a stray curl with her adjusting and the woman stirs, turning onto her side and molding to the baby by her. She wakes up and for a blissful second, she smiles up and Regina smiles down at her but then Mal sobers up a tad and Regina sighs - I’m awful, I’m sorry.

Mal sees something else under all that – What was it then? You look truly dreadful. It can’t be politics. Rumple? Daniel? Snow? Cora? Leopold?

She huffs – Cora. It was her birthday.

Mal stretches and removes the duvet from above, careful to settle their son right back down against her side. She motions for Regina to get under it before letting it fall back down over them – A star is born – is all she drawls sarcastically for a moment, before she reaches for Regina’s hand and lets out a yawn – Are you unwell?

- I am…- that trails off into nothing and Mal blinks with the patience of a monk

- You’re a brat. Every few months I forget and you just like to remind me. It’s fine. – Mal gives her a small smile and Regina does her best to blink away tears but one of them slips out of the corner of her eye and down towards the bed before Mal stops it with her thumb – Perhaps eventually it’ll stop hurting this much, but until then I’d rather you let it out than take it out on us.

- You shouldn’t have had children with me. I’m a monster. Some days it shows more clearly than others.

- What? – short of steamrolling over Draz she can’t do anything to get closer so she drops Regina’s hand to drag her closer by the waist, rucking up every bit of fabric in between them – Regina you are kind and loving, overwhelmingly so that no matter how hard she tried Cora couldn’t beat it out of you. Sure, you lose yourself a little when you’re hurting, everyone does, we just need to keep you from hurting in the first place. And you are not like her, do you think Cora would have shown up for Emma’s little self-indulgent party out of friendship? Do you think I would’ve left you alone with our pack of annoying, defenseless spawn tonight if you were anything like her?

- I… miss her. – It’s said with an overwhelming shame, she turns away from Mal’s gaze and buries her face on the mattress under her

- Oh, my love. – Regina’s fight only slows down the tears but they still fall and Mal does her best to catch them all – You miss what she could’ve been with her heart on her chest, and mourning that lost opportunity is all right. But you yearn for a mother, not for Cora and what she did to you.

- But I-

Mal interrupts the repeated apology - You haven’t wronged us in any significant way, whatever you believe you did, forgive yourself.
I’ve been so absent lately… I’m sorry. I’m sorry for not asking how it’s been and making you go there tonight, and leaving you alone here with Draz day in and day out.

Mal sighs and takes Regina’s hand again, whatever anger she had at all that had been pushed aside in the face of all this, but it was still there she supposes, just infinitesimally small when compared to the anger that burns through her at the thought of Cora. More than once she’d asked for Regina’s permission to help get rid of her, but the damage was done and killing her, although cathartic for Mal, wouldn’t have fixed The Evil Queen’s broken childhood. She brings the hand up to circle their son’s small frame and releases it with a brush of her thumb – It’s fine, Regina. Just get back to your usual self, I need you in your best shape because everything I do for these children I learn from you.

Lily’s been fighting her body to keep herself from eavesdropping, but Regina was obviously too distressed to remember to cast the silencing charm and it was her who’d once told her having a family meant people knowing too much of your life. She doesn’t have the will to keep herself from hearing tidbits of the backstory that makes her parents who they are, not after seeing such a jarring moment u in the attic. But at last, it seems like they’re going to sleep, the ragged breath Regina lets out letting her know she’s tamping down her crying like Lily herself has often done. Mal reassures her once more and they fall quiet, and Lily grabs her phone from besides her pillow, eyes protesting and adjusting in less than a second, and opens her messages picking out Emma, she types quickly ‘Who’s Daniel?’

‘Regina’s Daniel?’ is the first text she gets back, after she doesn’t answer anything Emma texts again ‘her first bf, my mom told on them and Cora killed him bc he was a servant’

Jesus Christ what was wrong with her grandmother? She takes a minute to process that one and remembers the other one. ‘ok so who the fuck is Leopold?’

’yikes’ is what she gets back.
You have an hour to pack, any later they don’t let us in.

Maleficent? – Regina calls for her as she rifles through her bag for the car keys, she could’ve swore she had them but she had gone out to open the trunk and had to come back inside

Behind her the woman huffs – Gods, are you filing for divorce as well?

She lets out a tired sigh and Lily flies by them carrying much more than it’s safe to, even if she can physically do it. It agitates Regina even more – Dearest wife, light of my life and air in my lungs, have you seen my keys?

She’d seen them on their regular spot in the bowl earlier but it is a matter of principle, she will not be called Maleficent in her own home unless it is under completely different circumstances – Have you checked the bowl? – it is also a matter of giving Henry time to change his brother out of the shirt he threw juice at, the teenager being the one throwing the juice at the baby in this case

- Of course I checked the bowl! – Regina says wondering if she indeed checked the bowl

- Darling, did you check the bowl?

- I checked the bowl – Regina affirms, still wondering

- But did you really?

- Just tell me if they’re in the bowl and spare me the agony – she rolls her eyes when Mal nods, and drops her bag from the night before right in the corner where she’d left it, dodging Mal on her way towards the foyer and resorting to a bellow – Okay we’re leaving! Henry, last call. – It’s one of her lowest moments.

Over them Henry’s heavy footsteps become chaotic and Mal chuckles as she hoists hers and Regina’s bags, Draz’ as well since she’s at it. They make it all the way to the foyer in peace, and Lily reaches for the door knob under her cargo but the next thing she knows she’s pinned between the wall and the mountain of stuff she’d decided to carry, the crash making an ungodly sound as everything falls and the door bounces back on its hinges, dented and splintered where Lily’s arm had pushed out to stop it

Regina rushes towards her as Mal drops her own charges to pull the door open and see whoever it was that almost stamped her daughter onto their house. She finds Emma panting, clearly not aware of what she just did -Monster Alert! –

She moves to get inside again and Mal stops her by the collar of her jacket – You need to learn how to knock.

She sputters - Didn’t you hear me?! Monster! – She yanks Mal’s hand off her and takes one steeling breath when the dragon eyes her coldly from above. Regina’s more concerned with fixing the door and removing the splinters from Lily’s skin – Regina!

She gets around the first dragon and the second one reaches for her collar too. Lily growls her way - You almost fucking killed me! –

It’s only when Henry finally reaches the commotion, jumping over the debris with his brother held tight, that Emma sees the state of the foyer and the dent on the door – Oh shi—I’m sorry! But there’s this huge snake!! Red is fighting it. Let’s go! - Regina’s hand remains squarely on Lily’s
shoulder and Emma groans – Dude! You’re fine! You split the goddamn door. Let’s go!

With a collective sigh they move over the mess on the floor and down the stone path. Henry confused as to whether he is allowed to go see the two beasts fighting. It’s the good thing about siblings, his mom has way too much on her plate to always remember him now.

She finally stops fussing over Lily and turns to Mal as they reach the car – No killing.

She stops in her tracks - Oh but what about camping? If we don’t leave soon it’ll be too dark to set up the tents and whatnot.

Regina stops as well, with her hand on the door handle, so close and yet so far away – Since when are you excited about camping?

Lily slinks by them towards her bike - She’s excited about the jeans you’re wearing -

Henry frowns, shudders, covers the baby’s ears – Why don’t we uh, load up the car and then we don’t have to come back?

It’s the last straw for Emma, she stamps her foot down and grabs for both Regina and Mal -

There’s a fucking snake in the middle of town square. Can you all give a shit? – before anyone can answer her a cloud of white sparkly smoke takes the two and a half responsible adults away.

Emma’s poor planning drops them smack in the middle of the aforementioned fight, Regina casually leaning sideways to avoid being hit by Red as the wolf all but flies by them, and Mal stepping in her place to try to detain the snake careening after it. It’s work of a minute, grabbing the huge snake and holding it at arm’s length while Regina manages to cast a binding spell, why it had to be her instead of Emma Swan is beyond her, but when the snake is struggling suspended in midair she spots a familiar quirk of a face muscle and goes closer to have a better look – Jafar?

- From Aladdin?! – Emma asks like it isn’t plausible that Jafar from Aladdin was fighting Little Red Riding Hood on a Friday afternoon

After a few seconds of squinting at him Regina drops him altogether. Emma protests but they watch him land with a thud and swiftly become covered by what look like swirling mauve fabrics, that then disappear and leave a slim, gaunt man before them. He smiles – Maleficent! Such long time! Here in the land without magic?

Emma tries to sneak up on him with her handcuffs and he growls, she draws her gun for good measure and Regina interrupts – Jafar, I’m going to have to restrain you again. For our peace of mind.

- Ah, Majesty. – Finally he turns her way, only to lift his chin at her – Do what you must, but face the consequences.

Mal steps up to him – Don’t make this worse than it is, we have travels to embark on.

He rolls his eyes - Time goes by and yet, this is where we stand. You always take her side.

- She’s my wife so I rather think it is all going according to plan if I do so. – He scoffs at her revelation

Emma clearly gets tired again because she reaches for all three of them, barely managing to lay a
finger on both Mal and Jafar, and in an instant they all land in a cell. Regina promptly walks out –
you couldn’t do that before you dragged me from my home, could you?

- He was a fucking snake. – she says as she ushers Mal out and follows, closing the door on her
way out, she turns towards him with her arms crossed and glares – Ok, go.

- Pardon? – he glances around his humble foot squared and decides he won’t be ever sitting in that
cot, so he looks forward and stays upright

- What do you want? – Mal says as she drags a chair from behind one of the desks and sits. Regina
moves to stand behind her, and Emma holds her ground, so Mal motions her way – This girl here is
the local rule enforcer, you seem to have broken some rules since your arrival.

- I did not. - He huffs - I crossed a portal, was only slithering around. Could only be accused of
lurking, if one wants to find a reason to accuse a perfectly innocent man. And then a wolf attacked
me.

Both Regina and Maleficent turn to Emma – He was a fucking snake! Someone calls 911 and says
there’s a gigantic snake going around, I call our animal defense first. Then I go get you.

- He’s done nothing illegal – Mal concludes and Jafar nods her way genially

Regina chuckles and drops both her hands on her wife’s shoulders - Darling, a large snake in the
middle of town? I would’ve called 911 too.

Emma stirs at being agreed with - And I won’t let him go just like that! Sure, he hasn’t done
anything illegal, but I’m sure he was about to! He’s a villain and he doesn’t even live here – she
turns Regina’s way with a lower voice – also Regina I’ve been trying to talk to you, I was reading
Harry Potter and-

- The point, Miss Swan. – She moves away from Mal’s chair to lean against the unoccupied guest
with her arms crossed

- We should make a log of everyone and their magic powers. Keep track. Can turn into a dragon,
can cast spells, can hypnotize people. All that that. Pictures, names and addresses.

She lifts an eyebrow - A human rights violation for another time.

- Human, though?

Lily catches up to them somehow, with Henry on tow even, baby still in his arms and eyes wide on
all three of them. They glance at the man behind bars and at the three women before him and then
back at the man. Henry breaks the silence first – uh, so, who is the Snake?

- Jafar, kid. – she smiles his way briefly but before he can say ’cool’ Emma turns to get him out of
the precinct with an apologetic look – we’ll tell you all about it later.

- Why can’t I stay? He’s already in jail! – he turns his pleading eyes Regina’s way and then he
remembers himself and turns them Mal’s way, easier path if he starts there

She intercedes for him – Jafar is hardly dangerous, and perhaps it’s time Henry starts taking part.
He would’ve been king after all.

- Yeah! I need to learn.
Emma shakes her head - Nope. I’m putting my foot down. Who knows what this psycho is about to say.

Regina drawls from her spot – He’s hardly a stranger, I’m sure whatever his explanation it won’t be traumatizing. -The man sneers at Regina, she’d never had faith in his schemes, bitch.

Lily interrupts – So you guys know Jafar? From Aladdin? From before today?

Mal is about to pipe something up but Regina removes herself from the desk and starts moving towards Henry - But I agree with Miss Swan. Henry wait in the hallway please, you’re taking care of Draz, that’s more important than whatever this is.

He looks torn, looking between the fresh villain and the baby in his arms. He nods Regina’s way when she reaches him – Can’t you send me home? That way I can load up the car

- Dude you can’t do both. – Lily says as she props herself in the desk, feet on the surface and arm propped over her knee

- What she means is, your brother needs your undivided attention – Regina finishes before turning to glare at Lily, whose foot falls with a thud on the wood under her and whose back straightens

- Let’s focus, please. – Emma huffs – Also you really were going camping, without me?

- We are going camping, once Jafar explains – Mal says and Regina eyes her from her spot with an inexplicable hunger.

- I am chasing the woman meant to be my wife – he starts, and they all pull a different face at that

- Jasmine? – Lily clarifies and they all pull a worse face when he nods his assent

- Jafar, have some dignity. She doesn’t love you. – Mal tells him

He recoils – How would you know? She’s been whisked to this land by some low life thief! I will rescue her.

- She ran away from you with him because she loves him. Of all the women in the world, surely even you can find one that tolerates you, she’s not the last living one. You will leave her alone and find yourself some other object to your affections, we have things to do. Do not subject yourself to years of a loveless marriage for the sake of some inheritance. Think.

He glances frantically between all of them – Where are you getting this information?!

- The Disney Channel - Emma sidles up to Lily as the brunette snickers at her joke, she whispers – Do you ever wish you could just wake up? This whole life feels like a bad dream sometimes

He starts pacing the cell, ignoring Emma altogether – She would love that- that- rat! But not me? Ha! – he cackles for good measure and Regina rolls her eyes – And that’s rich coming from you! “Find another woman” and yet – he motions Regina’s way – Here she is, still.

Regina walks forward about to snap at him some more but out of the corner of her eye Mal gives her some kind of unspoken signal and she backs away– How about we leave you two alone to come to terms about your subsequent vanishment from this town? – She’s barely waited for anyone to agree to that before she turns to march out of the door – Lily, Miss Swan, let’s go.

Emma frowns at the spot Regina vacates, Lily shrugs but goes away in her signature cloud of ashy
smoke obediently, and turning to watch Mal lets Emma know that she should follow the order as well. She trudges outside ready to snap at Regina but finds her deep in a phone call with Henry hanging onto every word spoken, it leaves her out for another solid minute before she finally hangs up and they both turn to see her standing there against the wall.

- Where’s Lily – he asks, and bounces his brother that gurgles happily at the motion

Emma shrugs – Poofed.

With one hand, expertly, he takes his phone out of his pocket and swipes this way and that – She’s at home. Can I go? We can still make it! – Regina nods and motions for him to pass Draz to her, to let him go hug Emma probably, but he shrugs it off – Bye Ma! – and he’s gone, with Regina’s assistance thank god, it’d suck even more to realize he’s found magic powers in the few days they’ve spent apart.

Regina returns promptly to her phone and Emma sidles up to her before she can make another long phone call – Hey, what’s up?

- Nothing much until the snake made an appearance – she glances up without as much as a twitch in her body – He’s harmless. Mal will talk him out of whatever it is he’s planning, and we’ll get out of your hair.

- To go camping? – Emma sprinkles it in the conversation, or so she thinks. Regina looks up at her with a raised eyebrow – I just didn’t know you liked camping.

- Mal and I loathe it. Henry suggested it, Lily was surprisingly excited about it, so off we go. Children.

- Cool. Cool. – For a second it seems that’s where it’ll die but Emma shakes her head – Look, it was my weekend with the kid – Regina only locks her phone to see where that’s going and Emma kinda feels a pang for the days when that would’ve gotten her head chewed off before she could finish her sentence – and he kinda texted he wasn’t gonna come by, and that’s cool, he can do whatever right? But like, he didn’t invite me? Or even tell me? What’s up with that? He would’ve invited me. He would’ve nagged you into inviting me.

- Miss Swan-

- No, c’mon. Emma. Why? – she lets out a calming breath – Why are we back to this?

- I call you Miss Swan often.

- Regina, c’mon- She huffs – Kid’s upset with me about something since like two weeks ago. Which is fine because he’s a teenager but you and I… I miss us. We talk about shit, you were just gonna go somewhere with no reception for days without telling me?

Regina chuckles – Are you about to confess your undying love to me, again?

- Yeah! – she nods twice – We used to be the Swan-Mills family unit, and now were the Swan-Mills-Mal family unit and I don’t know, I’m feeling fucking abandoned in the threesome these days. Lily’s like an off-brand version of you. It’s not the same. And honestly, Mal has some weird views on kids.

Regina smiles – Life is inherently less dangerous for her, she doesn’t remember that sometimes - For a few seconds Regina glances Emma’s way. Her concerns must be serious for Emma to initiate conversation but at the same time, life happens and when there’s no threat actively forcing them to
work together or Snow-White-mandated engagement to attend the only thing they truly have in common is Henry, who’s perfectly able to shuttle himself between houses these days. Still, she had grown very fond of Emma – Emma, believe me when I tell you, I won’t be able to forget you for a single day of what remains in my life.

She hears it for what it is and smiles at Regina brightly - Let’s hang out!

- We’ve never done that.

Before Emma can point but the multitude of times they’ve hung out inbetween adventures Mal comes outside with an exasperated expression and glues herself to Regina’s side, bypassing Emma and wedging herself in between them – I think we should help him become mildly functional.

Regina lets out a cackle to rival her best ones and Emma sighs as they sidetrack their hanging out again. When she’s done being super amused, she speaks – You should, he hates me.

- Darling, don’t do this – She looks at Regina incredulously

- I guess I’m taking Emma camping.

Emma jumps - You are? – she looks up from her boots that she was kicking against a chair dejectedly

Regina doesn’t really drop Mal’s eyes but she speaks to her - You have an hour to pack, any later they don’t let us in.

Mal cranes her long neck upwards, truly asking the skies for guidance – I can’t believe I am doing this instead of enjoying the jeans –

Mal whispers to herself more than anything else and Regina laughs softly at her and drops a hand on her arm - Welcome to being nice. - For a single second, she stands on her tip toes to lay a kiss by the side of her jaw

Emma glances at the entire scene with fresh eyes, from the sensible shoes to the jeans in question and up, then her eyes widen – Regina, you’re wearing flannel.

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