Gallium & Yttrium
by Stessa

Summary

When Emma Swan gets a job as a bouncer in a fancy night club in Boston, all she really wants is to make some extra cash so she can take her kid on a water park vacation, but already on her first night there, things aren’t going totally as according to plan.

In comes four women; all beautiful, upper-class and probably filthy rich, and Emma can’t seem to take her eyes off the brunette one in the pretty maroon dress. Tink says her name’s Regina Mills, as if Emma is supposed to be sure who that is. All she knows is that those are the prettiest lips she’s ever not-kissed, and that is saying something.
Emma

“…and this is the room where we take our breaks, if the night allows us to,” Thea Bell finished her tour, shoving the door marked ‘Staff’ open as she gestured wildly with her other hand. “It’s not always possible to get a break actually. Of course, if you gotta pee, you gotta pee, but yeah…” she grinned sheepishly, “You smoke?”

Shaking her head, Emma glanced around the small break room, noticing the old table and two wobbly chairs. Off to the side, in the small kitchenette, was an electric kettle and next to it was a stash of paper cups, instant coffee and tea bags. It didn’t look like much, but then again, it sounded like she wouldn’t really be able to take many breaks anyway.

Thea smiled brightly, her blonde curls bobbing as she closed the door behind them. “Good, makes the job easier,” she quipped, her melodic voice trailing slightly in the small space between them. They were behind the bar, where two bartenders were getting ready for the night, stocking up and wiping surfaces.

Emma stuck her hands into her pockets, taking a look around the space; they were on the first floor of the establishment right now, where there were tables and booths scattered around the walls, as well as a direct hallway to the bathrooms. The bar took up most of the space, and in the other end of the room was the stairway to the basement where the dance floor was located and the DJ was currently setting up and getting ready as well. Down to the left was the entrance with the coat room and ultimately the place where Emma would be spending most of her time – the door. The second floor was more like a lounge; the lighting was low and comfortable, and there was a smoke room if one was so inclined.

Thea eyed her quizzically as she took in Emma’s appearance, “Who did you say you knew again?”

“I know Dorothy,” Emma explained, eyes scanning the room as she tried to remember every detail of the floor plan, just in case she was needed somewhere during her shift. “She’s got a thing with my best friend Ruby, well,” Emma paused, biting her lip, “I guess they’re more than a thing now, it’s been going on for almost a year anyway.”

Laughing, Thea nudged Emma with her elbow, “Alright, I get it, so if you know Dorothy, Mulan’s your in, right?”

Emma nodded, thinking of the silent, stoic woman whom Dorothy called her best friend and roommate. They’d met at Ruby’s birthday dinner, and Emma had immediately hit it off with Mulan; they’d bonded over beers and turned on Ruby’s old playstation, and even though Mulan had not said much to begin with, Emma hadn’t minded. How the night ended up with Mulan offering Emma a few trial shifts at her place of work, Emma wasn’t entirely sure, but yet there she was. And the work was right up her alley, and she could really use the extra money right now.

“So you know the boss, eh?” Thea said as she pulled back her curls in a bun, drawing the unruly hair out of her eyes. “Well that’s good. Mulan’s third woman tonight, so she gets in at twelve,” she continued to explain. “If you like it here and you do your job well, then you might get a couple of those shifts as well. They suck, ‘cuz you get home at light eight in the morning, but we take turns.”

“I don’t mind,” Emma replied, eyes landing on the giant chandelier above the bar. She vaguely remembered, from a drunken night here years ago, that there was light directed on it, and it shone in all the colours of the rainbow, illuminating the wall as a prism. But she couldn’t be entirely sure though, because her and Ruby had snuck in and been drunk off their asses.
Thea gave her a once over again. “So what’s your deal? Why do you want to work at GaY?” She questioned as she started walking towards the front hall where they had stored all of their belongings with two coat girls while Emma was showed around. “I mean, I’m here ‘cuz I’m training at the academy, going into law enforcement, same goes for Mulan. Most of the other bouncers here are the same or they’re gay,” she paused, probably noticing the way Emma seemed to stiffen for a second, “not that you have to be queer to work here or anything,” she quickly added, “it’s just that most people are.”

Emma grabbed her half empty cup of take-away coffee from the counter and leaned herself against the side of it. She’d doubted all the way over, ruminating about how much she would be comfortable telling her new co-workers, but ultimately she had come to the decision that she’d feel better if she was just being honest with them. After all, they were going to have to trust each other completely, working as part of the night scene in Boston, and one couldn’t trust somebody who had too many secrets. Not that Emma was going to tell this Thea everything. “No worries, I’m queer,” she said, taking a sip of the now cold coffee, “a lesbian.”

Thea grinned. “Yeah? I thought for a second that my radar was way off.”

Emma cracked a smiled, “You ping just fine,” she assured her new co-worker. She quite liked Thea already. Sure, the woman was the complete opposite of Mulan, a total chatter-box, but Emma didn’t mind. If Thea talked, then she wouldn’t have to say as much.

Jokingly, Thea ran the backside of her hand off her forehead, as if wiping off sweat. “Phew.”

“I uh, I need the extra cash right now,” Emma decided to tell her instead. “I work as a bounty-hunter, which is good for paying the bills, but I really want to take my kid on a summer holiday this year,” she revealed, thinking happily of Henry who was probably already wiped out, sleeping on Aunt Ruby’s couch because he’d been spoiled rotten after dinner.

Thea looked surprised at the fact that Emma had a kid, but then again, most people were. “You have a kid?”

Reaching into her back pocket for her phone, Emma quickly wiped out a picture of Henry to show off. “His name’s Henry, he’s five,” she said then. Her heart swelled entirely at the way he smiled into the camera; his face was covered in ice cream and there was a giant hole between his lips where he was missing a front tooth.

“Cute,” Thea replied.

Stuffing her phone back into her pocket, Emma smiled. “Yeah, he’s… he’s the best thing that ever happened to me. He deserves a holiday this year.”

Thea reached over the counter then, grabbing two of the three walkies which had been docking in their stations. “We communicate like this. We take turns manning the door and doing rounds inside; the dance floor can get a bit crazy, but that’s usually after twelve,” she explained, turning on one of the walkies and handing it to Emma. “But it seems like you’re familiar with these kind of things, so it should be no problem. We’re on channel five.”

Clasping the walkie onto her belt, Emma looked back to Thea. “Sure, so uh, can you tell me a bit more about the clientele here?”

Smirking, Thea said, “You haven’t been here much yourself?”

“Kinda busy having a kid,” Emma said, glancing at the big clock behind the counter. There wasn’t
long until they opened, but the first couple of hours would probably be quiet – at least according to Mulan.

“Okay, so it’s a lot of upscale older lesbians on Fridays, they mostly use the lounge area upstairs,” Thea said then, hooking her thumb over her shoulder and motioning towards the stairwell, “There’s also an unspoken rule of no pictures there, because we can get a lot of famous not-out politicians, actresses and public persons,” she explained, sharing a knowing look with Emma.

Emma bit her lip, eyes landing on the stairwell to the basement. “And downstairs?”

Thea huffed. “A bit of a younger crowd. The music can get pretty loud.”

“And there’s no guys allowed or what?” Emma asked then, eyes landing on the door where she’d be spending most of her night. She wasn’t that fond of separatist places because a lot of transpeople and non-binary people could get caught in that, but if she had to turn straight males away, she’d gladly do it.

Offering Emma a frown, Thea said. “No, everybody’s allowed. Management rules.” She huffed. “But we kindly inform presumed straight guys that this is a place targeted lady-loving-ladies, and that they should be aware of that fact entering. Doesn’t mean we don’t have to deal with them leering and being inappropriate sometimes. I hope you’re packing some heat beneath that jacket there,” she rattled off, finishing with a long sigh and a glance at Emma’s beloved red leather jacket.

Emma couldn’t help but chuckle. “That won’t be a problem, I assure you of that.”

Thea nodded and stuck her hands into the front pocket of her hoodie; there wasn’t a dress code for the bouncers, except they had to clearly display that they were working for GaY and was just not another one of the guests. Her hoodie clearly stated that she was security (written across her chest) and GaY’s full logo was visible on her back.

Emma had Gallium & Yttrium written across her chest as well; printed onto the white t-shirt she wore underneath her jacket. She had thought that the name was pretentious and stupid when she first heard it, but now she found it kind of clever, and most people shortened it GaY anyway.

“I think I like you,” Thea said then, winking briefly at Emma and adjusting her green scarf. “You can call me Tink, by the way, most people do.”

Now that Emma heard that, she was pretty sure that she remembered Mulan talking about a Tink when they discussed this. But then again, she had been heavily inebriated during that conversation, so maybe she was wrong. “Tink?”


“Alright,” Emma said, smiling warmly at the other blonde, “Tink it is.”

Tink looked positively thrilled that Emma had taken to her nickname so quickly. “Alright, so do you need the bathroom before we get into positions?” She motioned towards the front door which was still locked. A small line of women had gathered outside already, so Mulan really hadn’t been kidding when she said that GaY was the most popular lesbian night club in Boston.

“I’m gonna go real quick, and then check on my kid,” Emma said as she pulled out her cell phone. “That OK?”

Tink nodded her had, “Absolutely and without a doubt, partner,” she replied, glancing warmly up at
her, mischief splitting her face in a giant smile.

Emma shook her head to herself, chuckling slightly as she scrolled through her contacts to find Ruby’s number. Henry was probably sleeping, but she just had to make sure that everything was going fine. If he couldn’t handle spending the night at Ruby’s, then Emma wouldn’t be able to continue to do this job, which would be a shame. It wasn’t just that she would really like the extra cash, but she was kind of already liking Tink and perhaps working at a lesbian night club would make it slightly easier to get her itch scratched – something that Ruby had in many unkind words told her was ‘about damn time, Swannie, can’t stay celibate forever’ - which had been entirely too difficult since Henry entered her life so unexpectedly five years ago.

Not that she would change having Henry for the world, because she couldn’t imagine her life without him; sure, it had not been planned, and he had been conceived in a drunken stupor when Emma was 17, hoping to herself that maybe she wasn’t gay at all, and maybe she just needed to sleep with a guy and she’d find some family to call hers, but that night had ended with a pregnancy and no doubt in Emma’s mind about her very homosexual orientation, and afterwards she had been so unsure about what to do with the baby.

Ultimately she knew that the most responsible thing would have been to either get an abortion or to give the child up for adoption, but she simply hadn’t been able to do it. She simply couldn’t give away her child, knowing that it might be just as unlucky as her and end up being thrown from one foster family to the next, never leaving the system, never having a real family. So Emma had done the only thing her heart had been able to accept; she’d kept the baby, decided then and there that they would be each other’s family, and then she’d never looked back. She’d turned her back to the life of delinquency and petty crimes and tried doing things the right way. It hadn’t been easy, far from, but she had Henry and they were good. Henry was the best damn thing in her world.

After talking briefly with Ruby (once more reminded that if she were to pick up a lady, Henry could really hang out with his favourite aunties for as long as needed the next day), Emma replied to Mulan’s text (Emma. I hope Tink hasn’t talked your ear off yet. I’ll see you later. Mulan), and went to find her place next to Tink by the front doors.

They opened up at eight, and there was a steady stream of women entering the place from then on; Emma and Tink checked their bags, guided them forward and greeted everyone with a smile for the first hour, before Tink announced that she was going to do the first sweep, just to make sure that everything was good.

Emma was left alone then, still greeting guests, and she got more than a few appreciative looks as she leaned against the wall. She didn’t mind the view either; a lot of the women entering at this time looked to be in their late twenties or early thirties, and they seemed to be all business: High heels, dresses and pantyhose. Plenty of money to buy cocktails with. Emma might not take Ruby’s not-so-subtle nudge for good, because she was really too tired from work and Henry to do anything remotely sexy with anyone, but she could still enjoy the view, yeah?

“All good here?” Tink questioned when she returned, handing Emma a bottle of water that she had probably retrieved from behind the bar.

Emma unscrewed the lid and took a long gulp of it; she hadn’t really noticed how dry her mouth had gone, but the water was refreshing. “Yeah, all good here, no troublemakers yet.”

They chatted for a while then, only interrupted whenever a group of women came to enter the establishment, and Emma found that she quite enjoyed all the stories that Tink had to tell. She didn’t have to provide much herself, in regards to the conversation, because Tink always had something to say. When she wasn’t talking about the academy and her boyfriend, she provided
Emma with information about the women who entered GaY, while appraising dresses and heels. Apparently being the bouncer had its perks, because you were always sober, and you bore witness to what went on in the nooks and crannies of the place, always seeing who hooked up with whom, and always privy to the latest gossip.

When a beautiful black-haired woman gave Emma the once-over upon entrance, Tink told her in a very serious voice: “Do not go there! She’s slept with all the bartenders and the bouncers and the coat-girls, and she’s married,” while Emma stared after the woman who offered her a wink as she handed in her coat.

Time passed quickly then; Emma getting lost in her job and the notions, while listening to Tink’s crazy stories, and she found that she really didn’t mind the job that much. It was comfortable and easy, and she really wouldn’t mind returning for more work. She hoped Mulan would be pleased with her when she showed up, because maybe she could get another shift already tomorrow. Of course she’d have to clear Ruby and, or Dorothy for Henry-duty, but if they weren’t available, maybe David and Mary Margaret would take him. They usually didn’t mind whenever she had to chase a perp out of town.

When Emma glanced back at the clock again, she was surprised to realise that it was nearing eleven. She’d lost count of how many people had entered the bar, but GaY was starting to fill up; laughter bubbling through the hallway and music growing louder by the minute. She turned back around as a another group of women – Emma immediately guessed them to be around thirty and all upper class – appeared at the door. They seemed to be in a good mood; the last one trailing slightly after the other while talking on her cell phone.

Tink seemed to stand up a bit straighter, and Emma had a feeling that these women might be some of the more important guests that GaY experienced. “Good evening, ladies,” she chimed, holding the door open for them, “Welcome to Gallium & Yttrium.”

Emma repeated the words, eyes scanning over the new guests to make sure that there were no weird bulges beneath their coats and that their purses weren’t big enough to smuggle in alcohol. No that these women appeared to be the types to do so, but you never knew. Emma had a feeling though, that none of them would take too kindly to being frisked. Not that she would mind frisking them, because they were all stunning.

She took in the first woman; a small blonde who walked with fierce determination, and who immediately pinged as entirely straight to Emma. Right after her strolled in a tall woman wrapped in a green jacket and with red hair like a mare. She gave Emma a once-over and offered her a wink. “Hello darling, you’re new,” she drawled, and Emma was surprised to hear a British accent. “I wouldn’t mind to get my claws in you,” she continued in a whisper, a hand trailing slightly across Emma’s arm.

“Zelena,” the next woman warned, before a set of kind brown eyes landed on Emma, and an even kinder smile broke out on the woman’s lips, “don’t mind her, she’s all talk,” she replied, timidly brushing a piece of brown hair behind her ear. “She’s not even into girls,” the woman continued in honest, before she turned around and looked through the doors. “Regina, you coming or what?”

Emma’s eyes followed the woman’s – pass Tink, who still stood stiffly with a straight back – and towards the last woman, who was still outside, hissing into her cell phone. Emma couldn’t help the way her breath seemed to hitch slightly in her throat as her eyes landed on the woman outside. She was positively the most beautiful creature Emma had ever laid eyes on; dressed in a form-fitting, without a doubt very expensive, maroon dress that cut just above her knees, she stood tall on high heels and with her black jacket hanging open. Emma couldn’t stop her eyes from trailing over those
long legs and up her form, stopping briefly at the ample cleavage which was just peeking out, before they landed on the woman’s face.

Only then for Emma to realise that the woman was looking directly at her, and that she’d been caught staring. *Fuck.*

Smacking her cell phone close, the woman – Regina, was it? – strode pass Tink and met her friend who was still standing next to Emma. “Sorry dear,” she said then, and her voice was low and husky as she rested a hand upon the other woman’s arm, “Work call.”

“Put that away for tonight,” the woman said then, swatting Regina’s hand with a teasing lilt to her voice, before she turned to Emma, that smile still playing across her lips. “I’m Marian, by the way.”

Regina’s eyes landed on Emma then – Emma who’d just been standing there, watching this woman in complete amazement. As her eyes settled onto her face, she stared straight into them for only a second – and damn, those eyes were brown – before lowering her gaze to the red lips as the other woman spoke. “We all good here, Miss…?”

“Swan,” Emma croaked, eyes immediately snapping up to meet the other woman’s once more. “Emma Swan,” she replied. She had no idea why she let that information slip though, because she was in no way obligated to share any personal information with the guests of GaY.

Regina’s eyes trailed over her face then, “Alright, Miss Swan,” she said, before she took a step back, her heels clicking against the tiled floor, as her eyes swept over Emma’s form.

The blonde woman who’d entered first groaned loudly from the other side of the room, where she’d been checking in her jacket. “Regina, Marian, come on,” she impatiently hissed, flipping her blonde hair over her shoulder and tittering, “We’re here for you, I can get cocktails anywhere.”

Marian laughed, “Sure thing, Kathryn, we’ll be right with you,” she turned back to Emma again, an eyebrow teasingly raised as her eyes travelled over Emma’s form, “Nice to meet you, Emma,” she whispered, casting an obvious leer to Regina, who was still watching Emma with intense brown eyes.

Why did it feel like her entire face was on fire?

“Have a good night,” Emma heard herself hiss out, as her eyes turned to the floor, because she suddenly found the titles there very interesting.

Regina offered a curt nod, “Thank you,” she replied, before she turned on her heel, and she and Marian went to join their friends, Zelena and Kathryn, at the coat room.

Emma couldn’t help but let her eyes linger at the retreating back of the woman, eyes captivated to the swell of her ass in that tight dress when she handed in her coat. Nor could she tare her eyes away from how her short cropped hair fell around her shoulders, curling slightly at the ends.

Tink nudged her slightly, and Emma willed her eyes away from the four women. “You’re leering,” she teased.

“Who’s *that*?” Emma breathed out, unable to stop herself, as she turned to her co-worker with wide eyes. She could not get those red lips out of her mind.

“That,” Tink said as she watched the four women trail up the staircase to the lounge area upstairs, “is Regina Mills.”
Emma bit her lip. “Should I know who she is?”

Tink shrugged. “She’s a high-profile defence attorney, but she’s also heavily involved in politics,” Tink explained, taking a gulp of her own water bottle, which she had on the floor next to her feet. “She’s one of our, what do you say…” Tink seemed to search for the right words, “more discreet guests. She comes here sometimes, but she’s not out publicly. Something about her mother or maybe her job or her charity, I’m not sure. But yeah, you haven’t seen her here.”

Turning to stare at the now empty staircase, Emma could simply not forget the way Regina Mills had looked in that dress. “Sure, haven’t seen her,” Emma replied, eyes moving back to land on her new friend Tink. It was easier to focus on Tink now that Regina Mills had left the room and wasn’t there to distract her.

“Anyway,” Tink continued, shrugging her shoulders and getting on with it, “how about I go take a sweep, and when Mulan comes you can have the first indoor shift?”

Nodding her head, Emma leaned herself slightly against the wall and glanced down the busy Boston street as Tink went off. She felt like this job was going to be okay, and she certainly didn’t mind being privy to all the beautiful women who seemed to enter the building. She wouldn’t really mind returning for more shifts if it was possible. Most importantly though, she just couldn’t wait to have enough money to be sure enough to tell Henry that they were definitely and for sure going to that water park he’d been babbling about non stop since Christmas. His little face when she told him? That’d be worth all the extra working hours to her.

And maybe, just maybe, something else entirely would come out of this job as well? One could only hope.

She pulled on her best smile as another group moved towards the doors, “Hi, welcome to Gallium & Yttrium, may I please check your bags?”
Regina

Chapter Summary

Regina just wanted to get drinks with her friends, but instead she meets an infuriating blonde bouncer in a Red Leather Jacket.

Chapter Notes

TW for this chapter: Robin is present, and he does not take no for an answer.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Kathryn bought them all drinks at the bar, opting for a round of dark and stormy, and Regina took a long sip as they found seats at a strategically placed table in the lounge area. She relinquished in the taste of alcohol on her tongue, even though rum had always been much too sweet for her. It was nice though, and she could feel all of the anxieties from a tough work week vanquish as she fell back into her seat.

The room wasn’t too crowded yet, but she looked around her, trying to stake out the women, just to see if there was anyone to her fancy. Not that she was going to do anything, because she was certainly above dragging random women into her apartment for a single night. Even if that was sort of the reason that they were all at GaY to begin with.

“See anything you like?” Kathryn questioned as she did her own sweep of the potential prospects, positively leering at every woman on the floor.

Marian glanced around as well; she was much more comfortable openly expressing her sexuality and her desires here or anywhere else. Regina kind of envied her for that; she often wished that she could date whomever she wanted and feel comfortable doing it, but there was just too many extern factors. Mother. The job. All those expectations, and she’d never been good at defying her mother’s plans for her. At least she’d never been tempted enough to try. Marian though? She was a social worker with supportive parents, and she could bring home whoever she wanted to and they’d love them. She didn’t say anything; much more comfortable glancing around and taking her time.

Zelena huffed. “Oh come on then! Kathryn and I aren’t going to be getting any tonight, so one of you two have better find a woman,” she argued, and even though Regina knew that she was referring to both of them, she felt it was certainly more directed at her. Her sister, ever the supportive friend. If anyone was more interested in Regina hooking up than Regina herself, it was most definitely Zelena.

Regina raised an eyebrow. “There’s no one here, they’re all just…” she waved her hand, as if she could brush all of the women out of sight. Bland. Boring. Imbeciles. Her list could go on.

“What about that cute blonde bouncer?” Marian piped then, arching an eyebrow, daring Regina to contradict her.
Regina puffed. “There was no cute blonde bouncer.”

Kathryn tittered. “The new one? Emma was it?”

“You are mistaken, dear,” Regina said, sneering at her best friend and partner in law. “There might have been two blonde bouncers, but none of them was cute.”

Zelena’s eyes went round and she guffawed loudly. “Oh please, we all have eyes, you know,” she mocked, “The new bouncer was definitely cute, dare I say… hot?” She stared pointedly at Regina, mimicking Marian’s expression.

Regina sipped her dark and stormy. “Her jacket was hideous.”

Kathryn laughed too; she almost fell out of her chair as she clutched the side of the table. “Oh Regina, you sweet naïve woman, my dearest friend in the world,” she cradled her stomach, puffing out air in huffs as she spoke, “The jacket comes off, you know. Unless you’re into that and nothing else, I suppose.”

Zelena and Marian broke out laughing, joining Kathryn in her pathetic attempt to rattle Regina. She had no idea when it had become their favourite pastime, but she was finding it quite tedious.

She arched an eyebrow, pointedly looking towards the floor. “You’re all hilarious,” she commented.

“Boohoo,” Zelena teased her as she reached a hand out and padded Regina’s thigh.

Marian clinked her glass against Regina’s before letting the straw settle between her lips. “You need to unwind, Regina,” she commented, dark eyes scanning Regina’s body. She took a sip of her drink.

Regina felt the tension in her shoulders and back, wound tight after a long week of too many work-hours. Hours spent at the office because she had nothing else to do, no one else to go home to, even though Marian invited her for dinner with her and Roland practically every night of the week. Regina always found something else more important: “I have this case I need to prepare for court”; “I have to finish this rapport”; “My secretary is useless, I have a meeting”. She always, always had something else to do, and mostly it was because it pained her so much to see Marian and Roland together, knowing, fearing, that she was probably never going to have that herself.

“I am perfectly unwound, Marian, thank you very much,” Regina curtly replied. She glanced around the floor then; eyes roaming the people who had entered the establishment tonight. It was nearly 12pm, and the place was filling up. She could practically hear the loud music from the basement, basically overshadowing the calm jazz there was playing in the lounge. There were a lot of women tonight, and – to Regina’s dismay – also a lot of men who were just circling around, obviously leering at the unsuspecting women around the room.

A blonde man across the room from her caught her eyes then, silently raising his glass in greeting. Regina scowled, pointedly turning her eyes away and not returning his gesture. She hated men and their self-chosen entitlement. Why did they have to come into one of the few spaces where women could express their attraction to each other and make it into something predatory? There were plenty of other bars where they could go hunt for straight women.

“Yuck, so many men tonight, huh,” Kathryn said then, even though her eyes were obviously very appreciative of the blonde man across the room from them. And why wouldn’t they be? He seemed attractive enough, even though he was obviously there to try and leer on women hooking
up with other women.

“Very attractive men,” Zelena added in a whisper, eyes following Kathryn’s.

“So are you coming to The Hills on Wednesday?” Marian asked as she turned to Regina and let their two friends to their own devices. Whenever Kathryn and Zelena got in a mood, their appreciation for the male gender had no bounds, and Regina and Marian had long ago learned to just let them be.

Regina nodded and placed her drink on the table. “Yes, I’d planned on it. My schedule is cleared all afternoon, so I can be there after lunch.”

Marian nodded, eager as always to talk about The Hills and the projects she was a part of there. Regina didn’t mind much talking about it either; she was heavily involved in a lot of it, and her love for outreach programmes fuelled their possibilities greatly. If they didn’t have wealthy benefactors, they wouldn’t have much. She liked to be a part of the place though – as more than just a wealthy woman. Marian tittered, “It’s going to be great. I love when the academy does their outreach program! The kids always talk about it for weeks.”

“I’d imagine so,” Regina commented, but she had difficulties hiding her enthusiasm. She quite enjoyed the cadets from the academy – they always inspired the kids to do better, to be better. She knew that Marian loved the cadets more than her though – future-to-be police officers were much more her thing.

Reaching forward, Marian gently cradled Regina’s hand in her own. She looked worried, her brown eyes roaming Regina’s own for answers. “Are you sure you’re okay, babe?”

Regina – always touched, but also always annoyed by Marian’s truly concerned and caring ways – huffed. “Yes, I am just fine, Marian, and don’t call me babe.”

Marian perched her lips and leaned back in her seat again. She looked amused as she cradled her drink, and Regina wanted, for just a second, to apologise for her snappiness, but then Marian’s eyes widened, and Regina turned her gaze in the direction that Marian was glancing as well. Oh, so that blonde guy was coming over, and he was dragging his ridiculous friends with him. Regina felt her shoulders stiffen.

Damn Kathryn and Zelena and their mooning eyes. Inviting them over with their looks and their stupid heterosexual flirting.

“Hello ladies,” the blonde one said as he turned a chair over and moved to take a seat, “mind if we join you? I’m Robin.”

“Actually we do mind,” Regina grumbled beneath her breath, but Marian, ever the sweetheart, nodded her head and motioned for them to sit.

Zelena’s eyes roamed over the men blatantly. “Hello, I’m Zelena,” she replied, offering her hand out to one of them.

“These are my merry friends,” Ryan gestured towards his friends who had all magically found a chair to find a seat at their table. Why did this always happen again? Men were such imbeciles. Did they really not understand that this was not the establishment to enter if they wanted to find women to bed? They’d have better chances just down the street.

There were greetings around the table, and Regina leaned back in her seat to distance herself from the insipid men talking to her friends. Zelena was completely in her right element, battering her
eyelashes and shootings smiles here and there. Kathryn appeared a bit more weary, and Regina just had this queasy feeling in her stomach. She glanced around the room instead, ignoring this Robert-fellow and his questioning eyes. She let her eyes trail across the room, roaming across beautiful women who seemed to be flirting, drinking and talking to each other – generally they seemed to be having a better timer than her.

Regina grumbled to herself, eyes moving towards the staircase where that blonde bouncer – not the one with the curly hair, but the new one, Red Leather Jacket – was just finding her way into the room. She scouted the scene; eyes trailing across the space, checking out the patrons, seeing if there was any trouble, before she made her way towards the back of the room and took a place in a shadowy corner.

She couldn’t help it, Regina’s eyes followed the bouncer on her way through the room, and she felt absolutely disgusted by the fact that so many of the other women inside the lounge appeared to do the same thing. Regina huffed. Of course that woman had taken this job to score easy targets who found it sexy to hook up with the bouncer, even though Regina could in no way understand why they would want to. That jacket was absolutely hideous and it looked like her pants were trying to cut off circulation between her legs and the rest of her body. So unbelievably unattractive.

“So your sister tells me that you’re a lawyer, Regina?” Roy interrupted her, not-surprisingly shaking Regina out of her trance by demanding attention to himself. Like most men would.

Regina shot Zelena a glare for good measure, before she turned her head slightly to the side to offer that poor guy a bit of her attention. “I’m a lawyer, yes,” she replied, daintily wrapping her lips around the straw in her drink.

Roger arched an eyebrow, and he did in no way try to hide the way his eyes trailed over Regina’s face, down her collarbone and towards her neckline. “So you’re here to support your friend?” He wanted to know next.

She clenched her jaw. Of course. Of course he’d think that. “You can say so,” Regina replied instead, determinedly not meeting his eyes across from her. He didn’t deserve her time of day, and she’d rather not give it to him. He could see how he was watching her, calculating his moves in his endeavour to approach her, to get her to talk to him. He was trying to find his way in, trying to charm her, but she wasn’t going to let him.

“So,” he said then, and – she couldn’t believe it – he leaned forward to brush his hand across her thigh, just above the knee. “Do you come here with your friends often?”

She glared at him, eyes staring pointedly at his hand on her thigh, silently ordering him to move it. “One would argue so,” she replied, and even if her voice told him to get off her person, he didn’t understand it. With a raised eyebrow to Kathryn, she conveyed a ‘Can you believe this person?’, and Kathryn rolled her eyes in reply.

Ron nodded his head as he shot her a charming smile. “My friends and I thought we would go somewhere different for a change, see what else this scene had to offer. Maybe even meet a wonderful woman, eh?” He wriggled his eyebrows and slowly – but not so slowly that Regina didn’t immediately notice – let his hand glide further up her leg.

Staring down at his giant palm for a second, Regina raised her eyes to meet his. “Do you come here with your friends often?”

Ross didn’t remove his hand. “Why? A beautiful woman such as yourself, perhaps I’d be able to show you a good time,” he commented while his hand continued to trail over her body, now up her side towards her arm, “I mean, you couldn’t possibly be here because you… prefer the company of
other women, I mean, you’re positively gorgeous.”

“Oh, I don’t prefer it,” Regina commented, still very much aware of the fact that he hadn’t yet moved his hand off her body, “I engage in it solely.”

That didn’t seem to deter him, and his hand was now moving back towards her thigh.

Regina felt her throat tighten. If she could have, she would have blasted him away in a blaze of fire. “Now, if you don’t mind, I’d like you to remove your hand from my leg this instant.”

Rory blinked up at her, “Oh come on, Regina, no one says no to me.”

“Except I’m saying no to you, Rupert-”

“-Robin-”

“-and I do not like having to repeat myself, Reg,” Regina commented, gently placing her glass back onto the table and moving to push his hand away. However, he was quite the stubborn man because he fought – albeit gently – against her fingers as she tried to shove them off.

Kathryn interrupted them, “Hey, are you not understanding what she’s saying to you?”

It appeared that he wasn’t. “I just wanted to-”

“Hey man,” someone had appeared beside their table, and Regina turned her head to the side, only to realise that it was Red Leather Jacket and her blonde hair. When had she moved from the corner again? “She said no thank you, so please remove your hand, or I’ll have to remove you from this building.”

Ronald grunted. “Oh come on, you’re blowing this way out of proportion, I just wanted to offer her a real good time with a real man who can show her what sex is supposed to be all about,” he tried to defend himself and without realising it, he was digging an even deeper hole for him.

Regina felt a flash of anger in her chest, but she wasn’t quick enough. Red Leather Jacket had grabbed his arm in a second and twisted it around to his back, thus pulling him against her upper body. She did not appear to be gentle with him. Ronny fell off the chair, stumbling slightly as his feet hit the ground and the bouncer pulled him closer. Zelena gasped animatedly from her seat across the table, and all of his friends roared in objection to the treatment of their mate.

“What’s your deal?” She hissed at him, and Regina couldn’t help but feel delighted at the flinch of pain she saw on his face. “Either you’re incredibly homophobic in which case you’re really barking up the wrong tree here, or you just don’t understand that no means no,” she paused, flicking his arm a little bit more, and Regina felt a pang of satisfaction or… something… in the pit of her stomach, “both things are bad in my book, so I’m sorry, but I’m going to have to escort you and your friends out of here.”

He grunted then, appearing to take her statement for good, and Regina had a feeling that her and her friends were going to be free of him and his insipid mates very soon. They still objected loudly though, trying to get the bouncer to release Randy, but she held on tight – until the second that that stupid, incredulous man decided to hammer his foot onto Red Leather Jacket’s, and – when she flinched briefly at the impact – elbow her straight in the face. She bolted back, cradling her face for just a second – and Regina felt her eyes go wide at the sight of blood pouring from her nose – before she wiped her hand across her face and glared angrily at the man.

“Seriously?” She questioned and watched as Rick tried to move across the floor, beer still clutched
in his hand. He waddled slightly, apparently much more intoxicated than anyone would have
thought. Zelena gasped excitedly, Kathryn too, and Red Leather Jacket sighed, pressing something
on the walkie attached to her belt. “Got a problem in the lounge,” she commented brusquely,
before she reached forward, grabbing the man by his collar and halting his steps. She pulled him
back to her with force, not taking care to soften the blow after the treatment he’d just given her.
“Did you seriously just elbow me in the face?”

Richard dropped his beer, the glass shattering on the floor, liquid splashing all over Red Leather
Jacket’s feet, and she looked absolutely done with this man. “Stupid blonde,” he spat, but he
halted, apparently realising that he was trapped by her fist in his shirt.

Just then another bouncer – this one slightly lower and with darker hair, who had been working
here a long time as far as Regina remembered – appeared on the top of the stairs, worried eyes
immediately settling onto her co-worker and the struggling Russel. She crossed the floor, appearing
at the side of the table just as Marian was offering napkins from the table to the bouncer, who was
trying to dap at her face with her spare hand.

“Emma, are you okay?” She breathlessly questioned, “Here, let me take care of him.”

“Thanks Mulan,” Red Leather Jacket – Emma was her name – replied and let Raymond transfer to
Mulan’s grip. “He got me straight in the face,” she winced, smiling gratefully at Marian, who had
now taken to dapping her face for her, carefully wiping at the corner of her mouth. “Thanks.”

Mulan eyed the interaction with wide eyes. “Can you get yourself cleaned up? I’m gonna take him
downstairs,” she said as she tightened her grip on his arm, twisting it a bit firmer. She motioned
towards the other guys at the table. “You’re all coming with me, or I’m calling the police.”

Wide-eyed, the guys all scrambled from their chairs to do as they were told, following Mulan
towards the staircase. With a last glance towards their table, she descended the steps, leaving her
co-worker at their table.

Zelena fanned herself. “My oh my, what an exciting evening we have here!”

Marian glared at her, “Shut up, Zelena,” she hissed, before turning back to look at Emma, “Does
this hurt a lot? Do you need me to take you to a bathroom somewhere?”

Emma offered a small smile in return, “I’m good, I don’t think it’s broken. As long as you got the
blood off of me,” she paused, stopping herself with a bite to the lip, before continuing, “Actually,
can you leave some of it? I think it makes me look badass,” she joked.

Kathryn and Marian chuckled, which was probably the desired reaction for Emma, because she
looked pleased with herself. Regina just huffed, stirring her straw around in her drink and staring
straight at the smear of blood on the woman’s white t-shirt. How unfortunate that it didn’t hit and
stain that hideous jacket.

“Something funny?” Emma questioned then, and Regina was surprised when she found the other
woman staring her straight in the eyes. God, her eyes were green.

Regina straightened her back, momentarily confused by the sudden shimmer she saw in the other
woman’s gaze. “No, I’m quite fine,” she pushed her chair back. “Actually, I think I’m going to get
another drink, if you don’t mind.”

Marian glared at her, and Regina was briefly surprised by the intensity of her eyes, and Zelena
nudged her with a heeled boot.
Emma ran a hand through her hair, eyes trailing over Regina’s face in the most unapologetic way Regina had ever experienced, “Really?”

“Yes,” Regina replied as she stood up from her seat and moved towards the staircase.

Emma called after her, “Hey lady,” she said, and suddenly she sounded thoroughly pissed, “a thank you would be nice, you know.”

Spinning around on her heel, Regina turned back to stare at the blonde woman who was looking at her with expectation, “A thank you?” She questioned, stepping closer as she straightened up and pulled her shoulders back. “For what, dear?”

Apparently Emma did not back down from her challenge – which surprised and intrigued Regina, because everybody usually did – and she jutted out her chin. “Well, I just stepped in and saved your ass.”

Huffing, Regina crossed her arms across her chest. She would never admit this, but it was nice to meet somebody who didn’t just immediately back down and retreat when presented with a challenge. “I don’t need a personal saviour, I can handle myself,” she replied then, arching an eyebrow, daring Emma to disagree.

The blonde poked out her tongue; it swept over her lips, wetting them. “It sure didn’t look like it.”

“I can,” Regina fired back. It wasn’t because she didn’t know what else to say, it was simply because she didn’t want to offer this woman a further explanation.

“Look, just say thank you,” Emma continued and she looked like such a petulant child, Regina couldn’t help but feel amused.

She took a step closer, looking the other woman straight in the eye. Emma had to be at least a bit taller than her, because she was wearing heels. Not that that was important or anything, Regina just noticed it now. “You don’t need a thank you,” she hissed, “you get paid for this.”

She was vaguely aware of the fact that Zelena was enjoying this absurdly much, while Marian was shaking her head to herself. Regina knew that she was going to scold her for this, for her manners, for her hostility, but she simply couldn’t be bothered to play by society’s stupid rules. She said thank you if she felt like expressing gratitude and this Emma had done to herself; stepping up and taking action in a situation where she simply hadn’t been needed.

Emma’s eyes narrowed. “Well,” she said then, “I just took an elbow in the face for you, so you’re welcome anyway,” she finished, before turning on her heel and striding determinedly towards the stairs.

Regina watched her go, ignoring the way her eyes seemed to linger briefly on the other woman’s butt, before she turned back to her friends with a huff. She crossed her arms, tapping her foot. “Can you believe the audacity of that woman?”

Kathryn shook her head, “She just saved your ass, Regina.”

“No she didn’t,” Regina replied.

Marian snorted. Repeating. “Yeah, she did. She just saved your ass.”

Zelena wriggled her eyebrows at her. “And I really think that the polite way to thank her would have been to fuck her in one of the bathrooms.”
Kathryn broke into a fit of giggles, and Regina glared at her friends. “What would make you proposition such a stupid act?”

“Sexual tension,” Zelena deadpanned.

When Regina didn’t react to this, Marian elaborated, “You know, because it was very clear to everybody at this table that you two wanted to rip each other’s clothes off.”

“I wanted no such thing,” Regina defended herself. There was this odd pang inside of her chest, and it seemed to spread all the way to her stomach and further, but that could have been because of anything. Maybe she just really needed some fresh air or a new drink or something.

Raising an eyebrow, Kathryn added, “Sure you didn’t. There was no sexual chemistry present at all.”

“No there wasn’t.”

“We must have just imagined that heat then,” Marian butted in.

“Yes, you must have.”

Zelena guffawed. “Sis,” she said, “you’re an idiot.”

Regina glared at her friends, tapping her foot and hating them inside of her head for good measure. Why was she friends with these people again? They had no base in reality, they were simply imagining things. She did not have the desire to rip that ugly red leather jacket off of Emma’s delicious body. Nor did she want to wipe that smirk off Emma’s lips by pressing her own against them. She wanted no such thing, she simply just wanted for that damn bouncer to leave her alone.

“I’m going to get us some drinks,” she finally said then, before she turned on her heel and moved towards the bar downstairs. This night had quickly turned much more tiring than she’d hoped for it to be.

Chapter End Notes

Regina gave me quite a challenge in the beginning of this chapter, I found it much easier with Emma in the first one. But, I think I got an okay feeling of her, so hopefully it’ll be easier next time.
Emma

Chapter Summary

Emma wakes up with a swollen and purple face, and Ruby wants to take her to the emergency room. She tries really hard not to, but she keeps thinking about Regina Mills.

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains Ruby Slippers, a five-year-old Henry and unfortunately no Regina. (She’s on somebody’s mind though).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

CHAPTER THREE

When Emma felt herself awaken the next morning it was to unnecessary tugging and pulling, and a much too bright stream of light coming through the windows. She grumbled, trying to ignore the kink in her neck and the painful headache, as well as the way her bra was uncomfortably digging into the side of her right breast. Was she still wearing her jeans? They seemed way too tight for sleeping.

She wanted to turn over in her bed, splay herself across the mattress and sleep just a little bit more, but when she moved to roll over, she did not hit the soft plush of her bed. She rolled over the side and landed with a thump on the floor.

Oh right. Ruby’s couch.

Blinking, Emma tried to get used to the brightness of Ruby’s living room as she stared straight into the ceiling. She lifted a hand to rub her eyes only to realise that there were two faces looking down at her from above. Her son’s small face filled with freckles was peering over the side of the couch accompanied by the grey fluff and black eyes of her friend’s dog Toto. Henry had a giant grin on his lips, and Emma cursed herself for not taking out her contacts when she got home this morning. Had she brought her glasses? Toto barked loudly.

“Ma,” Henry said then, his green eyes sweeping curiously over her – without a doubt – messy state. “Why are you at Aunt Ruby’s?”

Emma licked her lips. They were chapped, almost tasting metallic, and her entire face was in pain. “Mamma couldn’t sleep alone when she was done with work, so she came here instead,” Emma explained then, remembering how Mulan had told her that she was to go sleep at Ruby’s because she might have a concussion. Emma had thought that she’d just say yes and then go home anyway, but then Mulan had made a point of showing her a text message she had sent to Ruby, and Emma knew that there was no point in trying to trick her friends.

When she stumbled to Ruby’s apartment earlier in the morning, Ruby was already up, promising to
look out for her, and she’d tucked Henry into her bed next to Dorothy and Toto, where he had been sleeping with a stuffed animal in his arms.

Henry eyed her quizzically. She could practically see the wheels turning inside his little head, and not for the first time did she wonder how she ended up with such a smart child. “Why’s your face all purple?”

Emma didn’t really want to tell her five-year-old son about abusive assholes, so instead she reached a hand out to run it through his mop of brown hair. “What time is it, Kid?”

Toto greeted her by licking his tongue across the back of her hand.

“Time for you to wake up!” Henry cheered, and before Emma knew what had happened, he’d rolled off the couch and onto her stomach, wrapping his tiny arms around her torso, and nuzzled his head beneath her chin. Toto watched in curiosity from his seat on the couch.

Pressing a kiss to his hair, Emma closed her eyes for just a minute more, breathing in his kid-scent and appreciating the weight of his small body on top of hers. She still remembered how fucking scared she had been throughout her pregnancy when she had come to accept the fact that she was going to do this alone; she remembered the late nights, trying to make ends meet, going back to work way too early, and depending way too much on the kindness of her friends and especially of David and Mary Margaret.

Henry was worth it though; every little part of him was amazing to Emma, and she still found herself dumbstruck on most days, completely taken aback by the fact that he was the product of her, that she’d carried him inside her womb – and that something so perfect had come out of her, out of a hot mess whose parents had abandoned her on the side of the road. She’d done nothing but screw up in her entire life, and yet there she was – she’d done Henry, and Henry was damn well perfect. At least she hadn’t messed him up yet, and her desire to do well by him was what fuelled her crazy working hours and the fact that she barely had any time to herself and did not even bemoan that fact. All the time she didn’t spend working, she wanted to spend with this amazing kid who was now nestled on top of her, drawing small circles on her bare arm.

“Did you get hurt at your new job?” Henry questioned then, lifting his head and staring straight into her eyes. She was always completely awestruck by how similar his eyes were to hers. Genetics were weird.

Emma nodded softly as she wrapped her arms tighter around his little body. He was wearing his firetruck pyjamas which consisted of matching pants with feet and a t-shirt. Firetrucks were the shit at the moment, and he’d gotten this set for Christmas from his favourite aunts. “Yeah, there was an accident, Kid. No worries though, Mamma’s all good,” she shot him a giant smile, flinching slightly of the pain that shot from her nose and towards her temples.

Henry shook his head at her. “Ruby says we hafta go to the hospital!”

Urgh, that was the last thing that Emma wanted right now. But if Ruby said so, she knew she wasn’t going to win that argument. Besides, she hadn’t really had the pleasure of inspecting her injuries in the mirror yet. “Does she now,” Emma teased, before she pulled herself off the floor slightly and started tickling Henry all over his belly.

He squealed loudly and started kicking his legs, and Toto begun barking from his seat on the couch, joining on the fun as he jumped up and down.

Henry’s loud giggles combined with Toto’s barks must have pulled Ruby out of whatever she was
working on in the small kitchenette, because she appeared in the doorway into the living room. She had a pencil placed behind her ear, and her long brown hair was pulled back into a messy bun. It seemed that she’d been trying to study by the counter, now that Emma had overtaken her living room. “What’s this ruckus?” She teased, but there was nothing but joy and laughter on her face.

“Mamma’s tickling me!” Henry laughed, trying to bite back his giggles as he continued to squirm in Emma’s lap. He was practically breathless, his little face scrunched up in pure joy as he stared at his favourite aunt from his mother’s embrace.

Ruby raised an eyebrow as she crept across the floor, “Oh really? Then maybe I should help her?!” She suggested, and her hands were already outstretched, fingers wriggling as she came closer, and Henry squealed even louder, before she even touched him, and soon all three of them were engaged in a tickling match on the floor of Ruby’s apartment with a very eager dog trying to join in on the fun. A tickling match that could probably be heard in the diner downstairs, but then again, that was nothing new.

Not for the first time did Emma wish that she could have just fallen in love with Ruby and made a future with her. It would have been so easy; Henry loved her, Emma loved her, and they were compatible in many ways. Ruby’s grandmother was close friends with David and Mary Margaret, and thus Emma had known Ruby since she was 14 years old at the time when she first came to live with the Nolans. But no such luck; her and Ruby had zero sexual chemistry (as they had concluded at 16 when they’d both been unsure of their sexualities and had tried to fool around), and now Ruby had Dorothy, the cutest farmer girl from Kansas, who had stolen Ruby’s heart with her brunette braids, sarcastic personality and adorable dog. Speaking of.

“Oh my God, you guys,” Dorothy interrupted them from the doorway, looking all dazed and sleepy. Her hair was sticking in all directions, and she’d put her slippers on the wrong feet.

“Sorry babe,” Ruby sheepishly replied as she tried to untangle herself from Emma’s legs. “Henry just really needed a good tickle.”

Henry’s mouth formed a perfect ‘o’, “Did not!”

Emma laughed, “Sorry, Kansas,” she replied, meeting Dorothy’s eyes across the room. She reached a hand out and scratched Toto behind the ears.

Dorothy gasped. “Oh Golly, you look like hell!”

Running a hand through her messy blonde hair, Emma shrugged. “Perks of the job, which is why I’m here by the way,” she glanced at Ruby, who was absentmindedly stroking Henry’s back as he fiddled with the wolf- pendant on her necklace. “Mulan said I couldn’t sleep at home in case I had a concussion.”

“Mulan’s a smart woman,” Dorothy replied as her eyes scanned over Emma’s form on the floor. “Are we going to the emergency room?” She questioned then, eyes landing on her girlfriend, who nodded eagerly.

“Yeah!” Ruby said, finally pulling herself off the floor, Henry clutched to her side.

Emma groaned. “Seriously? I just need to clean myself and the kid and I will be out of your hair.”

Shaking her head, Ruby dismissed her. There was no way Emma was going to win this, that was for sure. “Nope, Emma,” she paused, needing a second or two to think, “why don’t you go clean yourself up and we’ll get Henry ready, grab some breakfast downstairs and then drive you to the
“Granny’s pancakes!” Henry cheered, as he wriggled himself out of Ruby’s arms and stormed into the bedroom where Emma had dropped his overnight bag the night before. Toto followed immediately, paws scurrying across the floor as he went after his best friend Henry.

Emma managed to pull herself off the floor and shot her best friend a weak smile. If she felt slightly dizzy by the movement, it was simply because she hadn’t recovered from the earlier tickling fight, and not because she was feeling the aftershocks of the night before. She offered the two women a dorky thumbs up. “Don’t let him have too much syrup, OK?”

Ruby flashed a wolfish grin. “But it’s Saturday, Swannie!”

“He’s a growing boy,” Dorothy also argued, before she turned on her heel to go help Henry in the bedroom.

Emma groaned, and Ruby stepped closer then, gingerly placing a soft hand on the side of Emma’s face. “I’m just taking you, ‘cuz I wanna be sure, Ems, OK?” She whispered, staring earnestly into Emma’s eyes. “Henry needs his Ma in tip-top shape, so we’re just makin’ sure.”

Emma nudged Ruby’s shoulder with her own. “I know, Rubes,” she whispered then, and once more did she feel eternally grateful for her best friend and partner in crime. “Thank you.”

“Wipe that blood off your face, and don’t think you’re not telling me how this happened, because I sure as fuck wanna know,” Ruby shot off before she turned on her heel and went to join the others in the bedroom, where Henry could be heard chatting away, telling some kind of story, while all Dorothy did was hum in the right places.

Grinning to herself, Emma turned the other way and moved straight towards the bathroom.

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With their stomachs full of Granny’s pancakes (and Emma’s head full of Granny’s exhortations to be more careful and get a safer job), the four of them were waiting in the emergency room. Toto was hanging out in his corner in the diner, and the bug was parked outside, barely holding it together after Ruby’s haphazard driving. Henry was lying across the floor in the waiting area, drawing on paper with Dorothy, who was – as always – his go-to aunt in all creative endeavours.

Emma knew that they were going to be there awhile, because her injuries were not that urgent. Of course her head still hurt like hell, but she was still fairly certain that nothing was broken. Everything was just swollen and purple, and for some reason her foot was shooting painful pangs up her leg, too. She cursed that stupid guy from yesterday and his stupid entitled ass. Why did he think it was acceptable to hit on a woman who was clearly not interested and also clearly not into men? And then to not take no for an answer. Honestly, Emma was glad that she had stepped in, even if it had caused her a painful evening and a day in the ER.

What bothered her the most actually wasn’t her injuries, but the mere thought of Regina Mills. Stupid, attractive Regina Mills who did not even say thank you or acknowledge Emma’s actions. Stupid, incredibly attractive Regina Mills with her coiffed hair and her tight dress and those extremely kissable red lips. Emma had spent too much time thinking about those lips whenever Henry was otherwise occupied.

Not that she’d told Ruby as much. She simply just told her that some asshole douchebag had elbowed her in the face and that Mulan had escorted him and his friends out of GaY.
Ruby did not seem convinced that that was the entirety of the story though. “But like,” she paused, raking her fingers through strands of brunette hair, spiked with red, as she looked thoughtful, “why did you need to step in? What was he doing?”

Emma bit her lip. “He was, you know,” she paused, “bothering this woman. Touching her, being inappropriate. I noticed in one of my sweeps.”

Scrunching her nose up in confusion, Ruby was still trying to get a sense of the entire picture. “But…” she stopped talking then, eyes moving over Emma’s features pensively, brain working overtime.

“How are your hands?”

“Don’t hurt yourself,” Emma joked.

Ruby stuck her tongue out at her. “Was she hot?” She questioned then, because apparently she knew Emma better than Emma sometimes knew herself. And she could not be fooled.

Shrugging her shoulders, Emma tried to brush it off. “I don’t know, just doing my job,” she replied, tilted her head to the side, eyes landing on Henry and Dorothy on the floor, all the while she tried to ignore the warmth flooding her cheeks. Perhaps Ruby wouldn’t notice.

“She was so hot!” Ruby cheered in a whisper, eyes trained on her girlfriend and nephew as well; not wanting to disturb them either. “Oh my God, Swannie, you’re such a lesbian, coming to the rescue of all the pretty girls!”

Despite herself, Emma’s cheeks grew warmer. “Shut up,” she hissed, turning her eyes back to look at Ruby, “I was just doing my job, OK? I would have done it for everybody, not just the pretty girls,” she paused, biting her lip. She knew she would have, because she was damn good at her job and she took it seriously, and she hated entitled assholes. So there. But Ruby was still right though, there was something entirely different about Regina Mills. “Not that she’s just a pretty girl,” she decided to add, as an afterthought, “more like an incredibly beautiful woman.”

Ruby couldn’t hide her chuckle. “A woman? Really?” She arched an eyebrow.

“Yeah,” Emma replied, folding her arms across her chest and letting herself relax a bit more into the uncomfortable plastic of the hospital chairs. “I mean, she appeared to be a bit older than me, one of those upper-class lesbians we always used to make fun of, with their high heels and their lipstick and their expensive designer purses.”

Whipping her hair over her shoulder, Ruby straightened her back. “Sure thing, but look,” she paused, “you found her attractive? So what, that’s just good, you haven’t had any in a long time.” She tittered, “What’s her name?”

Regina Mills. “I don’t know, I didn’t catch it,” Emma breathed, eyes wavering slightly as she tried not to look at her best friend, “Something with an R or something.”

“Ruby?” Ruby mocked, before she crossed her legs and laughed animatedly. “So what? After you saved the damsel in distress, what happened?”

Emma shrugged. She wasn’t really going to tell Ruby the entire thing, was she? Because now that she thought about it, she really didn’t understand why Regina Mills had been on her mind all morning. The woman was a grade A bitch who hadn’t even bothered to show her gratitude by a simple thank you. Her friends had seemed awesome though, cheering Emma on and helping her with napkins. So why was it that it was Regina and not one of the other women that Emma kept circling back to? Urgh, it was just so damn typical of her. She decided to reveal a little more. “She
Ruby stared at her for a second, just a second in complete silence, as the other woman tried to understand whether Emma was serious or not. But the second she realised that Emma was indeed not messing with her, Ruby broke into a full-blown belly laugh that caused Henry and Dorothy to turn around and look at them from their place on the floor. “Oh my God,” she hiccuped, clutching her stomach and heaving in air, “oh my God, that’s just typical you, Swannie, always with the feisty ones!”

Glaring at her friend, Emma turned to her son, “Don’t mind Aunt Ruby, Kid, she’s just got the hiccups,” she assured him, and Henry turned back around to his colouring. Dorothy followed suit, but not before narrowing her eyes in on the two women in the chairs. Emma offered her a reassuring smile.

Still chuckling slightly, Ruby continued, “What did she say?”

“She just told me that she wasn’t in the need of help, and that she had it all handled,” Emma explained, pressing a Finger to each of her temples. She really wished she could get her head checked soon, not that there was anything they would be able to do. At the least just so she and Henry could return to their quiet apartment and play games or something. “She didn’t even say thank you or offer to help me or anything.”

Arching an eyebrow, Ruby whistled, “Damn, she sounds stubborn.”

“Yeah,” Emma agreed, as her thoughts once more drifted to Regina Mills and the way that those brown eyes had been filled with so much fire and passion. When she’d stepped closer to Emma during their argument, she’d been so close that Emma could smell her perfume; some scent of apples mixed with cinnamon. She’d been so close that Emma had barely needed to take a step forward and she would have been able to press their lips together. Not that she would have done that. Not at all. She was a professional, of course, but she could not ignore the surge of electricity, the tension that had erupted between them. She’d felt it on her body even after she left the lounge.

Ruby padded her arm. “Maybe you should consider not doing this job after all?” She whispered, eyeing Henry on the floor once more. “I mean, I know you want to take you-know-who you-know-where, but…” she trailed off, shrugging. “Is all this really worth it?”

Emma had thought about that; she’d thought about it a lot. Thought about how being a bounty hunter and a bouncer wasn’t really compatible with having a small child. She’d thought about what else she could do when essentially she was trained to do nothing. She’d gotten where she was today simply because she was good at it. But she was never going to be able to be a real police officer like Mulan or Tink because she had a record and she couldn’t afford to go back to school. Not with Henry around. And how was she ever going to find something else to do if she couldn’t go back to school and she didn’t even have a high school diploma?

She turned her best friend’s hand over, letting their palms rest against each other and their fingers intertwine. “Probably not,” she whispered, “but I really don’t know what else to do, Rubes. I just want to do right by him.”

Pondering that for a second or two, Ruby said, “I know you do, but maybe… maybe figuring out another career path is better in the long run? Even if money would be tight for a while. You’ve got a great kid,” she said, and Emma knew that she was right, knew that she had the most perfect kid in the entire world, “he would choose more time with you over a vacation any day.”

Emma knew that she was right, of course, but that didn’t mean that she didn’t want to give him that
water park vacation. She’d never been anywhere as a kid, and she hated going back to school after
the summer and having nothing to tell. If she’d been lucky, maybe there had been a summer camp
for orphans or a trip with the group home to a free museum, but generally… she’d had nothing to
tell. She didn’t want that for Henry, she wanted to give him the world. “I just… what would I even
do?” She sighed. It wasn’t just that it would be nice to do something else. It was also the fact that
she had no idea what that something else would be.

“Maybe you should set aside some time to figure that out?” Ruby suggested. “I mean, you could
do some research, try to meet some new people, I dunno. How do folks get jobs these days?”

“Not everyone gets to study and work at their grandmother’s diner,” Emma teased her, but it was
full of love. She knew that Granny would hire her too in a heartbeat, if only so she didn’t have to
catch jumpers all around the state, but working as a waitress at Granny’s simply wouldn’t be able
to pay the bills – not with their two bedroom apartment, the bug and new clothes for Henry who
seemed to grow at a rapid speed these days.

Emma looked down when she felt a tug at her jeans. Henry had crawled across the floor, and there
was a look of absolute mischief in his eyes. He had a swipe of red marker across his cheek and his
eyes were shining. “Mamma, I’ve gots to pee,” he whispered, leaning in closer to her, as if he was
trying to tell her a secret.

“Why don’t I take you?” Ruby suggested, already getting ready to stand up and head to the
bathrooms across the hall. “’Ma gotta stay here in case they call her name, yeah?”

“’Kay,” Henry simply just replied, shrugging his shoulders and pulling himself into a standing
position. He was – and probably always would be – a total Mamma’s boy, but Aunt Ruby was his
second favourite adult and she was always cool enough for bathroom duty.

Emma pressed a kiss to Henry’s head, “Be good for Aunt Ruby, m’kay?”

Henry gaped at her in clear exasperation, “Always am!” He turned around then and trotted
forward, grabbing Ruby’s hand on the way.

Managing to offer her best friend a small “thanks,” as they went, Emma leaned back in her seat and
felt, more than saw, Dorothy fall into the seat next to her. She squeezed her eyes shut for a second;
relinquishing in the quietness even in the bustling busy emergency room, and she felt everything
overtake her completely. She was so fucking tired, having only slept a few hours before Henry
woke her; she was sore from sleeping on the couch and her entire face was throbbing; the Advil
that Mulan had shoved down her throat had long since lost its effect. She wasn’t going to be able to
go for another shift at GaY tonight, but she suspected that Mulan might already have figured that.
She just felt like her first take at trying to do something better for Henry was already failing
miserably.

“You’re gonna wear yourself to the ground, you know,” Dorothy said then.

Emma squeezed one eye open, turned her head slightly to the side and offered her friend a glare.
She just sat there, stiffly in her seat, stating a matter of fact, as if Emma already didn’t know that.
“What’s your point, Kansas?”

Dorothy smirked, but there was a true sign of affection behind her blue eyes. “I couldn’t help but
overhear,” she breathed then, not quite meeting Emma’s eyes, “also because I was trying to–”

Emma gasped in mock offence.
“-but you seriously need to find another job,” Dorothy finished. This time, she turned her head to meet Emma’s eyes and the two of them just looked at each other in silence for a few seconds, before she continued, “This isn’t going to go in the long run, Swan. You can’t keep running around, chasing perps all over the country, and you know Rubes and I love Henry and we love taking care of him, but we’ve got jobs and school too, you know?”

Down-casting her eyes, Emma knew what was coming. She also knew that Dorothy was right and there was no way she could say anything that Emma didn’t already know.

“Rubes is too nice to say anything,” Dorothy continued, and there was a wistful smile on her face, “she wants to do everything for you, but did you know that she missed three classes the other week because you had to catch that guy in New Jersey?”

Emma had not been aware of that, so apparently there was something Dorothy could say that she didn’t know.

Dorothy reached a hand out and gently squeezed Emma’s knee, “And hey, you know we’d do anything for you, yeah?”

“I know,” Emma rasped, placing her hand on top of Dorothy’s.

Nodding her head and sweeping her long, brown braid across her shoulder, Dorothy continued, “Did you know that Rubes asked me to move in with her?” She questioned, and by Emma’s surprised gasp, she was urged on, “Yeah, I know. I haven’t told Mulan yet, I don’t know what she’s going to do. She’ll have to find a new roommate.”

Emma didn’t really know Mulan that well yet, although she was quickly becoming a good friend, but she had a hard time imagining Mulan opening up to just anyone. “Can you take Toto to live with you guys?”

Dorothy nodded, “Yeah. Ruby loves that damn dog just as much as I do.”

“You guys really want to get a start on your future together, don’t you?” Emma questioned then. She knew that it could sometimes be hard to tell with the way that Dorothy and Ruby appeared to be such goofballs who loved games and going out for beers, but she also knew that these two were meant to be together – like one of those stupid true loves that all those damn fairytales taught Emma about in her childhood – and they just really wanted to start a family.

Dorothy’s blue eyes shone with love and affection at the thought of that potential future, and she offered Emma a giddy smile. “Yeah, we do,” she confirmed, withdrawing her hand and fidgeting nervously with the ends of her plaid shirt, “Anyhow, don’t think I’m just here to break your spirits, I actually have a suggestion for you.”

Emma’s head perked up at that. “A suggestion?”

“Yeah,” Dorothy added, nodding her head for good measure. “I just can’t help but think about your, y’know, best qualities and how that can be used better off, you know?” She paused, seeing if Emma wanted her to continue, which Emma very much did, “And Mulan was telling me about how her and Tink and the other cadets are going to this youth centre on Wednesday for their outreach programmes, and I just thought…”

Perking even more up, Emma felt her heart start beating just a little bit faster as she understood what Dorothy was getting at. “And you want me to do outreach?”

Shrugging her shoulders, Dorothy simply said, “It’s just an idea.”
Emma bit her lip and leaned back in her seat, contemplating what Dorothy had just told her. It wasn’t a horrible idea. Actually, it was quite a good idea. Emma was good with kids, even better with young adults. And she knew more than anyone how tough it could be to make your way in life when you had no one to show you how or no place to make roots. Maybe it wouldn’t be so horrible to share some of what she’d learned from her times in foster care and group homes? Sure, she’d found David and Mary Margaret as a teen, but by then she’d already been mistreated enough to try and run away more than once. She’d ended up squatting in this abandoned building with a girl named Lily for awhile, before the police had found them.

Now that she thought about it, working with kids, sharing her own stories and trying to do better by them might not be such a terrible idea. It was definitely something that she’d want to look into for sure. It was entirely possible that it might not even happen, because she did have a record and people tended to want grown-ups without messed-ups pasts around kids. It wouldn’t hurt to do some research though.

“You’re not so stupid, Kansas,” she said then, tilting her head slightly to glance up at Dorothy.

The brunette looked entirely too smug and pleased with herself. “Oh, don’t sound so surprised, Swan.”

Just as Henry and Ruby were making their way back from the bathrooms, Henry swinging from Ruby’s arm as she lifted him, a nurse from the station stepped forward and called out Emma’s name.

Ruby let out a giant sigh of relief. “Damn! Finally,” she cheered as she plopped into Emma’s abandoned seat.

Emma pressed another kiss to Henry’s head before shuffling after the nurse towards an empty room. Fucking finally, she thought to herself, as sat on the hospital bed and immediately started telling the nurse all about how she ended up with a purple face and a swollen nose.

Chapter End Notes

I really appreciate those of you who take the time to leave a comment - it’s fuel for a fanfic writer! I hope you liked this chapter? As you can see, the point of view will switch from chapter to chapter, and soon there’ll be more interaction between Emma and Regina than we’ve seen so far. I just need to establish a bit of the things going on around them, plus I’m a sucker for taking things at a nice and moderate pace.
Regina

Chapter Summary

Regina keeps thinking about that blonde bouncer, Red Leather Jacket, Emma Swan or something. Then she goes to The Hills and meets a certain five-year-old obsessed with fairytales. And her mother wants her to date a CEO-woman, which just makes her tired.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Regina was pulled out of her train thoughts by the insistent ringing of her cell phone. Not just the insistent ringing of her cell phone, but the insistent ringing of her mother’s specifically chosen tone. She’d been trying to prepare herself for a court case – keyword being trying, she had the self-realisation to acknowledge that – but she’d been disrupted by her assistant on more than one occasion as well as troubling thoughts of a certain blonde bouncer.

It was pretty infuriating how much those damn green eyes had been trying to sneak their way into her head all day. And all yesterday. And the day before that. She did not understand why that was. Emma Swan, Red Leather Jacket, with her incredulous green eyes. Why was Regina thinking so much about her again? That jacket really had been hideous. But those jeans had also been very tight.

She was surprising herself by even remembering the name of this unwanted saviour. Regina did not appreciate being made into a damsel in distress when she had the situation completely under control and in no way had needed help from anybody.

Her cell phone went off again. Mother is so persistent. Regina figured she had better answer it; if Mother was in one of those moods, she would not relent until she had spoken to her daughter. And Regina figured she might as well take the call, have lunch with Kathryn and then be on her way to The Hills to meet Marian.

“Mother,” she greeted as she pulled her private phone to her ear and leaned back in her office chair. Cora Mills scoffed at her youngest child, “Regina, is that a way to greet somebody on the phone?”

Pinching the bridge of her nose, Regina was already regretting answering the call. Mother could be so tiring and she really did not have the energy for that today. “I know it was you, Mother. You have that special ring tone,” she defended herself, knowing it would be fruitless.

“Regardless,” Cora begun with a sigh, “you should still answer the phone like an adult woman.”

Regina stood up from her chair then and crossed the floor to look out of the large window in her office. She had a beautiful view of one of the busiest streets of Boston, and she could see people hurrying about on the street; tiny dots, scurrying around like small ants. “I apologise, Mother,” she said then, eyes following a red car as it made its way down the road. Red like a certain jacket made of leather. “What can I do for you today?”
Cora said, “Zelena tells me you were out to look for a possible partner this weekend, but that you – as usual – did no manage to talk to any eligible women all night,” she stated, and Regina made a mental note to kill her sister for telling on her, “Honestly Regina, I’ve accepted the fact that you’re a lesbian and that you will not bring home a handsome husband like Zelena, but I’d at least have thought that you would bring home a beautiful wife instead,” she tsk’ed, “I still want to have grandchildren.”

Sighing, Regina did not know what to say to that. She’d had this conversation with her mother many times already, and yes, she’d been surprised when her mother had accepted her sexuality and the idea of a future daughter-in-law (Daddy had not been surprising in his support), but that still didn’t mean that it was easy to just find a wife. All the people that Regina had dated the last few years had just been boring, unchallenging and too easy to mould. And the women that Mother had set her up with had obviously been chosen for their status (their job, their family, their appearance), and not to match anything that Regina looked for in a partner.

Not that she was entirely sure what she looked for in a partner.

Regina just knew that she wanted to have a wife, to start up a family. Sure, her job was demanding, but she wanted nothing more than to cut back the hours if she had a reason to do just that. She saw what Zelena and Walsh had with their children – she wanted that. Even if Walsh was too much of a push-over and let Zelena walk all over him and dictate his every move. Even is she flirted blatantly with every man she met when they went to out for drinks. Walsh loved her though, and that was what Regina envied the most.

“You have grandchildren, Mother,” Regina replied, knowing that it would push Cora’s buttons, “you know Zelena’s kids, right? Montgomery and Anniston.”

Cora did not let her push her around, “Yes Regina, I know Montgomery and Anniston, outrageous as their names are. I can’t say your sister hasn’t disappointed me with her flair for the dramatics even regarding baby-names.” Cora sighed into the phone, “But I want your grandchildren, do you understand? Preferably with better names. And I’ve been looking forward to getting a daughter-in-law, so will you please try harder when your sister takes time off from her family to go to that ridiculous lesbian bar with you?”

Regina closed her eyes, telling herself to calm down and not bite her mother’s head off. She knew it would only anger her even more. “There are no interesting women, Mother,” she replied, “They are all just bland.”

“Honestly Regina, a woman of your status ought to have suiters lining up around the block,” Cora replied, and Regina could clearly hear the disappointment in her voice, “You’re just being too picky. I’ll set you up again. One of my bridge friends has a niece who’s the CEO of some company. I’ll give her a call.”

She had no desire to go out with anyone that Mother deemed acceptable, because they were always the most boring ones, but Regina hummed in response anyway, and when she heard her door open and Kathryn poked her head inside, she saw this as a perfect opportunity to end the call. “Oh, you know what, Mother? Kathryn just came into my office, so I’ll have to cut this short. I’ll talk to you soon.”

Cora replied, “Talk to you soon,” before she hung up the phone.

Regina turned to Kathryn with a smile curling at the corners of her lips, “Thank you, that was perfect timing,” she told her friend. Kathryn knew more than anyone how Cora tried to control Regina’s every move; even her dating life, and her best friend since law school had always been
supportive of Regina’s choices and tried to get her to tell her mother off a bit more than she already did. Not that Regina ever had the temperament to do it as much as Kathryn urged her to.

Kathryn winked at her, “You know me, that’s just my natural talent,” she joked, before she reached forward and took Regina’s peacoat off the hanger by the door, “Ready for lunch?” She held out the coat for her friend and Regina hummed as she gratefully stepped into it before reaching for her purse. “Did she try to set you up again?” Kathryn added, as they made their way pass Regina’s secretary.

Regina pressed the button on the elevator, “Some CEO of some company,” she replied, staring at the numbers above the elevator, as it neared closer.

Buttoning up her jacket, Kathryn said, “You don’t need a CEO, you need like…” she paused as she tried to search for the right words. The elevator arrived, and they stepped inside together, while Kathryn still hummed in thought. “Someone who can challenge you, like, oh,” she pressed the button to the lobby, and the doors sealed close, “like that blonde bouncer! She totally gave you a piece of her mind, and I could practically see in your eyes that you wanted to devour her.”

Feeling a slight increase in her heart rate at the mentioning of Emma Swan and her challenging ways, Regina made good use of wrapping her red scarf around herself as she stalled. She hated whenever Kathryn was right, and she might not have wanted to devour that blonde infuriating bouncer, but she had been thinking an awfully lot about her green eyes. That did not mean that she wanted to have sex with her, Kathryn might as well forget that insinuation right this instant. Regina scoffed and told her as much.

“Oh please,” Kathryn replied as they crossed the lobby and said good afternoon to the security guard, “you can be so exhaustingly dense sometimes, Regina. I love you, but you have no idea what’s good for you.”

Regina licked her lips, “And what’s that supposed to mean?” She turned right outside of the building, automatically making a beeline for their favourite Italian restaurant, which they frequented quite often for working lunches.

Kathryn rolled her eyes. “I’m not saying you have to marry her, you fool. You just need to get laid, and I could practically smell the sex between you two – I bet it’d be totally hot. I wonder who would be the top,” she mused.

Appalled, Regina hurried to defend herself. Why did Kathryn have to be so engaged in her sex life? She was not this interested in Kathryn’s potential suiters, that was for sure. And it was just irritating that Kathryn’s suggestion conjured up a very compromising picture of Emma Swan beneath her all naked and sweaty. Why did Kathryn have to go there? Frustrating. “I do not need to just get laid, and certainly not with that blonde bouncer,” she gasped, just as the restaurant came into view. “That jacket was hideous,” she added for good measure.

Which only gave Kathryn the opportunity to break into a guffaw as she glanced up at Regina. “You’re impossible,” she declared, but her eyes shone with love and care for her best friend.

Regina rolled her eyes and pushed the door to the restaurant open. She found Kathryn quite impossible, too.

———

The Hills was bustling with energy when Regina entered the building after a fulfilling lunch of mushroom risotto with Kathryn. There were kids of all ages running around, and she saw Marian...
and the other employees – with a few unfamiliar faces which she assumed were the cadets – sit at the table in the big, open kitchen space. They were probably having a quick meeting before the cadets were to speak with the children.

Regina offered a nod and wave towards Marian, before she crossed the floor and pushed through the double doors to the enclosed space outside. There was a basketball court and a playground as well as a closed-off skateboarding area. Regina breathed in the air and took a seat on one of the benches by the side, knowing that Marian would know where to find her as soon as she got a spare moment.

She liked going outside whenever she was at The Hills. She was one of the only benefactors who was quite this engaged in the everyday running of the place, but she couldn’t help herself. She just wanted the kids to have everything, and she made more money from her job – and had more money in the bank from her family fortune – than she knew what to do with. She liked looking at the work that her money was able to do; her last big contribution had been to the playground she was now staring straight at; and then she liked looking at the kids as they played around and got a momentary break from their lives.

Right now the playground wasn’t being used much though; there was a group of older kids playing on the basketball court, and two girls skateboarding – and only one kid hanging out by the playground area. It looked like a little boy, probably no more than five, and a bit younger than the kids who usually came here on Wednesdays. He was sitting on top of the wooden tower, back against the castle and legs hanging over the side, right next to the slide.

Huh. He was leafing through a giant book.

Making a quick decision, Regina crossed the small asphalted space before stepping onto the padded ground of the play area. She stepped closer, not wanting to startle the kid, and found the way his little forehead was creasing as he stared at the pictures entirely adorable. He had a mop of brown hair and was wrapped up in gloves and a scarf that looked way too big for him. He was smiling through, as he stared at the colourful pictures of the book; Regina could just about make out that it was some kind of fairytale.

Leaning against the side of the slide, she smiled softly at him as he briefly met her eyes before turning back to his book. “Hello,” she whispered, glancing at his freckled face with a slightly runny nose. “My name’s Regina. That’s some big book you’ve got there,” she offered.

The kid looked up again and offered her a giant smile. Apparently commenting on his book had been just the right thing to say to him. “It’s my favourite,” he offered as he tried to turn it around; it was so big though, that he had troubles handling it very well. “It’s about fairytales. I got it from Grandma and Grandpa last Christmas.”

“It looks very cool,” Regina offered. She wasn’t sure why, but she felt like this kid wasn’t one of the usual kids who came here. He spoke of a family, and he somehow looked a little more well taken care of. His clothes were slightly big, but they looked new, and he just didn’t have that look that she’d come to associate with the kids at The Hills. “What’s your name?”

He sniffed, running the back of his gloved hand over his nose. “I’m Henry,” he offered then.

Regina couldn’t help the giant smile that found its way onto her face then. Henry. What were the odds? One didn’t meet many Henrys these days. “No way,” she offered, and she felt her own eyes shining with mirth, “my Daddy’s named Henry, but he’s old.”

“Nuh-uh,” Henry replied, his green eyes going entirely round as he stared up at her.
“Yes,” Regina assured him, nodding her head and stuffing her hands into the pockets of her coat. It was kind of cold outside today, and yet here this kid was, sitting on the playground with his book of fairytales and his runny nose. “You usually don’t come here, do you?”

Henry shook his head. “Nope,” he said, closing his book and struggling for a second to put it into his backpack. “I’m ill today, and Ma says I can’t go to school when I’m ill, ‘cuz the other kids might get ill too,” he told her, leaning slightly closer as if to tell her a well-kept secret.

She raised an eyebrow. “Your Ma told you that, huh? Then what are you doing here?”

Seeming to think about it for a second or two as he zipped up his bag, Henry eventually told her. “Ma had work and I couldn’t stay with Aunt Ruby or Aunt Dorothy or even Grandma and Grandpa, so I had to stay with Aunt Mulan,” he paused, fingers fidgeting slightly with the zipper of the bag still, “she’s my newest aunt, but she’s so cool, and she had to come here, because she’s gonna be a real police officer!”

Ah, the cadets. “That sounds very cool,” Regina assured him and she couldn’t help but reach out and brush his scarf away from his face where it had ridden slightly up. “But maybe you shouldn’t be out here when you’re a bit ill, hm?”

Henry did have the conscience to look guilty at that. “I was s’posed to stay inside and read the book, but there were older kids, and I just saw this tower, and it reminded me of my fairytales, and I know Mulan said to stay there while she had the talk, but I really, really wanted to check out the tower,” he rattled off then, looking directly into her eyes with such a fiery gaze she was surprised that he was only a child.

Regina couldn’t help the low chuckle that came over her lips then. This kid was the absolute most adorable child she had ever met. It really tugged at her heartstrings and made her wish to have her own kids that much stronger. She couldn’t help but be pleased that he at least seemed to have a family and wasn’t left to fend for himself. He seemed way too precious for that. She reached a hand out to tug his backpack over her shoulder. “Why don’t you and I go find your Aunt Mulan together, hm? She’s probably worried if she can’t find you.”

Nodding his tiny head with determination, Henry scurried over to take the slide down. He landed on the ground with a thud and before Regina had any chance to say or do anything, he’d tucked his little hand into her own one and was dragging her towards the double doors.

Regina could not describe the feeling his little hand in hers gave her. It was the most amazing sensation, and she felt a motherly wave of care wash over her, and all she wanted was to hug him tight. She knew she couldn’t though; those kinds of actions would have to wait for one day when she had her own kids, so instead she let him drag her towards the double doors.

Regina could not describe the feeling his little hand in hers gave her. It was the most amazing sensation, and she felt a motherly wave of care wash over her, and all she wanted was to hug him tight. She knew she couldn’t though; those kinds of actions would have to wait for one day when she had her own kids, so instead she let him drag her into the building where she was instantly met with a frantic looking and very worried Marian.

…who seemed to relax greatly when her eyes landed on Henry.

“Mulan,” she hollered, turning her head around, “I found the kid.”

Henry grinned sheepishly up at her.

Regina bit her lip to contain her grin. “Sorry, I seem to have found a very determined Henry outside,” she explained, just as another woman – presumably Mulan – brushed pass Marian and fell to her knees in front of Henry.

“Henry,” she breathed, engulfing him in a tight hug, “you need to do as I say! You had me
worried,” she argued, but her voice told of relief and she reached a hand out to brush a strand of brown locks out of his eyes. She looked up then, meeting Regina’s eyes, and her relief turned into surprise. “Hey,” she said, raising from her place on the floor, “thanks.”

Not able to hide her surprise either, Regina held out the backpack and gave the other woman a once over. But of course. Of course Henry’s aunt had to be no other than one of the bouncers from Gallium & Yttrium, because apparently that much intertwine ment of her life was in Regina’s cards. It was the bouncer who’d come to the rescue of Emma Swan on Friday; who’d dragged Reginald and his friends out of there and given Regina and her friends some much needed peace. What were the odds, really? “Hello,” she replied, dropping her arm as Mulan took the bag, “I found him in the castle. He looked a bit out of place.”

Apparently she was not able to hide her confusion and look of scorn, because Marian used this moment to step into their conversation, “Regina,” she offered, “this is Mulan, you might remember her from GaY? She’s a cadet, too.”

Regina had figured as much by the sweatshirt that Mulan was spotting which stated exactly that, but she decided to keep that comment to herself. “Yes, from this Friday, right?” She straightened her back.

Mulan nodded her head.

Marian continued, now turning to look at Mulan, “And this is my friend Regina, you might remember her? She funds a lot of our projects here and she likes to come by every Wednesday to check on the kids.”

The smaller woman seemed genuinely surprised by those facts; it showed vividly on her face. “Really? That’s great,” she said, nodding her head and tucking Henry into her side, “I’ve got to get ready for the presentation though,” she turned to Henry then, looking sternly down at him, “Can you behave while I do this? Or do I need to tell your ‘Ma about this unplanned trip to the castle?”

Henry smiled bashfully up at her. He promised, “I can behave!”

There was just something mischievous in his eyes that made Regina doubt the truth of his statement, and it seemed like Mulan was thinking the exact same thing, because she did not look convinced. “Really?” She questioned with an arched eyebrow.

Marian looked on amused.

“You know what,” Regina heard herself offer then, “I don’t need to hear your presentation. Why don’t I hang out with him? We can read in the book,” she explained; the last part was more for Henry’s sake than Mulan or Marian’s. “We can sit right here at the table, so you can see him through the glass windows,” she added to Mulan, for good measure. She did this while pointing straight at the windows in question, just in case the other women needed to have it spelled out.

Mulan smiled down at Henry, “Would that be OK with you, Kiddo?”

Henry beamed and nodded his head eagerly. “Yeah! R’gina is nice!”

Turning back to Regina with a raised eyebrow, Mulan asked, “Are you sure? He can just come sit in the back of the room. That was the plan anyways.”

“Oh nonsense,” Regina said then, quickly grabbing Henry’s backpack out of Mulan’s hands again, “Let’s just read. I’m here for the kids anyway.”
Marian couldn’t hide her giant grin as she turned to Mulan, “Regina’s really good with kids, I’m sure little Henry here will be fine,” she stuffed her hands into her jeans pocket and continued, “Come on, let’s grab some coffee and go help your friend Tink with the tech-stuff.”

Regina watched the two of them leave as she clutched Henry’s backpack. Was she just imagining the eyes that Marian was sending Mulan’s way, or could her friend perhaps be interested in the not-blonde bouncer from GaY? Regina would have to question her about that later. She was sure there was something there though.

Henry piped up, smiling at her with wide eyes, “Can you read me the story about the Evil Queen?”

Reaching a hand out to guide him towards the round table in the kitchen, Regina nodded, “Yes. Yes, I will read to you about the Evil Queen, but only if you point out all your favourite pictures for me!”

“I was gonna do that anyway!” Henry cheered as he shrugged out of his jacket and clumsily climbed onto one of the chairs. Regina couldn’t help but bite her lip to keep herself from grinning at his adorable little ways. He was wearing a bright red t-shirt with a giant firetruck on the front.

How could one kid be so inexplicably cute?

— - - - -

Someone who Henry called Aunt Ruby – a tall, leggy woman with red streaks in her brown hair – had come to pick him up about ten minutes before the cadets were done talking to the kids, and now Regina was enjoying a cup of coffee with Marian in the corner of the room, while the kids had time to mingle with all the ‘cool’ future police officers.

Regina couldn’t help but notice how Marian’s eyes kept finding their way towards a very specific future police officer though, and she was sure she wasn’t imagining Marian receiving eyes right back.

Marian was warming her hands on the ceramic mug as she said, “So what was that about with the kid?”

“He was cute, wasn’t he?” Regina wistfully replied, blowing gently on the hot liquid in her mug.

Nodding her head, Marian took a sip of her drink. “Yes, very cute indeed. And just about Roland’s age, I’ll presume,” she paused, once more letting her eyes drift towards Mulan who was kneeling down to be on eye level with a girl from the center, “Perhaps I should ask Mulan to set up a playdate for them the next time she babysits.”

Regina bit her lip to keep herself from spitting out a snarky reply; Marian was always so sweet with her about everything, and she ought to let her friend have this infatuation in peace. She settled for a quiet hum in response. “Perhaps.”

Marian continued, undeterred. “But she also told me that she’s working at GaY this Saturday,” she looked at Regina with a hopeful look in her eyes, “Do you maybe want to accompany me there again? We can go just us and try to find you a woman,” she finished, nudging her slightly in the side with her elbow.

Regina hadn’t planned on going back to Gallium & Yttrium so soon after last Friday’s fiasco, but her earlier conversation with her mother lured in the back of her mind and made her think that perhaps it was a good idea to go back so soon after all. If she played her cards right, maybe that would persuade her mother to leave her alone for a little while longer before setting her up with
that CEO-woman.

Nodding her head, Regina took a sip of her coffee as well.

“Really?” Marian looked at her in disbelief, but a huge smile overtook her beautiful face. “That’s great!”

“Don’t sound so surprised,” Regina retorted sourly, just as Mulan appeared at their table and sheepishly took a seat on one of the spare chairs.

Marian questioned, “Everything good?”

“Yes,” Mulan replied, “very.”

Beaming, Marian continued, “Great! It seemed like the kids were really interested in getting to know you guys.”

Nodding her head, Mulan seemed to think about something for a few seconds; her finger trailed the corner of the table as she frowned her forehead. “I was actually thinking about something,” she quietly offered. It sounded like she wasn’t entirely sure that her opinion would be welcomed, and Regina resisted the urge to roll her eyes at her indecisiveness.

Marian immediately looked worried though, “Yeah?”

Clearing her throat, Mulan continued on, “A lot of the kids seemed very interested in the progress and in getting their lives sorted out, you know? But most of them really didn’t seem to believe that they could get that far. It think that’s a problem here, they don’t believe it.”

Regina’s eyes immediately turned to Marian’s – worried what Mulan’s observations might do to her friend and the work they were trying to do here – but Marian did not look so surprised. She appeared to be in agreement with Mulan actually, if the look on her face was any indication at all. Regina had been aware that one of the biggest hurdles was in fact that children and their lack of faith in themselves, and it was something that they constantly tried to work with at The Hills.

“It sounds like you might have a suggestion for me?” Marian said, and her eyes were positively shining with mirth.

“I have this friend,” Mulan said, the words spilling out of her in one breath, “she used to be an orphan, in and out of group homes and foster families, you know the drill,” she continued, and Regina felt her fingers tighten slightly around her mug, “She’s really good with kids, and she’s a true example of how someone can actually get their life together even if they started it out on shitty circumstances.”

Marian urged her, “Go on.”

Mulan straightened her back and raised her chin. “You should consider someone like her to work with these kids,” she blinked and reached a hand up to to tug a piece of hair behind her ear. “Anyway, we have to get back because we have a late afternoon class. But will I see you on Saturday?” She pushed her chair back and stood up.

Not able to hide her smile, Marian nodded eagerly, “Yes! Yes, we will be at GaY on Saturday. Right Regina?”

Surprised by suddenly being pulled into the conversation, Regina could do nothing but agree. “Yes, we’ll be at GaY,” she confirmed.
Mulan offered them both a huge smile as she turned around to find her co-cadets and get back to the academy. Marian turned to look at Regina, and she appeared positively giddy.

“You’re coming home with me and Roland for dinner,” she ordered, as she grabbed her mug and stood up from her chair.

Nodding, Regina reached for her mug too and moved to follow her friend as they did their rounds at The Hills.

Chapter End Notes

I am still trying to line everything up smoothly – and if any of you are wondering why Mulan wouldn’t just say Emma’s name or perhaps “my friend from GaY” or “Henry’s mom” it’s because she wants to protect Emma a bit – she can’t just go out her story for everyone like that. So yeah, that’s my reason for Mulan’s vague attempt at setting Emma up for the project.

Anyway, if you’re reading, please drop off a comment. It’s my fuel right now, that and lots of coffee.
Emma

Chapter Summary

First it’s another night at Gallium & Yttrium, and next it’s a trip for Emma and Henry to the park where they run into a very surprising person. Conversation ensue.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Gallium & Yttrium was filled to the brim with happy people tonight, and Emma was feeling slightly stressed. Not because there was a lot of trouble going on, because people were generally pretty nice and civilised according to Mulan (except, for one, the occasional straight guy like that dude from last weekend), but because she just had to be everywhere at once. Tink wasn’t working today, instead there was some woman named Ursula, who was trying to get her singing career started and therefore earned some extra cash by working at GaY as a bouncer whenever possible. Ursula was nice enough and she liked to talk, but she also preferred to be the one to cover the entrance, which meant that when Emma got in at midnight, she was supposed to just do rounds.

Mulan radioed out her place in the lounge, so after Emma had greeted Ursula and tried to get out of her grasp for about twenty minutes, she finally managed to leave the other woman to check in the basement. There was a DJ for the night, and the room was filled with dancing women. It would have been exactly Emma’s scene before she had Henry, but right now she just found the music too loud, the crowd too thick and the room too hot. She quickly walked the room, making sure that there was no signs of trouble, before descending the stairs to check the next floor; the bar.

There was a long line and Emma checked in with the four bartenders to make sure that they were good and had nothing to point out, before she headed upstairs to find Mulan in the lounge.

She was feeling pretty tired though, after a week of tracking some douchebag from a hit-and-run incident, but it was nice having the late shift this night, because that meant that she’d been able to spend time with Henry and do his regular night-time routine before she had had to leave for work. She’d tucked him in, read him his stories (she was getting pretty tired of reading about The Evil Queen and her supposed tragic childhood from the damned book Mary Margaret and David had gifted him at Christmas), and if she was lucky she’d be back tomorrow before he even woke up. It all depended on when the last people left GaY though, so she’d have to cross her fingers on that one. Dorothy had brought Toto with her for dinner at Emma’s place – Ruby was working the night shift and the morning shift at the diner – so she’d spend the night with Henry until Emma came back in the morning.

As Emma stepped into the lounge, the sound of smooth jazz from the speakers hit her ears, and she smiled to herself. The lounge was a little less crowded than she’d anticipated, and she found it kind of odd that Mulan would have spent such a long time up there instead of in the basement. Generally, it wasn’t in the lounge that the problems arose, because the women there were older and less likely to get completely hammered. Tink had told Emma that the incident last week with that dude and Regina (oh God, beautiful Regina) was the only one in a very long time originating in the lounge. Usually it was the baby gays who caused the most trouble.

Emma was still pretty sore after the incident last weekend; she did not have a concussion, as she’d
suspected, and the swelling had gone down almost completely. She was, however, still spotting a giant purple bruise around her right eye – and thus had been wearing glasses all week to minimise touching the area – and a smaller one on her foot. After careful recollection she was remembering that the fucking douche had heeled her on the foot, and that had to be the cause of that one. Henry had been carefully looking at her eye everyday, making note of all the changes in colour and size as he played her pretend doctor. It had been unbelievably cute, and he’d informed her tonight, as she tucked him in, that she better not come back hurt again.

Scanning the room, Emma tried to locate Mulan, and for a second she was confused because she couldn’t see her in the obvious corner, but then she realised where she was. Emma froze in her steps, for a second not sure whether or not she should approach her friend. Mulan was leaning against a table. Chatting up a beautiful woman. And not just any beautiful woman, but that Marian woman from last weekend. And who was sitting at that table, too, looking mildly annoyed that her friend was busy talking to a bouncer instead of her? Regina fucking Mills.

She had not gotten less attractive in the last seven days, that was for sure. Emma had spent a lot of time – also more than she was comfortable admitting – thinking about Regina Mills and her expressive brown eyes, even thinking about the scowl on her face, her fierce attempt to tell Emma off, yes, and of course also her fucking banging body in that stupid maroon dress.

Today she was wearing bottle green. And that dress was stupid, too. In a she-looks-incredible-and-downright-fuckable way. Emma swallowed the lump in her throat and drew in a deep breath. She could to this. It was her job after all. She could so totally do this.

Sweeping her hair over her shoulder – it was lose today, not in her usual work-ponytail – she stepped closer to their table. She locked eyes with Regina before Mulan or Marian noticed her there, and for a second Emma thought that she saw slight appreciation flash across Regina’s face, before she lowered her head, and Emma wrapped an arm around Mulan’s shoulders in greeting.

“Hello boss lady boss,” Emma cheered, squeezing Mulan in for a hug, before dropping her arm. “And to you too, Marian,” she said, offering Marian a nod, before turning to the third woman at the table, “Regina.”

Regina’s brown eyes trailed over Emma’s face, before they settled on meeting Emma’s eyes. “Hello Miss Swan,” she replied then, lifting her glass to take a sip of the straw.

Marian reached a hand out, lifting Emma’s glasses slightly as her eyes went round. “Oh my God, is that still from last week!?”

Mulan nodded. “Yes, Emma took quite a hit there. But no concussion, right?”

“No concussion,” Emma confirmed, nodding her head and pushing her glasses onto the bridge of her nose. They had a tendency to fall down slightly, because it had been way too long since she got them checked out. She mostly wore her contacts these days. “Anyway, that dude was seriously out of line. You all good after last weekend?” She directed the question mostly at Regina, not sure whether or not she wanted to have a real conversation with her. All she knew was that she’d thought unhealthily much about those lips which were painted a dangerous deep red today. And mostly she’d thought a lot about what it would be like to kiss them, and what her name would sound like coming wantonly across them.

Regina straightened her back and said, “Yes, yes, thank you, Miss Swan. Randolph did not come back to attempt to get me into bed, so your work was appreciated.”

Emma had a feeling that this was the closest to an apology she was going to get from Regina after
how she argued with her last weekend, and for some reason she was okay with that. She offered the
brunette her most dazzling smile. “Well, he was an asshole and he needs to learn to respect women,
so there.”

Marian piped up, “Yes! He really needed that lesson. It’s just so annoying that men come here to
try to bed lesbians, I mean, has that ever worked well for any of them?”

Mulan shook her head and Emma shrugged, turning back to look at Regina who was sipping her
drink daintily, red lips wrapped around the black straw. She looked so fucking beautiful, Emma
could hardly handle it. “So,” she said, as Marian and Mulan turned to each other again (and Emma
had a strong suspicion that her friend might be harbouring a slight crush on this customer),
“where’s the rest of your friends?”

Regina placed her drink back on the table and offered Emma a stiff smile. “They only come
sometimes. Heterosexuals, you know.”

“Ah,” Emma replied as she leaned herself against the table, “they just here for moral support
then?”

“Something like that,” Regina replied as she nodded her head. She folded her hands in her lap, and
Emma felt her eyes sweep over her form as she took her in. “I see your jacket survived the ambush
from Raphael last weekend? What a shame,” she finished and her eyes were shining with mischief
and mirth.

Raphael? What? Who? Emma paused. “Uhm… yeah?” She tried, before she realised that Regina
was talking about the guy again. But – wasn’t his name Randolph, or had Emma misunderstood
something?

Regina tittered slightly, shaking her head. “I didn’t realise that one could still buy red leather,” she
said then, her eyes once more trailing over Emma’s form, which the blonde felt more than
anything. She got this strange feeling in the pit of her stomach that even though Regina was clearly
not a fan of the jacket, she appeared to be acting friendly with Emma right now. Or perhaps,
even… flirty? No, Emma must be misinterpreting that, because this woman could clearly not be
interested in her, she was just too classy and beautiful and well-educated and everything that Emma
was not; simply way out of Emma’s league for certain.

“Don’t hate on the jacket, OK? Just don’t,” Emma grinned then, not able to hold back her flirty
smile, even if she was sure it wouldn’t lead anywhere. This woman was just too hard to resist. She
let her eyes trail over Regina’s strong shoulders and down ample cleavage before they swept over
her legs encaged in pantyhose and ending in tall black heels. Damn, that woman was so attractive,
Emma thought, almost subconsciously darting her tongue out to wet her lips.

Regina arched an eyebrow, silently challenging Emma. Her eyes were still shining in amusement
though, and Emma had this strange desire to just grab the other woman’s shoulders, pull her closer
and kiss her. “You’re very attached to your jacket then,” she stated.

Emma gave a slight hum. “It’s followed me through a load of crap actually,” she said as she leaned
slightly closer, aware – somewhere far, far in the back of her mind – that both she and Mulan were
supposed to be working right now, and that two-thirds of GaY’s bouncers were currently standing
at the same table on the least crowded floor of the establishment. “So,” she said and nodded her
head slightly towards Marian and Mulan, who were still engaged in a pretty heavy conversation, “it
seems our two friends are likely to end up in bed together at some point.”

Regina nodded her head, finger trailing lightly over the side of the table. Her nails were painted a
dark grey. “Yes, it appears so. Is Mulan serious? Because I know Marian would very much like to find someone great. She has a son, you know,” she finished.

This was not at all what Emma had expected to hear from Regina, but it made her very happy. Because Mulan was serious; Mulan was very serious. All she really wanted was someone to settle down with, make a family, and live up to her parents’ expectations of a great life. And if Marian had a kid it was even better, because Mulan absolutely loved kids, and she’d been great with Henry from day one. “It seems like they just might be a match made in heaven,” Emma replied with a smile, and she was entirely serious about it.

That response seemed to appease and please Regina to no end, because a true smile broke onto her face then and Emma swore she’d never seen anything prettier. Damn, she was going to be dreaming of those lips for a long time.

Just then static sounded from both her own radio and Mulan’s, and because of their close proximity a high and painful pitch screeched out as well. Emma stepped to the side and pressed the button, thankfully eliminating the sound.

“Ursula?” She questioned, eyes still focused solely on Regina. If Ursula needed their help right now, she was going to be very sad to leave this conversation. For some reason. She probably shouldn’t think too much about why.

Ursula sounded pretty annoyed when she replied, “So yeah, where the fuck are you guys? I need the bathroom and a cigarette.”

Emma’s eyes locked on Mulan and the look her friend sent her way was too pleading for Emma to resist. She knew what she had to do, and she had to be the better co-worker and friend and take this one so Mulan could continue her thing with Marian. Emma felt her heart thud wildly in her chest as her eyes landed back on Regina who was looking at her with a mild stare of indifference. Emma sighed and hit the button once more. “I’ll be right down,” she scowled, before offering Regina her most dazzling smile. “See you later, yeah?”

Regina lifted the drink to her lips and arched another eyebrow. “Perhaps if I’m so inclined,” she replied, but Emma swore she saw a look of appreciation buried deep in those brown pools.

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Of course Emma did not have time to go back and speak more with Regina before she and Marian left Gallium & Yttrium for the evening. And of course Emma got off a little to eight in the morning, because a couple of patrons refused to leave the dance party in the basement. Of course this also meant that Henry was already up and about when she got home, so she let Dorothy and Toto head on back to their own apartment and decided to take Henry out for breakfast.

She had a feeling that this could be their new thing when she got home on Sundays after work. Maybe it would be nice to have that kind of tradition with him. Plus, they could go to the park afterwards, Henry could burn out a lot of energy, so when she needed an afternoon nap, he’d be able to entertain himself with a book or a movie. Emma thought that that plan was rather genius actually.

Instead of going to Granny’s Diner (even though it was their favourite), Emma found another place for them to eat near Roger’s Park which they sometimes visited, because Henry always found other kids to play with there. Emma just didn’t feel like sharing her time with Henry right now, and perhaps it was nice for her friends to get some time off from her and the kid too. She’d been thinking a lot about the conversation she had with Dorothy last weekend, and even though she
knew they’d always help her, no matter what, she couldn’t help but feel guilty for having relied on them so much.

So she and Henry ate way too many pancakes with syrup; she drank an entire pot of black coffee filled to the brim with cream and sugar, while Henry got hot chocolate with cinnamon and whipped cream. He told her all about the dream he’d had when he slept; something about that darn Evil Queen and how she came to be Snow White’s stepmother (Emma still wasn’t entirely sure how someone had come up with the idea of twisting these fairytales around so much) before cursing all of the land.

Afterwards they walked to the park, and Henry rushed off to the playground immediately while Emma took a seat on one of the benches with her take-away coffee warming between her hands. She was wrapped up in a sweater and her jacket with a giant scarf around her neck. She’d wrapped Henry up in his scarf and gloves too, this time remembering to give him his beanie as well, because she didn’t want him to get sick again. Admittedly, it had just been the sniffles, but his nose had been running and he hadn’t been sleeping well, which was why her friends had helped take care of him during the week when he couldn’t go to school.

She sighed as she thought about it once more and guilt swept over her. She really did rely on her friends too much. Maybe she should try to involve David and Mary Margaret more. She knew they wanted desperately to be involved, and they were the greatest, and Henry did see them as his grandparents. But they lived further away than Emma’s friends, and she’d never really gotten to view them as her parents; she’d been fostered way too late for that, even if she appreciated everything they had done for her. She wished she was better at opening up to them though, but she was glad that Henry had them. At least he had some semblance of a family in his childhood.

He was crawling around on the monkey bars and his loud giggles could be heard all the way to where Emma was sat, sipping her coffee. He appeared to have found two friends to play with already (it happened often on the playground, even if he mostly did better with adults; thankfully he hadn’t completely taken to her lone wolf-persona); a boy and a girl, both with flaming red and unruly hair. They were laughing together, and it appeared they were playing some form of catch.

Henry paused for a second then, on top of the highest tower, and he waved at her happily, before adjusting his beanie – it had a tendency to fall into his eyes, which was why he hated wearing it – before leaping off the side to catch a bar and swing back and forth. His laughter reached her ears, and Emma found her chest filling with so much happiness and love for that kid. She honestly had no idea where she’d be today if it wasn’t for Henry. He was such a blessing to her; he helped make her better. He helped make her want to be better, not only for him, but also for herself.

“Ma, Ma, look at me, look at me!” Henry giggled as he swung around the monkey bars, his thin arms carrying his weight easily.

The redheaded girl was right on his tail though, laughing too, yelling, “Henry, Henry, I’ma catch you real soon!”

Emma sipped her coffee and happily yelled back at him. “I see you, Kid! You’re doing real good,” she assured him. And he so totally was, she didn’t just say that because she was his mother and she was supposed to. Henry would see right through that anyway, because he was too smart for his own good.

She felt her phone vibrate in her pocket, and Emma quickly got it out, seeing a text from Mary Margaret. She looked at Henry for just a second – he was now busy chasing after the redheaded boy – before turning her focus onto the text from Mary Margaret, which was a request for her and Henry to come to their place for dinner sometime during the week. Apparently she and David
‘really misses you two’, and Emma felt another pang of guilt, because of course she couldn’t even handle being a good foster kid. She bit her lip, contemplating what to write back to them; she knew she had to suggest a day for them to visit. But what would fit with her schedule? Wednesdays and Thursdays were usually best.

She typed in a reply, and just as she was about to hit send, a loud yell was heard from the playground, and she looked up from her phone. Henry was lying on the ground beneath the monkey bars, his little face scrunched up in discomfort, and the two redheaded children were sitting next to him, frantically calling for their mother.

Dropping the phone back into her pocket, Emma discarded her coffee on the bench and immediately rushed across the grass and towards the playground area. Thankfully Henry’s cries weren’t that loud, and already two women had come to their aid – probably the other children’s mother for one – and they were now looking around the playground and checking Henry’s arm.

Emma came to a halt when she realised that Henry buried his face into one of their jackets and immediately wrapped his tiny arms around her midsection. *What the fuck?* She stalked over and dropped to the knees next to her son, her eyes only focused on him.

“Henry, Henry,” she breathed, and he turned his head slightly upwards to meet her eyes. His were filled to the brim with tears, “Hey Kid, I’m here, OK? What happened?”

Henry leaned over then, reaching his arms out to wrap them around her neck as he cried. “I fell off the monkey bars, Ma,” he hiccuped, his warm breath ghosting across Emma’s cheek, “Anniston pushed me off when she tried to catch me,” he explained, his wet lashes blinking rapidly as he stared at her. “But R’gina already hugged it better,” he continued to cry, as he folded himself even closer into Emma’s embrace.

Emma pressed a kiss to his forehead, “Oh, it was probably just an accident, right Kid? Accidents happen, you know that,” she assured him, before looking up to get a handle on the situation, now that she finally had Henry in her arms. What she saw though was something completely unexpected. Regina fucking Mills was staring at her with wide brown eyes, and next to her sat that redheaded woman from GaY – Zelena, was it? – with the two children who could only be her kids. They all had the same look of mild surprise in their eyes, and their unruly red hair was too alike to not come down to genetics.

“You’re Henry’s mother?” Regina breathed, her brown eyes showing an emotion that Emma had never before seen in there – complete care and adoration.

The blonde had to remind herself to actually reply to Regina’s question, but everything was seriously confusing her right now. How the hell did Regina know Henry? Emma swallowed. “Uhm yeah?” She tried, her eyes sweeping over Regina’s surprised features, “How do you know the kid?”

Regina’s eyes swept down to Henry’s small form in her arms, before looking back up to meet Emma’s. “He was at The Hills with Mulan last Wednesday,” she explained in one breath, “I come there every Wednesday, I,” she paused, her tongue darting out to lick her bottom lip, “I am very involved in their projects. I entertained Henry for a bit reading stories, while Mulan was busy with the presentation.”

Emma sighed. “Oh.”

Zelena broke in then, her British sneer disrupting the weird, but comfortable, silence erupting between them. “Well as lovely as this little reunion is, don’t you have something to say to Henry, children?” She looked at her kids then, who both sat there, looking particularly guilty, “Anniston?
Montgomery? What do we say?"

Anniston? Montgomery? Who the fuck names their kids that? Emma bit her lip to hold back a snort, and she had a strange suspicion that Regina knew exactly what was going through her mind.

“We’re sorry, Henry,” Anniston and Montgomery chorused.

“I was just trying to catch you,” Anniston added as she reached a hand out and brushed it over Henry’s leg.

Henry sniffed bravely as he looked at her. “It’s, it’s OK,” he said, and Emma reached a hand out to brush it over his wet cheeks.

“I don’t think anything’s broken, right Henry?” Regina said, and the smile on her face was unlike anything Emma had ever experienced. It was so full of warmth and care, and it did really strange things to Emma’s stomach. Just when she thought she couldn’t find Regina’s red lips prettier, she went ahead and smiled like that at Henry. How was that fair?

Shaking his head, Henry looked to Regina then. “No, R’gina, you already hugged it better,” he promised, and Emma was surprised to see that for some reason, her son was feeling safe and confident in Regina’s presence. How long exactly had they spent together last Wednesday? Emma really needed for Mulan to clarify that.

Emma pressed another kiss to Henry’s forehead. “What do we say then, Kid?”

“Thank you, R’gina,” Henry dutifully replied, relaxing his grip on Emma’s body as he turned slightly over.

Regina’s smile grew even wider, “You’re very welcome, Henry.”

Zelena rolled her eyes, “OK, so how about you children run off and play some more?” She urged, and her red hair was blowing wildly in the wind as she spoke. “And I’ll get us some coffee from the stand, yeah?” She directed the last question at Regina, and Emma didn’t really know, but she was pretty sure that the two of them were having some sort of silent conversation.

“You OK to play some more, Kid?” Emma asked Henry, while he carefully slid off her lap. She really appreciated Zelena’s attempt to get the kids to continue their game, because she needed to talk to Regina for a second. She had to have some sort of explanation for this strange encounter before she took Henry home.

Jutting out his chin, Henry nodded. “Yeah, I can play,” he confirmed, and before anyone knew what had hit them, he’d reached a hand out to poke Montgomery’s shoulder, “You’re it!” Henry giggled, as he rushed off the ground and ran towards the slide.

Anniston giggled loudly and ran after him, while it took Montgomery a second to realise what was going on.

“Oh crickets,” he whispered to himself, before he, too, was off.

Regina turned to Emma, and her brown eyes were shining, “So coffee?”

Emma nodded, “Coffee would be perfect,” she confirmed, suddenly remembering the take-away coffee left on the bench, which she’d only managed to take a few sips of before discarding it. She stood up from the ground and brushed off her knees.
Zelena said, “I’ll be right back with the liquid gold. Tah-tah for now,” she cackled and turned on her heel, giving them a slight wave as she stalked towards the coffee cart.

When Emma turned back to look at Regina, she was surprised to see an almost shy smile playing across those lips which – even in the light of day – were painted red, though a slightly milder shade. Regina looked as beautiful as ever; dressed for the weather in a black peacoat and a grey beanie. She was wearing heeled boots and leather gloves, and Emma was finding it more and more difficult to not attack Regina’s lips with her own.

“So uhm, should we, like, sit?” Emma breathed out.

Nodding, Regina led Emma to the bench where she and Zelena appeared to have previously been sitting, watching the kids. There were a few blankets, and a basket with some snacks, and it looked cozy and planned-out, something that responsible adults would probably do. Emma took a seat and turned to look at the playground, where the kids were once more playing happily.

Regina looked in the same direction, “Is Henry going to be alright?” She questioned.

Emma shrugged. “Probably, he’s a tough kid. And Montgomery and Anniston apologised, right? Accidents do happen.”

Scoffing, Regina said, “Don’t let my sister’s charade from before fool you. It might as well have been her kids ganging up on Henry. Her children are wicked,” she said, turning to look at Emma with a raised eyebrow, “just like her.”

Not really sure what to say to that, Emma decided to settle on something less dangerous. “Wait, hold on,” she said, and she actually held up her hand because yes, she was that much of a dork. “is Zelena your sister?”

A low chuckle escaped Regina’s lips, and this was probably a regular reaction from people, because the two of them looked nothing alike. “Same mother, different fathers,” she explained, and strands of her hair were blowing lazily in the wind. Her cheeks were tainted a slight pink. “Zelena’s was redheaded and British, mine was small and Puerto Rican,” she clarified.

Nodding, Emma just said, “Genetics are weird like that.”

“Yes,” Regina agreed, nodding her head as well. “Zelena has lived most of her life in London with her father, but after she married Walsh and came to live here, we’ve started to connect like sisters.”

Another silence erupted between them, and Emma found herself wondering when Zelena would be back with those damn coffees. She figured she had to fill the silence with something though, so she settled on something safe. Henry. “So uh – you and the kid?”

Regina broke into a grin then. “Yes, I can’t believe you’re Henry’s mother. It’s a small world after all,” she paused, her eyes landing on Henry on top of the slide, getting ready to take the leap down. “I apologise if it seems odd, it’s just, I felt like him and me had a connection last Wednesday. We read about The Evil Queen and there was voices and everything.”

Emma practically couldn’t handle the embarrassed flush in Regina’s cheeks, so she decided to skip over that part. “It’s not odd, Henry’s always been better with adults, he’s… He’s a special kid,” she nodded. “Sometimes I can’t believe he came out of me.”

“You must have been pretty young when you had him,” Regina stated then, her eyes trailing over Emma’s form unapologetically.
“I was seventeen,” Emma replied, meeting Regina’s eyes in a serious hold. “I was kind of messed up when I was younger, but he just, he just made everything OK again,” she replied, pushing her blonde hair out of her eyes and wrapping her scarf tighter around herself. “It's just been him and I, but thankfully I’ve got some great friends, but I guess you already know that.”

The brunette nodded, “Yes, yes, Mulan and, who was that woman who picked him up on Wednesday?”

“Ruby.”

“Ruby, yes,” Regina confirmed, her lips curling into a small smile. “And now you work as a bouncer in a lesbian bar and club,” she added, and Emma was unsure whether or not she was inquiring or simply stating a fact. It was kind of hard to tell with Regina sometimes.

Emma nodded once more; she kept dividing her attention between Henry on the playground and the beautiful woman on the bench next to her, which was kind of difficult, because she really wanted to be engaged in both Henry’s game and in her conversation with Regina. “Well,” she said then, deciding to just clarify to Regina what she thought that maybe, perhaps, the brunette sought to know based on her statement. “I am a bails bonds person, and I am a lesbian, so when Mulan proposed it as a possibility to earn some extra cash…” she trailed off, shrugging her shoulders.

Regina looked at her with something akin to relief. “Yes, I suppose that makes sense,” she softly volunteered, but was that a smirk on her lips? Emma wasn’t sure.

Just then Zelena returned what appeared to be out of nowhere with three take-away coffees stacked in her hands. “Hello, what are you lesbians chattering on about?” She demanded to know as she took a seat on the other side of Regina and handed them each a coffee. “Sorry, there was a bit of a line,” she added with a cackle, and Emma didn’t believe her one bit.

Rolling her eyes, Regina lifted the cup to her lips. “Sure there was.”

“Thanks,” Emma murmured in indication to the coffee, before she mirrored Regina’s position and turned to look at Henry.

“Oh,” Zelena moaned, sighing in exasperation, “don’t stop flirting on my account! I’ll just go check on the children then.”

Emma couldn’t help the smile that appeared on her face and she hid it behind her coffee cup, before she said, “Actually, I think Henry and I better head back home soon, I, I haven’t really slept yet, so…” she trailed off and stifled at yawn.

Regina stared at her in horror. “You haven’t slept yet?! How on earth are you still standing upright? I surely hope you’re not planning on driving a car back home?” She questioned, and Emma knew that Regina had absolutely no right to demand anything of her, but she couldn’t help but find it kind of amazing that the other woman appeared to care so much. It was probably about Henry (for some reason she liked him a lot, but Emma wasn’t about to question that either, because her kid was damn cute, so it kind of made sense), but maybe it was a little bit about her, too? One could always hope, right?

“Don’t worry, I’ve got it,” Emma winked at her, before she scooted off the bench and turned to the two sisters. “Anyway, it’s been, uh, nice?”

“It has not been horrible,” Regina murmured in agreement.

Emma held back a laugh. “And uhm, perhaps I will see you around? At The Hills or at GaY?” She
didn’t want to appear too eager, but she kind of really wanted to see Regina around, and perhaps as soon as possible. It would just be nice, that was it, yes.

“Perhaps you will then,” Regina confirmed, but she’d already dug out her cell phone and was staring determinedly down at the screen and not meeting Emma’s gaze.

Zelena rolled her eyes.

The blonde sighed. “Okay then, take care Regina.”

Regina hummed in reply and Zelena scoffed out an indignant, “And I will take care also, thank you very much,” just as Emma turned and walked onto the playground.

“Come on, Kid,” she hollered, “we’re going home now!”

Henry argued her for a second – just for good measure – but he looked tired and burned out after all that playing, so he really didn’t need much convincing. She allowed for him to go say goodbye to Regina real quick – which consisted of a hug and a few words that Emma was too far away to hear – before he returned to her side and wrapped his little hand inside her bigger one. Emma wasn’t sure, because she didn’t turn her head to look, but she had a feeling that Regina was watching them leave.

Chapter End Notes

I want to thank you all for the great comments and the support with this fic so far – it’s moving along now! I don’t really know anything about any parks in Boston, because I’ve never been, and I live in Denmark (which also explains, though not excuses, the spelling and/or grammar mistakes you might find), so I hope my random choice of park makes sense somehow.
It’s getting harder and harder for Regina to ignore invading thoughts of Emma Swan, and it’s especially difficult when the blonde suddenly catches Regina in an unguarded situation.

“I’m very excited for you guys to read this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“...and this date, I swear Regina, he could really be the one for me! He took me out for sushi, and you know how I enjoy sushi, right? And his name is Frederick – he likes to be called Fred – and he’s very handsome and gallant, and he’s blonde, too. He bought me flowers, did I tell you that? Red roses, I’ll have you know, and-”

Zoning out of Kathryn’s enthusiastic monologue about her latest date and possible future husband Frederick, nay Fred, Regina’s mind wandered off, entirely on its own accord, to a much more different kind of blonde. This particular blonde was slimmer, more green-eyed, wore a red leather jacket, and oh, female. The female thing was the important part, at least in Regina’s mind. And oh what female Emma Swan was, with delicious female parts and plumb female lips. Female lips that Regina might or might not have been spending a considerable amount of time thinking about. She might or might not have also thought of them when she was in her bed last night, solely alone and wound up, before she found her trusty vibrator in her night stand’s drawer. And then wasn’t so wound up anymore.

She should probably feel more embarrassed about that, but she simply did not have the time or energy for such feeble emotions. Instead she hummed and ah’ed at appropriate places while Kathryn gushed between mouthfuls of fettuccine alfredo, and instead let her mind drift off, because her best friend and partner hardly even noticed.

It was frustrating, really, how much time she seemed to spend on the subject of Emma Swan. That woman was so infuriating with the way she acted at Gallium & Yttrium, as if Regina had really needed her help with handling the likes of Rueben, but then she went ahead and had a son five years ago – an adorable one at that – and now Regina really didn’t know what to make of this situation. She didn’t like Emma Swan, even the thought was preposterous. Sure, Henry was cute and she wouldn’t mind spending time with that too-smart-for-his-own-good boy, but his mother was annoying on her best days. And sure, did Emma Swan have a nice ass in those tight jeans she liked to wear? Yes, even Regina could admit that she did, but she was only a lesbian. No one could blame her for being appreciative of great butts and tight jeans. And maybe Emma Swan did also look sort of beautiful with her wavy blonde hair and those green eyes, but that was merely Regina being observing. Anyone could come to that conclusion. Perhaps Emma Swan really wasn’t so horrible last Sunday in the park, but there had been children present, so that must have been why
Regina found her company not entirely unpleasant that day.

And her jacket was still hideous, even if it did sort of make her look a little attractive.

Regina took a sip of her lunchtime wine and told herself that Emma Swan was merely a blimp on her radar. Yes, just a tiny blimp, and Regina had no idea why she kept wondering if there was another Mrs. Emma Swan who sometimes took care of Henry, too. Surely that boy deserved more than just one parent, and if there wasn’t another parent, then it was really quite okay for Regina to want to spend time with Henry because she could not deny their connection. And she didn’t want to, as was the case, because Henry Swan was too adorable for words. Perhaps if she was lucky, he was going to be at The Hills again today. Not that she was interested in having anything to do with Emma Swan, this was merely for Henry’s sake (and her own).

“…and I was just- Regina, are you even listening to me?”

Pulling herself out of her thoughts, Regina lifted her eyes from her plate to meet her best friend’s inquisitive gaze. “What? Yes, Kathryn,” she said, forking a piece of pasta, “Frederick sounds really great.”

Kathryn lowered her knife, “I was talking about my latest court case,” she sighed, arching an eyebrow and looking at Regina in that penetrating way that only few people could get away with. It was the no-bullshit way.

Regina shook her head, “Yes, I know that. Your court case,” she smiled at her friend and chewed her food slowly. She really should be getting going to The Hills sooner rather than later.

The blonde across from her dropped her hands to the table and smiled at Regina in pure astonishment. “Want to share with me what’s going on inside that head of yours?” Kathryn questioned then, and even though this appeared to amuse her to no end, she did seem sincere.

Pursing her lips, Regina felt a faint blush rise to her cheeks. The warmth must surely have reddened her skin, but she was hopeful that her make up hid it well. She bent her head to let her hair shield her further from view. “I was just thinking about work,” she flatly commented, and she was aware how unconvincing she sounded.

Kathryn never let anything go – especially not when Regina was like this, the brunette knew that – so of course she tittered and shook her head. She was not having it. “Sure. Work,” she paused, for just a second, before she reached a hand out and gently placed it on top of Regina’s on the other side of the table. “This wouldn’t have anything to do with who you met at the park last Sunday?”

“I’m going to murder Zelena in a flaming fire,” Regina just commented, before casually sipping her wine.

Rolling her eyes, Kathryn withdrew her hand. “Yes, Zelena told me. Crazy about the kid, huh?”

Regina did not reply.

Kathryn soldiered on, “I mean, she told me that you and Emma were sending each other smouldering looks across the bench. Said that she could smell the sexual tension even from the coffee cart,” Kathryn paused, probably hoping that Regina would say something, but she was not going to give her the satisfaction, “It’s nothing to be ashamed of, Regina, Emma’s pretty hot – I mean, even I can appreciate those arms as a straight woman – and you already like her kid. What’s stopping you?”

“I am not attracted to Emma Swan,” Regina simply replied, dropping her cutlery to the table and
folding her hands in her lap.

The look on Kathryn’s face was not an amused one. “Look, Regina, it’s not often that you actually meet someone who interests you-” she paused when Regina glared at her, “-and I know Mal did a number on you, but it’s been two years,” she held out two fingers for good measure, underlining her point to Regina who simply continued to glare at her, “two years, Regina. It’s about time that you opened yourself up to love again. I know you still want all the same things you did before Mal, I know that hasn’t changed,” she softly finished.

Regina downed the last of her wine. She felt her fingers tighten painfully around the fragile glass and for a second she was afraid that she was going to break it. “Do not talk about Mal Horne in front of me,” she huffed.

Kathryn’s eyes softened. “Regardless,” she sighed, “Emma is not Mal, and she seems really sweet, albeit a little rough around the edges,” she paused, “but maybe that’s a good thing, you know? You need someone who can challenge you. Just… not as much as you-know-who did.”

“May we not discuss this any further?” Regina questioned then, placing the – thankfully still intact – wine glass back on the table. She’d spent such a long time forgetting Mal Horne, the stunning and cunning prosecutor that Regina had gone up against in court four years ago and later fallen into bed with. Their relationship had felt real and true, and perhaps like a future, until Regina had found Mal in bed with another defence attorney and suddenly realised that nothing was real and true and like a future, and especially not Mal.

With another sigh, Kathryn appeared to let it slide. “Just… don’t be so closed off that you don’t recognise a really good thing when it’s right in front of you, okay?” She swallowed loudly. “And I just can’t help but think back to the night you guys met and it was seriously like friggen’ fireworks, Regina,” she paused, for added impact, “fireworks.”

Rolling her eyes, Regina glanced at her wrist watch – her father’s old one, which made it way too big and masculine for the rest of Regina’s wardrobe – and said, “I better get going. Marian and I are going to plan out the next few months’ programme for the children, and she will start making decisions without me,” she explained as she pushed back her chair.

Kathryn laughed, “Will you look at that,” she said with a teasing smile, “it’s almost like it’s her job and not yours.”

Regina grabbed her purse. “Har har har.”

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Henry (or Emma for that matter) had not been at The Hills yesterday (and why Emma would be there, Regina didn’t know, but it was sort of disappointing nonetheless), and Regina found herself fidgeting and procrastinating the next day at work.

She was really fidgeting and procrastinating. So much that Kathryn was actually noticing. And her secretary too, who kept interrupting and asking Regina, in her stupid, polite voice, if there was anything she could get her.

Her and Marian had managed to start planning the programme for The Hills, but they had been understaffed yesterday (much like they always were, because money was tight), and Belle from the library had had troubles running her homework workstation on her own, so Regina had stepped in to help.
She’d gone home with Marian and Roland for dinner, and then she’d had to spend all evening – while they did the dishes, got Roland showered and tucked in and eventually found themselves with a glass of wine on the couch – listening to Marian gush about Mulan and how ‘she was the greatest’ and ‘so cute’ and apparently she had gathered up the guts to ask Marian on a date, which of course pleased Regina. She was happy for her friend. Really. Marian deserved someone ‘great’ and ‘cute’, but it had not been helpful to Regina who was still so very much confused about Emma Swan, Henry, her conversation with Kathryn and her nighttime activities with her vibrator.

So when Regina returned from her 11 o’clock meeting to find a message from her mother on her desk – taped to her computer with a post-it from her secretary – containing a name and a number to that CEO-woman she took it as a sign. And asked Tamara, the CEO-woman, to join her for drinks that same evening, if she had the time.

Which was why she was now seated at the bar at Gallium & Yttrium, nursing a gin and tonic, and glancing repeatedly at her watch. There weren’t many people – it was a Thursday after all and the basement was closed off on all days except Fridays and Saturdays – but there were people in the bar and in the lounge upstairs, and it was kind of nice to just sit there by herself and unwind with a glass of something strong.

She was starting to fear though, that Tamara was not going to show up today. Regina knew it had been unlikely that the other woman could make it, it was very short notice after all, and they’d agreed that if she couldn’t get off work on time today, then they’d find another day to have a proper date. Regina had googled her of course, because she had to know that her mother wasn’t trying to set her up with Cruella De Vil, and she’d been pleasantly surprised to see her mother’s choice in women for her; Tamara was beautiful with long dark hair and expressive eyes, and it seemed that she had a lot of bark in her.

But perhaps Tamara was not showing up today, and Regina had to admit that it didn’t even matter.

“Can I get another one of these?” She asked the bartender then as she motioned towards her now empty glass.

“Comin’ right up.”

Regina turned to her cell phone, only to realise that there now was a text from Tamara. She ran her finger over the screen, opening up the message, finding in herself that she actually did not even care. That this date for drinks had been a meek attempt at doing something with her life, finding something that could resemble a future that she had always wished for, but at the same time trying to control it with all her might. She had never been good at letting go, and the one time she had done so, Mal Horne had walked all over her in her five inch red stilettos.

*Regina, I’m sorry but I can’t make it. Paperwork is piling up. Can we get dinner this weekend instead?/*Tamara.

“Here’s your G&T,” the bartender said and placed a glass in front of her; the sides were trailing with condensation and Regina ran the tip of her finger through it.

She wrote back to Tamara, not denying nor confirming the dinner invitation, and instead decided to finish her drink, go home and take a long bath before turning in early. She didn’t know what she had planned this weekend, but it probably included Zelena and her offspring in which case she needed all of the strength she could get.

*Wonder what Emma and Henry are doing this weekend? Is Emma working, or are they going to the park again?* If they were going to the park, maybe she could ask Zelena and the kids there to-
“No,” Regina firmly told herself, straightening her back and taking a long sip of her drink.

“Do you always talk to yourself?”

Turning slightly on her bar stool, Regina was surprised to find none other than Emma Swan smiling that taunting smile at her; green eyes were shining with joy, and she leaned herself casually against the bar. “Emma,” she gasped, and she felt her fingers tighten around her glass. “What are you doing?”

Emma smiled, “Same as you is the looks of it,” Emma replied, before turning to the bartender and holding out a finger, “Quinn, can I get a G&T as well?”

“Sure thing, Em,” Quinn replied and smiled flirtatiously at Emma as she got to work.

Regina felt her throat tighten. “Just unwinding then.”

Turning back to her, Regina could feel Emma’s eyes sweep appreciatively over her body and she tried not to let it show how much those looks affected her. “Something like that,” the blonde whispered. “If you’re here alone, maybe we could grab a booth and unwind together?”

That Red Leather Jacket was still incredible hideous, but Regina might as well sit with Emma. It was just convenient. Instead of the both of them sitting alone, it was just the logical thing to do. She sure would look less like a pathetic, lonely lesbian if she sat with Emma. It was only common sense. “Yes, that would be fine,” she replied while she slipped off her stool and reached for her jacket and purse on the spare chair next to her.

Emma grabbed her drink from the bartender and made the way towards a booth in the far corner of the room – guarded and away from all of the other people in the bar, even if there were plenty of other spare booths on the way there.

They slipped in from each side, and Regina placed her things next to her, sipping her drink immediately at not daring to meet Emma’s eyes. Now that the blonde was in front of her, she became painfully aware of just exactly what she’d been doing to herself while thinking of the other woman. It was hard to not let that show, when Emma was sitting in front of her now, lips as full as always. And now she was taking off that jacket and her sweater and oh goodness, she was wearing a cut-off t-shirt underneath and Regina found herself staring right at her biceps.

Those were some really good, very toned, biceps.

The brunette gulped and took another sip of her drink. Raking her brain for something to say, she settled on the first thing that came to mind. “So where’s Henry tonight?”

Emma smiled, taking a long gulp of her drink as well. “With his grandparents. We were there for dinner, and Henry wanted to spend the night, and I figured… Why not grab a drink? It’s not often I get a night off to do just that. If I’m not with Henry, I’m usually working,” she rushed to explain, her green eyes tracing Regina’s face curiously.

Regina nodded, “That makes sense,” she replied, tilting her head slightly to the left and watching Emma carefully. The blonde really was quite beautiful. “So your parents? They live in the city as well?”

A flash of something entirely unreadable appeared on Emma’s face, and Regina only noticed it because she was staring intensely at the other woman. It was gone as quickly as it came, and all it left was a dark shadow looming in those green eyes. “No, they’re not….” Emma paused, biting her lip, “It’s kind of hard to explain.”
Perhaps it wasn’t Emma’s parents, but maybe the father’s? Or maybe a former lover whose family Henry had grown attached to? Regina waved the other woman off. “It’s okay, you don’t have to tell me anything you don’t want to,” she quickly said, her eyes searching Emma’s. It was pretty evident that she’d hit a nerve somehow.

“No it’s,” Emma paused, and she seemed to ponder it over for a second or two, weighing the pros and cons, and Regina knew instantly that if Emma did decide to share with her, she should feel privileged by that. “It’s not my parents,” she finally slipped out, eyes darting to rest on the cracks in the wooden surface of the table. “It’s my foster parents actually, but uh, I only came to live with them when I was older, so I’ve never gotten real comfortable with the uuuh ‘parents’ word, y’know?”

Regina reached a hand out instinctually and placed it on top of Emma’s, thus stilling its movements across the table. She could feel her heart thud in her chest, and she had no idea why this conversation was suddenly impacting her so much. “I’m sorry to hear that,” she honestly replied, “Were you in the system?”

Emma croaked, “Yeah, I was… bounced back and forth a lot. Before David and Mary Margaret.”

“But they adopted you?” Regina asked. She was finding that so many of her questions and wonders about Emma Swan was starting to make sense now. The closed-off book in front of her was slowly becoming readable, and she found that she was eager to learn more.

Finally lifting her eyes from the table, Emma met her gaze head on. “Yeah, and… they adore Henry, and he loves them,” she revealed and that smile that Regina was quickly coming to associate with Emma talking about Henry appeared on her lips. “I’m not the best adopted daughter, but I want Henry to have more family than I ever did, so...” she trailed off, the last of the thought finished in silent understanding.

“Em-ma,” Regina whispered, turning the pale hand over and resting their palms against each other. For a second she was taken aback by the sight of their different skin tones in contrast and she wondered how other parts of their bodies would look pressed against each other. Their legs intertwined. Emma’s fingers brushing over her stomach. Her own lips caressing Emma’s breasts, and then trailing lower, and- No. She couldn’t go there right now. “I think you’re giving Henry everything he needs, family or not.”

Emma’s eyes appeared to be transfixed on their joined hands as well, and her thumb had taken to stroking gently back and forth on the back of Regina’s hand. “Really?” She whispered, and her voice cracked slightly. “Sometimes it just seems like I’m messing him up, yeah? I’m so worried I’ll screw him up to be like me.”

Regina understood that; she understood the fear and the worries that had to be filling Emma’s mind most of the time. She had no one to mirror herself after when it came to parenting, nothing to look back at. “You’re kind of great, did you know that?” Regina whispered, “And Henry is a great kid too, if you hadn’t noticed.”

“Yes, I don’t know how that happened,” Emma breathlessly chuckled as she raised her glass to her lips and took a long gulp of it.

Regina withdrew her hand, leaning back and reaching for her own glass. “Why Henry though?” She finished her drink off, the ice cubes clattering against the empty glass, “I mean, why the name Henry?”

Emma’s eyes shone spectacularly when she replied, “He was the social worker who finally placed
me with David and Mary Margaret,” she revealed.

Regina found that she wanted to know so many things about Emma Swan, especially things about her childhood, about Henry and maybe what she looked like naked. It was getting kind of hard to ignore the way her skin was tingling even after she had let go of Emma’s hand; how her lips buzzed in some kind of anticipation and how she felt this weird sensation in the pit of her stomach. “Yes?”

Nodding, Emma continued, “Yeah! I’d been in and out of different foster homes and group homes my entire life, and I’d had more social workers on my case than I can even remember. I’d finally accepted the fact that I was never gonna get a family and then he gets assigned to my case and he’s this old dude who’s been around for so many years and I think I’m pretty much done for, which I tell him on our first meeting, and…” she trailed off, shaking her head to herself.

Regina could not explain the fondness in her chest or the way she could not stop smiling, so she simply urged Emma on with her eyes.

“He told me that there was no fucking way I wasn’t getting a family, and so he found David and Mary Margaret for me, and even though it was maybe too late, I still appreciated the hell out of it,” Emma finished with a fond smile.

Slushing the almost melted ice cubes around in her glass, Regina said, “My father was named Henry, did you know that?” She fixated her eyes on the melted ice, contemplating whether or not she should buy them both a glass of wine.

Emma’s head poked up at that. “Yeah?”

“Mh,” Regina murmured, “I told Henry when we first met and he didn’t quite believe me,” she lowly chuckled.

“I don’t think he’s ever met another Henry,” Emma replied.

The brunette felt her own smile and she was pretty sure she had to be looking completely foolish right about now. She had a feeling that she was looking at Emma like a complete idiot. “Technically his name wad Enrique, but Mother thought it was too… foreign,” she paused, “She never quite liked that I took after him… colour-wise.”

Emma frowned at that; a crinkle appeared between her eyebrows. “What? But you’re beautiful!”

Regina couldn’t hide the flush that came over her at Emma’s unguarded words, and she wetted her lips, finding her eyes transfixed on the blonde’s kissable mouth. “Yes, but…” she paused, searching briefly for the right words. “Mother has always had great expectations of me, especially me, and it was always easier to get somewhere in this world without being a minority. So Daddy changed his name to Mills, just like Mother’s, and I wasn’t taught much Spanish or encouraged to learn about my heritage.”

The blonde woman raised an eyebrow. “But that’s fucked up,” she simply stated.

Humming in response, Regina continued. “Thankfully she’s loosed the reins a little, and she’s quite acceptable of me being a lesbian, but…” she trailed a finger over the side of her glass. For a second she wondered why she was suddenly so comfortable opening up to Emma, when she never let her guard down around other people. Maybe it was because Emma had just shared something so personal with her, or maybe it was because she’d had a few strong gin and tonics. Or maybe it was simply because Emma was… Emma. “It’s not really something I share with a lot of people. It’s
hard enough being a Latinx woman in my field at work, but then a lesbian too?”

“The world sucks,” Emma just stated as she offered Regina an encouraging smile. “But anyway,” she said, nudging her head towards the bar, “How about a glass of wine?”

Regina could not contain the smile that overtook her features then. “You just read my mind.”

Regina had no idea how the clock was suddenly nearing one in the morning, and she and Emma were still sitting in their booth at Gallium & Yttrium, still drinking wine (at this point she had lost count of exactly how many glasses they had had), but now also somehow sitting a whole lot closer than they were before.

They’d both scooted nearer to the middle of the booth throughout the evening, and Regina was finding it decidedly harder at this point to not touch Emma. Which was why she was currently touching Emma. Their hands were in the blonde’s lap, fingers brushing, featherlight touches, barely there nails on skin.

And it was sending crazy tingles up Regina’s spine. Goosebumps were appearing, and she could feel Emma’s touches all the way down to her toes. The other woman was just so inexplicably beautiful in the dim light from the bar; she looked tired, but happy, and her hair was a mess of blonde waves after the long day, and of fingers raking through it, and Regina just really wanted to press her lips against the other woman’s neck, her jaw, her nose, and finally her lips.

Emma’s fingers were trailing up Regina’s arm, and the blonde had this look in her eyes, like maybe she also wanted to do the exact same things that Regina was thinking about. Like perhaps she also wanted to kiss her. But would that be okay? Wouldn’t that make it even scarier, even more dangerous? Regina shivered as Emma’s finger reached her elbow and the blonde leaned even closer into her space. Her breath was hot against Regina’s ear as she whispered. “You’re so fucking beautiful, did you know that?”

Closing her eyes, Regina willed herself to keep calm. “Is that so?” She questioned. Breathless.

Humming, Emma’s fingers were itching dangerously closer, and Regina could feel her own heart speed up as they came to her shoulders, brushing her hair away. “You’re like,” Emma paused, “the most stunning woman I have ever seen, and I just,” she swallowed loudly, her hands sneaking around Regina’s neck, palm sweaty on her skin, but not at all unpleasant. “I just want to kiss you so fucking much. I have since I first laid eyes on you.”

Tilting her head to the side, even though Regina knew just how dangerous that was, she met Emma’s eyes. Their noses were inches apart, and Emma’s green eyes were clouded over in lust, inebriation, want… Regina could hardly tell the difference. “Then why have you not done so yet?” Regina heard herself question, even though that was absolutely the last thing she wanted. As if Emma should even dare to. Her lips were very full though. Downright kissable.

“I,” Emma looked conflicted for a second, blinking at her in confusion, “I wasn’t sure if you wanted me to,” she hoarsely replied, eyes trailing from Regina’s lips, to her eyes, and back to her lips again.

Regina was not able to bite back her chuckle, because was this woman even for real? She was seriously starting to doubt her own taste in women if this was the kind of person she was now attracted to. “You’re an idiot,” Regina whispered back to her, and for a while – maybe just twenty seconds or so – the air between them was electrified as she leaned in closer. She knew that she
should stop herself, that this would never end well, and that her and Emma were better off as acquaintances, perhaps even someday friends, and that this would surely end with her having her heart broken when Emma eventually figured out that she wasn’t what her and Henry needed, and then they’d both leave her, and she’d be left with all of the shattered pieces of herself.

Yet she could not stop herself. Not when Emma’s eyes were falling closed as she muttered a low, not even offended, “Hey,” at Regina’s accusation, and their noses were now brushing, and everything around them seemed to come to a halt. She could not hear a single sound other than Emma’s ragged breathing, she could not see anything other than Emma’s fair skin. All she could sense was Emma, Emma, Em-ma.

And suddenly everything around her came to life again when their lips finally touched. It was soft at first, hesitant, just lips barely touching lips. Regina’s heart felt like it was trying to beat its way out of her chest as Emma gave her the lightest of kisses. And then she paused, long fingers pulled her closer, and she tugged desperately at Emma’s shirt as their lips touched once more. This was harder, fiercer, and every part of her body buzzed as her lips parted and Emma’s tongue met hers.

She had no idea what was happening; everything and nothing at once. Emma was there with her, so near and so right, and she wanted to have her even closer all the while she wanted to push her away for protection. She breathed in through her nose, never once letting go of the other woman, not daring to part because that might be the end of this experience and she was not ready for it to be over. She was not ready for Emma to realise what a huge mistake she was making, kissing this older, closed-off woman in the bar where she worked.

But Emma didn’t pull away; Emma appeared to draw her closer if even possible. The younger woman tugged at her blazer, ran a hand through her hair and she was breathing so heavily that Regina knew that they had to come up for air. Pulling away – not far though, never too far – Regina could hear her own ragged breathing as Emma’s lips placed kisses on her cheek, jaw, chin, before demanding her lips once more.

The brunette clutched at Emma’s arms then, and she felt heat all over, delicious warmth. “Em-ma,” she breathed, drawing out the other woman’s name.

Emma let out a breathy chuckle, “Fuck,” she let out, half a moan, half a whisper. Pressing their foreheads together, she repeated herself. “Fuck, fuck, fuck, you’re like…” she opened her eyes, green meeting brown, “fuck.”

“So eloquent,” Regina breathlessly chuckled, but to be honest she couldn’t really make out a comprehensible sentence either. All she could do was sit there, her forehead pressed to Emma’s, and take in the sight of this rumbled, beautiful woman in front of her.

“So Shut up,” Emma replied, and her long lashes brushed beautifully against her fair skin.

Regina hummed, trying to still her beating heart. This moment was precious, dangerously so. And as she looked at Emma across from her, she saw herself fall into pieces over this stunningly smart woman with the adorable five-year-old son. She saw herself brokenhearted when Emma evidently left her, saw herself saying goodbye to Henry and kissing Emma for the very last time, and… no goodness, she’d just started kissing Emma, and she never wanted to stop again. What if she got so used to it and everything just slipped through her fingers once more?

She could feel the panic rise in her throat.

Sensing that something was off – because of course she did – Emma reached a hand out and brushed it across Regina’s cheek. “What’s wrong?” She held her breath. “Regina?”
“I, I can’t,” Regina pulled back then, her forehead leaving Emma’s, eyes closed and hands dropping to her own lap. “Emma, I can’t,” she breathed, and she could already feel the tears welling up in her eyes, those traitorous, emotional tears.

“What?” The blonde croaked, and Regina was sure she saw hurt and years of abandonment issues floating in those green pools. “Regina, what – I don’t,” Emma paused, voice cracking, “what just happened?”

Running a hand through her hair, Regina didn’t dare meet Emma’s eyes as she gathered her things, searching for her discarded cell phone in the booth. She couldn’t look at the other woman, if she did, she might lose her resolve and stay. She might do something foolish like invite her back to her place for the night and then it would be even harder to do this in the morning. To get a taste of Emma Swan and then have to leave it all behind. She felt her throat tighten once more as she choked back the tears threatening to spill.

Emma’s hand was warm on hers as she reached out to stop her. “Regina.”

“What?” Regina bid her off, finally turning to look at her, to see those green eyes staring at her with so many questions, and a trembling pair of lips which were tainted with her red lipstick, mushed hair and flushed cheeks.

“Don’t tell me that you didn’t just have the same experience that I just did?” Emma asked her. She wasn’t pleading, because Emma Swan would never do that, but she was curious and honest, and she truly wanted to know.

So Regina did the only thing she could think of. She lied. To protect herself. To protect Emma. And to protect little Henry, because involving her in their life would surely end up badly. “I didn’t,” she said firmly, eyes meeting Emma’s in a locked gaze. She was pretty certain that she sounded convincing enough to win a court case.

But Emma just shook her head at her. “Bullshit,” she said.

And Regina couldn’t lie to her, not again. “Yes,” she whispered, before she gathered up her peacoat and purse and turned to leave the booth. She paused, just briefly, and turned back to kiss Emma softly. It was just as electrifying as their other kiss had been, perhaps even more so, and she could taste the salt of her own tears, because evidently she was now crying. Traitorous, foolish emotions.

Emma stared at her when she pulled back. “Regina, just talk to me,” she asked. And she still didn’t plea, but it sure sounded like she was about to.

Regina lowered her gaze. “I can’t.”

And then she turned on her heel and left.

Chapter End Notes

I’m... sorry? It’s going to be okay, I promise. Also, I’m running out of R-names.
Emma

Chapter Summary

Emma’s been thinking a lot about that kiss. It was a very good kiss, so why shouldn’t she.

Chapter Notes

I am a bit (read: quite a lot) nervous about this chapter. Also, no Regina which is just a shame because there should always be Regina.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Henry! Breakfast!” Emma hollered, slipping the plate of waffles onto their round kitchen table – just the finishing touch to their 7:30 Saturday breakfast feast – and taking a seat on the chair closest to the stove. This was her chair; it had been deemed hers shortly after they moved in when she realised that she could reach the stove and the refrigerator if she tilted backwards far enough and thus she didn’t have to get up if she forget anything when setting the table.

Henry came trodding into the kitchen in his Frozen pyjamas; they were light blue and covered in pictures of Elsa with her golden hair, and perhaps they were a tiny bit too small now, but Henry wasn’t ready to part with them yet. The Frozen obsession had been long and tiring (Emma never thought she’d be able to hear *Let It Go* again without cringing), but thankfully it had now turned into the firetruck obsession. Even though he was talking more and more about Disney and fairytale characters again. Especially The Evil Queen from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves* was interesting to him, and Emma really didn’t understand why.

Climbing onto his chair, Henry reached for his glass of orange juice, clumsily taking a sip as the liquid slushed onto the table. “Hot cocoa, Ma?” He said, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand as he reached for his fork. His waffles were already pre-cut so he was mostly handling his eating by himself at this point.

Emma pushed the top of her french press down, savouring the scent of the freshly brewed coffee. “It’s in your cup, Kid,” she replied, plucking a berry from her mountain of whipped cream and popping it into her mouth.

Henry stared at her like she was crazy. “You forgot the cinnamon,” he simply stated.

“Well duh, how stupid am I?” Emma chuckled and reached backwards, grabbing the cinnamon shaker from the kitchen table. She leaned forward and drizzled the hot chocolate with cinnamon for him.

Stabbing pieces of waffle with his fork, Henry said, “You can be very stupid, Mamma,” as he nodded his head and swallowed. “What are we gon’ do today? The park?”

Emma placed a finger on her chin, making her usual thoughtful face at her son; this was the first
Saturday in a while where they had woken up together in their own apartment, and she wasn’t tired or worn out from working, and she sure as hell was going to enjoy this with him. “I dunno, what do you wanna do, Kid?” She poured herself a steaming cup of coffee.

Shrugging, Henry bent his head and tried to drink from his cocoa without lifting the cup. This resulted in his nose coming back with whipped cream on it, and he giggled. “Can we hang out with R’gina?”

The mere sound of Regina’s name caused a ruckus inside of Emma’s body; not only had she not heard from Regina since their kiss on Thursday, but she herself had made no attempt to contact the other woman. Not that she didn’t want to, because she sure as fuck did, but she didn’t even have Regina’s number (and yes, there were ways to get that, she knew), but she was seriously doubting whether or not it was a good idea.

Regina just… confused the heck out of her. And yes, that kiss had been mind blowing, and not just because it had been a while since Emma had kissed anybody, but simply because the surge of chemistry she had experienced had been unlike anything she had ever tried before. She’d thought a lot about kissing Regina, she knew and admitted this, and she’d thought about those brown eyes and especially those red lips, but she also knew that what she’d imagined hadn’t even come close to the real thing – that kiss. Damn. She’d been thinking so much about it that she’d hardly been able to sleep the past two nights.

But Regina had run off. Emma was pretty certain that the other woman had enjoyed their kiss just as much as she had (because such an experience could not ever be one sided) and yet she had still run off. Sure, Emma had called her out on her bullshit, but that didn’t change the fact that she’d left anyway. Emma didn’t understand why – it was actually really confusing to her – and she’d spent the better part of her Friday trying to figure out what could have possibly gone through Regina’s mind the night before. Actually she’d spent so much time contemplating this that she’d had a hard time focusing on the prick she was trying to catch for skipping bail.

Emma was aware that Regina was closed off and had walls up all around her; that much had been evident from day one. But she also knew that Regina cared a great deal, she had experienced that in the way that Regina had taken to Henry immediately, without even knowing whose son he was. She remembered Henry returning home from his day at The Hills with Mulan and talking about this great R’gina he had met there and how she had read from his book and done voices for all of the characters. Of course at that point Emma had thought it was one of the employees at The Hills who’d taken care of him that day; she hadn’t been aware that it was the woman whose lips she couldn’t stop thinking about.

It was presenting to be some sort of a problem that Henry was now asking for time with Regina. They’d only met two times, but apparently the other woman had made quite an impression on the kid. And his mother too, Emma guilty admitted to herself. What the heck was it with Regina Mills and her power over the Swans?

“Sorry Kid,” Emma said as she lifted her cup to her lips and took a long sip. Henry was staring expectedly at her. “I don’t think we’re gonna be able to see Regina today. How ‘bout Granny instead, huh?”

Dejected, Henry hung his head and slurped a bit of his cocoa. “R’gina is just really nice, Ma,” he whispered, picking up pieces of his waffle with his fingers, which Emma did not have the heart to correct him for right now.

Emma bit her lip. “I know you think so, Kid, and let me tell you, I think so too,” she honestly said, meeting his eyes – so much alike her own – across the table. “I’m just not really sure how much
time Regina has for the two of us, yeah? She’s a real busy worker, not like me. She’s got a very important job and lots of people who depend on her.”

It was a little, white lie. Even though she hated lying to Henry, about anything, even the small things, it was a necessary lie, because she did not want him involved in this kiss-and-run debacle. And most important – she did not want him to get attached to Regina (more than he already was, it appeared) if the brunette was going to run away like that. Emma couldn’t afford to let people into their life who were just going to disappear on them.

She realised it was a bit too late with Regina though, because she was already there, and Henry was already attached. Emma had had no say in that; Henry and Regina had met without her knowledge and she somehow had to deal with that despite how much Regina’s actions on Thursday had hurt her feelings, how much the other woman was confusing her to no end.

“That’s stupid,” Henry simply replied, before he turned his attention towards the berries on his plate. He bit into a blueberry and immediately made a discomforted face. “Ew, that’s sour, Mamma!” He whined, before reaching for the glass of orange juice and gulping down the remains of the blueberry with it.

Emma chuckled. She could not contain her enjoyment of sharing this morning with Henry, something that happened far too little without the rush of preschool and work speeding them along. Those moments were precious, both to her as a mother, but also to Henry as the child. She remembered wanting such moments desperately when she was a kid and no one had time for her. Ever since having Henry she’d vowed to make his childhood great and full of love and care, and all those other things that she herself had not been privy to. She’d also always thought that at some point she’d be giving Henry a bigger family; another mother, perhaps siblings. A steadier family life. Not that she’d ever really worked hard in doing exactly that, because her life did not leave many moments for dating or socialising.

It’d just been her and Henry, and it had always been really good. Except now she was starting to actually see and perhaps even more importantly believe that it could be more than just them; it wasn’t just a far-fetched fever dream, it was an actual possibility. And she hated this, but goddamnit, she was starting to picture Regina fucking Mills as someone who could be part of that.

Even if she’d run off. God, why had she run off?

———

Granny’s was bustling with life and activity when Emma and Henry made their way into the diner for their afternoon snack. They’d had quite the day so far; they’d been to the park, they had run errands, they even went to get Henry a new pair of sneakers, because his other pair was spotting a giant hole in the sole.

Ruby greeted them both with a huge smile as they approached the counter. “Big Swan and Little Swan,” she cheered, popping her gum and sticking her pen behind her ear. “Hot chocolate and cookies?” She arched an eyebrow, already familiar with Henry and Emma’s preferences.

“What kinda cookies do you have today, Aunt Ruby?” Henry demanded to know as he stood on his tippy toes and practically glued his face onto the glass display with today’s cakes and other sweets.

Dorothy – who had her head buried in books by the other end of the counter – chuckled. “Try the carrot muffin, Kiddo, the frosting is really great.”
Henry’s eyes were wide as he turned to look at Emma, “Can I have one, Ma?”

Emma pretended to think about it for a second or two, “Oh, why the hell not?” She turned turned to Ruby, not able to hide her smile. “It’s my day off, the sun’s out. Give us both a muffin, why don’t you?”

Ruby punched it into the cashier and leaned over the counter, urging Emma closer with a crooked finger. “Mulan’s in the far corner,” she whispered, her brown eyes shining with mirth, “She’s got some kid and a woman with her. I think she’s on a date,” she finished, her mouth forming a perfect ‘o’ as if that fact alone was disturbing. Mulan having a date? When had that ever happened before? Emma could practically see the wheels turning inside her head.

Emma angled her body slightly as she handed over a few bills. “Yeah, that’s Marian,” she explained, eyes trailing over the now-familiar woman before they landed on the kid next to her. He appeared to be Henry’s age, maybe a year younger, and he had a mop of curly brown hair and was drawing eagerly on a piece of paper.

Handing Emma back her change, Ruby said, “Please go disturb her,” with pleading eyes, “please, please, please go disturb her, Swannie!”

The blonde tucked a piece of hair behind her ear, and as she looked around the room, she had to admit that perhaps the only way they were going to be able to get a seat was to disturb Mulan. Besides, her friend kind of owed her after spending an entire shift holed up at Marian and Regina’s table in the lounge. “We will,” she promised, winking at Ruby, “Henry, come on, Kid, let Kansas do her studying or she won’t ever let you play with Toto again.”

Henry immediately slipped his hand into Emma’s, “Nuh-uh,” he retorted, jumping slightly up and down as they made their way towards the booth in the back where Mulan and Marian were having their date. “Toto loves me, Ma.”

“Are you sure about this?” Emma questioned him seriously, a teasing smile playing around her lips. There was nothing better than to mess with her kid; it was one of her favourite pastimes. She was sure Henry was going to be an excellent bullshitter too, when he grew up, because that shit was just genetic.

When Henry’s eyes landed on Mulan, he let go of her hand and rushed across the floor. With a screeching “Aunt Mulan,” he let his presence be known, and Mulan only had a moment to compose herself enough to meet his excited hug. His little arms wrapped around her neck eagerly, and Emma laughed when Mulan’s panicked brown eyes met hers.

“Henry,” she whispered, pressing a short kiss to his forehead.

“Hi lovebirds,” Emma greeted as she smoothly slid into the booth next to where Henry had flung himself at Mulan. She wriggled her eyebrows and looked at the drawing that Marian’s kid was making. It looked like a dragon. “That’s one cool dragon, is it gonna blow fire?”

Huge brown eyes met hers, “I can’t draw fire.”

Emma reached for the red crayon, “That’s perfect, Kiddo, because I can draw fire,” she explained, before she pressed the crayon to the paper, giving him plenty of time to stop her if he didn’t want her to participate.

Marian ran a hand through his curly hair, “Roland, say hello to Emma and Henry.”

“Hi,” Roland replied, looking up briefly before he turned to watch as Emma drew fire out of the
dragon’s mouth.

Mulan sighed. “Not that I don’t love your company, Emma, but what are you doing in our booth?”

Emma didn’t look up from the paper, “Everywhere’s full.”

Henry rolled his eyes at her. “Ruby wanted Ma to interrupt your date,” he innocently explained, bopping his head up and down as he looked at Mulan.

“I wanted no such thing,” Ruby defended herself as she appeared at their table, setting two mugs of hot cocoa and two different muffins in front of them. “Also, Toto is out back, Henry, why don’t you go check on him?”

Henry eagerly turned to look at Emma with questions in his eyes.

Nodding her head, Emma said, “Do that, Kid, and why don’t you take Roland? Toto’s a dog,” she said the last part to Roland, her eyes shining as they met his freckled face. God, that kid was a cute one.

Roland turned to his mother then, his entire face alight with joy. “May I, Mom?”

Marian nodded, and Roland and Henry were out of the booth quicker than one could say ‘dog’, Ruby following after them with waving arms and high heels to make sure that everything went smoothly. Emma leaned back in her seat, picked up her cocoa and took a long sip of it. She ignored – for just a second – how both Marian and Mulan were looking at her questionably, no doubt wondering if she planned on staying there for long.

Emma groaned, “Just pretend I’m not here, do your date stuff,” she said.

“As if,” Mulan retorted, before taking a sip of her coffee.

Marian rolled her eyes. “So Regina was in a pissy mood yesterday,” she commented, reaching for her own cup of coffee and nursing it between her fingers.

Emma didn’t take the bait. “When’s she not?”

“Stop that,” Marian argued, and Emma would have been offended at the audacity if she didn’t respect the shit out of Marian’s attempt to rattle her. “I know you guys hung out on Thursday, because Regina texted Kathryn in her tipsy state, demanding that she stepped in for a meeting with a client Friday at eight.”

Raising an eyebrow, Emma still didn’t bite. “And Kathryn texted you immediately, did she?”

Marian said, “Regina’s our friend, excuse us for looking out for her.” She sighed heavily, placing her cup back on the table and sitting up straighter in the booth. She slid over slightly, so she was more directly in front of Emma, whereas before she’d been sitting directly in front of Mulan. “Just stop with the defences, yeah? I know you hung out and I can’t for the life of me figure out why that would leave her in such a sour mood,” she paused, brown eyes far off in thought for a second, “I swear, I thought that she liked you.”

Groaning, Emma realised that she was not going to get out of this one. She might be incredibly hurt by Regina’s actions on Thursday, but that wasn’t Marian’s fault, and who knew, maybe the other woman could provide some kind of insight for her. It was worth a shot anyway. She bit her lip in thought. “I think maybe she does,” she acquiesced, shaking her head slightly to herself, not quite daring to meet Marian’s prying eyes. “We… kissed.”
“What?” Mulan breathed, her eyes turning wide as her head flipped to the side. So far she hadn’t really participated in this conversation, but apparently this information was enough to draw her in.

Nodding, Emma continued, “Yeah, like… really kissed. But then uh, then she… ran off?”

Marian’s forehead wrinkled slightly as both Emma and Mulan turned to look at her in unison. The brunette’s eyes flickered back and forth, mouth hanging slightly open. “She… ran off?”

“Yeah,” Emma agreed.

“That’s…” Marian paused, “unfortunate.”

Rolling her eyes, Emma retorted, “Unfortunate?”

Mulan snickered, “I didn’t know you were such a bad kisser, Swan.”

Nudging her friend in the side with her elbow, Emma’s eyes never left Marian’s. “It wasn’t a bad kiss, I swear,” she whispered, tongue darting out to wet her lips, “It was a real great kiss actually. It was… heated. And uh, there was, like, electricity and stuff.”

Marian arched an eyebrow in disbelief, “Electricity and stuff?”

Emma nibbled a piece of her muffin, popping it into her mouth and chewing carefully as she looked at the other woman. “She feels the same, I know it. She said so—”

“-before she ran off,” Emma finished, swallowing loudly. “I mean, I called her out on her bullshit, but she still ran.” That was the confusing part. The part where Emma said ‘bullshit’, and yet Regina still grabbed her things and left.

Marian blinked. “Oh yeah, sounds like Regina,” she whispered almost breathlessly. “She can be hard to read, and even harder to get close to,” she paused, “Do you really like her?”

Emma took a long gulp of her cocoa, whipped cream staining her lips, which she licked off with a swipe of her tongue. “Are you asking me if I wanna fuck her, or if I really care for her?” She fired back, but it wasn’t hostile, actually she was more amused by Marian’s question. Of course if Marian had known her better, she would have never had to ask, because all of Emma’s friends knew that she didn’t do just fucking. Not after Henry.

A crooked smile appeared on Marian’s lips. “Yeah?”

“Of course I wanna fuck her,” Emma said, leaning slightly forward and lowering her voice; this was a family establishment after all, and Granny would have her ass if the children heard. “I mean, have you looked at her? She’s, like, the most beautiful woman I have ever seen, but do I just wanna fuck her?” She continued to question, eyebrow raised and smile dangling at the corner of her lips, “No. I don’t. I feel like I wanna get to know her and stuff. And that shit doesn’t happen often, not when you have a kid,” she finished as she leaned back in her seat, motioning towards Roland’s discarded drawing. “I figure you’d know.”

A soft look overtook Marian’s features then as she looked from the drawing towards Mulan, who was sitting silently next to Emma, drinking her coffee and watching the exchange between the two of them. “I do know,” she honestly whispered, before her eyes met Emma’s.

Trying the other muffin by breaking off a piece (and getting cheese frosting on her fingers, thank
you very much), Emma said, “Yeah so that’s what concerns me, you see? I like Regina, but I don’t have the life for this bullshit, you know? I have Henry to think about, so if Regina doesn’t know what she wants, then I can’t just… I have to think of Henry,” she repeated, licking off her fingers one by one.

Mulan’s warm eyes met hers. “She really hurt your feelings, didn’t she?”

Emma hated that Mulan was so perceptive, because why couldn’t she just be like Ruby and not notice that Emma was trying to hide the fact that Regina’s kiss-and-run had dug up a lot of very buried emotions from Emma’s past. “Nope,” Emma replied, swiping a bit more of frosting off the muffin, just because she could, and Henry would get a stomachache anyway, if he ate it all.

Placing a warm hand on Emma’s free arm, Mulan said, “Yes, she did. Emma, you can be honest with us.”

Marian nodded eagerly, “Sure Emma, I think you should be honest with us. We are having a date after all,” she wriggled her eyebrows, “Which you ruined by the way.”

Rolling her eyes, Emma gave in. “I might… feel slightly rejected,” she said. That was as good as they were going to get it from her.

“Don’t give up on her,” Marian quickly said next, and Emma swore that there was a brief look of panic in her eyes. “Regina likes you, Emma, I know she does, and more importantly you feel the same! It’d just be stupid not to give it a bit more time. It was one kiss, perhaps she just needed some time to think things over.”

Emma bit her lip. “Look, I’m not gonna go beg on my knees for someone who ran out on me like that,” she said to Marian, well aware that this was her friend she was talking about and that it might very well get back to Regina if she said the wrong thing; not that she didn’t trust Marian’s concerns, because she was pretty sure that they were true. “Like I said, there’s Henry in the picture and for some reason he’s already way too fucking attached to Regina.”

Marian licked her lip and reached out her hand. “Give me your phone,” she demanded as she snapped her fingers. When Emma just stared at her, she continued, “Just give it to me!”

With a groan, Emma pulled out her cell phone from her pocket. She unlocked it before handing it over to Marian, who typed in something — her fingers moving swiftly over the touch screen — before handing it back to Emma with a smile.

“There,” she said, “now you have Regina’s number, and you should text her.”

Emma glared at her. “Or she should text me.”

Mulan sighed heavily. “You’re both stubborn mules,” she brushed a piece of her long, straight hair behind her ear and turned to Emma with an encouraging smile. “I get it, you want to protect Henry, so he doesn’t get attached to someone. It makes sense, but Emma,” she patted her arm, warm fingers brushing over Emma’s elbow, “what if this could turn out to be exactly the kind of family you’ve always wanted for Henry? Didn’t you say he seemed to really like Regina?”

“And the feeling’s very mutual,” Marian added, nodding her head eagerly. “As well with you. I swear Emma, if Regina ran, that means she likes you. Otherwise she would have spent the night with you and ditched you after,” she offered a soft smile, “She’s just not that comfortable with emotions.”

Emma huffed, “That’s me and her both.”
Dropping her hand to the table, Mulan added, “Just think about it.”

Emma reached for her cup of cocoa and excused herself to the other two women, intending to go check on the kids in the back. She could hear Henry’s excited squeals, and some giggles that could onto erupt from Roland, and she sipped her cocoa as she passed Granny to find the kids. Perhaps Marian and Mulan were right, perhaps she just needed to reach out to Regina again. At least to talk about what had transpired on Thursday. She couldn’t keep dodging Henry’s questions and requests to spend time with Regina, and if Emma was being totally honest – and decided to see past herself and her hurt pride – she didn’t want to let go of Regina so easily. The other woman still intrigued her, and she could still taste her on her lips, feel her grazing touches.

She stared at the number in her phone, which Marian had saved simply under Regina, and mentally began composing a text she could send to the older woman. Just, if, perhaps maybe, she actually wanted to. She still had to decide that, but at least if she did want to, she’d have an idea of what to text her. Just then, her phone started ringing, and with a groan, Emma realised that it was her boss’ name flashing across the screen – oh God, he probably wanted her to work tonight or perhaps tomorrow. It was probably a lead on her current bail case.

“Henry, Roland,” she said, catching the attention of the two boys, “go inside. Your cocoa is getting cold,” she added to Henry, when her son opened his mouth to object to her.

Roland obeyed immediately and brushed pass her, Henry running after as Toto found its place in the corner on a pillow, where it always spent the days when neither Ruby nor Dorothy was home. Emma discarded her cup of cocoa on the nearest counter and swiped her phone to answer her boss.

“Hey, Emma speaking.”

“Emma,” her boss greeted her with a happy sigh, “I’ve got some intel for you…”

Hey Regina. It’s Emma. Emma Swan. I got your number from Marian, I hope that’s okay. I just wanted to say that I’ve been thinking a lot about you after last Thursday. If you want to meet up and grab a coffee and maybe talk about it, that would be cool. Or whatever. It’s up to you really. Now you’ve got my number, use it if you want.

Hesitantly, Emma stared down at the phone in her hand, eyes trained on the words she had written there – sent to Regina hours ago, last night, after she’d tucked Henry into bed and retired to her couch with a bottle of beer and a trashy tv-show.

Regina hadn’t answered yet, and Emma was starting to regret putting herself out there. At least she’d tried, and that was something. Then it was all up to Regina; Emma had voiced her thoughts, given her two cents, and then the other woman had to choose what she wanted to do with that information. Or in this case, Emma’s number.

“Ma,” Henry whispered, tucking himself into her side and wrapping his short arms around her middle and burying his head in her armpit.

Emma pressed a kiss to his forehead, “What’s up, Kid?”

Henry lifted his chin, his eyes landing on her phone which was still open on the message that she’d sent Regina. “Who you texting?” He yawned slightly, squinting his eyes as his bangs fell into them; they really needed to get them cut soon. Perhaps they could both use a trip to the hair
dresser.

Her eyes were still trained on the name on top of the screen. “It’s uh…” she swallowed, pausing, “I was just writing to Regina actually,” she honestly told him. Her heart was beating fast inside her chest, and she savoured his warmth as he cuddled against her. Soon she’d have to get his bags ready, get him dressed and driven to David and Mary Margaret’s. Oh, she wished she’d just be able to spend another evening with him curled up the couch with Disney movies and popcorn.

Tilting his head back, Henry’s green eyes met hers. “Oh yeah? And is she writing you back?”

Emma cleared her throat and tilted her head too, her eyes meeting his as she swept his hair back. “No Kiddo, she’s not,” she replied. She didn’t want to get into just how much that worried her, because Henry didn’t need to know that. He didn’t need to worry about that.

“That’s stupid,” he said to her, as a matter of fact. “Tell her, I want to see her.”

Breathing out a chuckle, Emma discarded her phone next to her on the couch. “Yeah okay,” she said, and she pushed him gently off the couch, giving him a pad on the butt, “Now, go and pack your toys for tonight, we gotta get moving soon, alright?”

Henry trotted towards his room, “M’kay!”

Tumbling back into the soft cushion of the couch with a sigh, Emma’s eyes strayed towards her cell on their own accord, involuntarily landing back on thoughts of Regina as well as Henry’s words and his childish way of problem solving something Emma had been gruelling over since last night. Perhaps there was something about that though.

With a sigh, she pulled herself off the couch and went to go make sure that Henry also packed his toothbrush and his pyjamas.

_____

*Oh. And Henry wants to see you. He said to tell you that.*

Chapter End Notes

So a bit of insight into Emma’s thoughts in this chapter. Next chapter should pick up a bit on their interaction again. I am really having a good time reading your thoughts and ideas though!
Regina

Chapter Summary

Regina’s not answering any texts, if that’s what you were thinking.

Chapter Notes

So as it often goes whenever I write “This will probably be around eight chapters or so,” this will totally be more in the range of, like, fifteen chapters. It happens. There’s just so much story to tell.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Yesterday there had been the first message.

Which was one thing really. Just Emma being Emma and letting her know that she was thinking of her, of what had happened. It was pretty much Emma putting the ball entirely in her court. Which Regina hadn’t known what to do about; she’d just let the message be, gone to dinner at her sister’s and then occasionally, probably more than considered healthy, touched the screen to look at the words.

But that had been it. She hadn’t answered, because she didn’t know what to say. The same rules still applied, the same thoughts still ruminated in her mind, the same doubts still spooked her.

But then this morning there had been the second message.

Which had been entirely different and not at all what Regina had expected. Perhaps that was one of the things she liked about Emma Swan – that she managed to catch her off guard, surprise her – but it still didn’t help her thoughts. Emma seemed to firmly believe that everything was up to Regina, that she held all the cards so to speak, despite the fact that Emma really hadn’t needed to give her that kind of space, because she probably did not deserve it. Yet it had been handed to her, and it had been nice after all, to be given the opportunity to think things over. If she’d just been able to actually do that. Think things over.

But the message had been about Henry. About sweet, wonderful, innocent little Henry. And he wanted to see her. Her. What had she done to deserve such faith from a little boy, a kid who barely even knew her, yet had decided that apparently she was worth knowing.

Regina had not known what to do with that second message either; it had ticked in this morning, and since then she’d been conflicted, worrying her bottom lip with her teeth, pacing the floor and foolishly – just foolishly – accepting a date with Tamara at this cozy Vietnamese place. It was mostly because her mother had kept poking her last night, asking whether or not she’d gone out with the CEO-woman, and then Tamara had asked for that redo after their failed attempt at drinks, and Regina had acquiesced.

Which was why she was now sitting at the bar, waiting for Tamara to meet her, so they could get
started with their date. Which was all well and good, except for the fact that Regina could not stop thinking about Emma Swan and her pink lips. And her blonde hair. Her green eyes, and those delicious biceps. Mostly though, she couldn’t stop remembering that playful smile she’d offered Regina after their kiss. She, too, couldn’t stop remembering the way she had looked at her, called her out, told her to please talk to her.

And Regina really couldn’t forget the way her entire body buzzed whenever Emma was near her; how her lips still seemed to tingle even just thinking about their kiss, even though it was three days ago. She kept remembering Emma’s words, the hitch in her breath, her fingers combing through Regina’s hair.

And yet there she was. Waiting for her date. With Tamara, the CEO-woman. Who was decidedly not Emma Swan.

She was staring at the messages as she waited, finger hovering over the keyboard. The words were just sitting there, taunting her. Daring her to do something, perhaps maybe even answer them. They were words on a digital screen, and for all sense and purposes they should not have that affect and power over her. Yet she kept staring at the two messages, brown eyes trailing over the words, trying to determine whether or not Emma seemed mad at her, disappointed maybe. But she couldn’t figure it out, because mostly Emma’s words just seemed sincere.

It was very confusing to her.

Glancing at her watch, Regina sipped her glass of white wine and tried to kill time by people watching. She was quite early, as she liked to be for dates, because that gave her the opportunity to indulge in a glass alone to settle her nerves. Not that she was really nervous about being on a date with Tamara, because she was hardly interested in her. She’d do her best though, be the perfect date like Mother had taught her, and if she was lucky she’d get a nice meal and be able to forget everything about Emma Swan and her tantalising kisses.

As her phone vibrated, signalling an incoming message, Regina half expected it to be another one from Emma, and she had to bite back a disappointed gasp when she saw Kathryn’s name on her screen. She swept the text open, eyes scanning Kathryn’s words.

Still don’t know why you’re even on this date, you stubborn fool. You should be asking Emma out, sharing more of those sweet lady kisses, but alas, I wish you the best of luck with your CEO-woman. Mwah!

Darkening the screen, Regina slipped the phone into her purse and turned back to her wine. She’d taken a cab there, thus allowing herself to indulge in the alcohol, hoping that it might make time go by a bit faster.

What were Emma and Henry up to this evening, she wondered. Perhaps relaxing on the couch as it was a school night and Henry had preschool in the morning? They probably were. Regina couldn’t help but imagine what it might be like to be part of such a domestic routine; tucking in a kid, going to bed and making love, before getting up to make breakfast and get everyone ready for work and school. Making Henry lunches, dropping him off at school before going to the firm. Exchanging sweet, foolish messages with Emma throughout the day…

Pausing, Regina realised that she’d just gone from plain domesticity to domesticity with Emma and Henry. Oh, what foolish thoughts. She sat up straighter and told herself to forget about it. This was exactly the reason why she could not get involved with Emma. These things never ended well for her, and eventually Emma would take Henry’s tiny hand in hers and leave her brokenhearted. There’d be no more lovemaking, Sundays on the couch. Not more lunches or sweet messages.
There’d just be Regina, left behind once more.

She glanced at the clock again. Ten minutes until Tamara was supposed to be there, and Regina did not take kindly to being stood up twice, so she had better show up.

Just as she was about to order another glass of the merlot, Regina’s eyes landed on someone entering the restaurant through the double doors, directly in Regina’s line of sight, across the bar. And it wasn’t Tamara, the CEO-woman. It was Emma. Emma Swan. The woman she had kissed just last Thursday.

Em-ma.

And gone was the trademark leather jacket and skintight black jeans with boots. Gone was the messy mop of blonde uncombed hair and the pale make up-less face that Regina had come to appreciate so much.

This woman across from her was so vastly different that at first Regina didn’t even recognise her. But it was definitely Emma, there was no doubt about that. However, instead of her usual attire, she was wearing a pink strappy dress, that clung to her every curve and left nothing to the imagination; not the long legs that Regina had pictured wrapped around herself, not the full butt and the curvy hips, not even the ample cleavage with breasts Regina had thought of tasting more than a few dozen times.

And oh God, she was wearing heels too. And her make up was done simply, but with shimmering lips and darker eyes. Her hair was falling in big princess curls around her face, and she was holding a black clutch – a far cry from the woman who stuffed her cell phone, wallet and keys into whatever pocket was big enough.

She looked so beautiful, Regina could not tare her eyes away. Of course Emmas had always been beautiful, there had been no doubt in Regina’s mind about that from the moment she laid eyes on the blonde at Gallium & Yttrium, but this… this was something else entirely. And it was not unpleasant. Not at all unpleasant, Regina thought to herself, as she let her eyes travel from the high heels, up toned legs, over the pink dress and cleavage, before settling on green eyes. Which were looking directly at her.

Emma’s mouth had formed a perfect, delicate ‘o’, and before Regina could do anything but gape at her, the blonde had rounded the bar and was standing right next to her with a determined, yet insecure, look in her eyes.

“Regina,” she breathed, her green eyes sweeping not so discreetly over the brunette’s form. She was wearing a dress too; a black one, and her lips were painted a dark red. “What are you doing here?”

Regina was not going to lie to herself and pretend that she wasn’t affected by the mere presence of Emma Swan’s body next to hers, she, however, was going to pretend that she was not there on a date, because for some reason she did not want Emma to know that. She cleared her throat, “I have a… business meeting,” she lied easily, her eyes once more sweeping appreciatively over Emma’s form. She couldn’t help but think though, that perhaps Emma was actually on a date, considering the dress she was wearing.

Why that made her insides burn hot with something akin to jealousy was a matter she’d have to sort out tomorrow. Right now she had Emma to deal with, and that was much more of a challenge.

Green eyes swept over her face, pink lips forming a tentative smile. “No you’re not,” Emma
confidently said, placing her clutch on the bar next to her. “You’re here on a date.” Her eyes shimmiered in some kind of amusement, and Regina wasn’t really sure what to make of that.

“And you’re not?” She retorted, vaguely motioning towards that damn dress and the way it showed off all of Emma’s assets.

Leaning in closer, Emma’s lips almost brushed against her cheek as she spoke. “I’m on the job,” she revealed, and Regina felt her breath hitch at the way Emma’s warm breath caressed her skin, “It’s somehow easier to catch a perp when he thinks he has a chance to get into my pants… at least with this guy it is.”

Regina narrowed her eyes, “Clever.”

Emma leaned back then, a teasing smile playing across her lips. “Just using my best attributes, nothing wrong with that.”

Eyes once more trailing to the enticing swell of Emma’s breasts, Regina took a good ten seconds before she answered, “Nothing wrong with that indeed,” she murmured, and she was pretty sure that they both knew that she was referring to the attributes themselves and not Emma’s use for them in this particular instance. Regina was pretty sure that she could come up with far more interesting ways for Emma to make use of those attributes actually.

Emma tugged a stray curl behind her ear and said, “So I’m pretty sure I should be offended that you’re here on a date when you’re not even answering my texts.”

Regina wasn’t sure if she should be, because those two things were not related at all. Being on a date with Tamara did in no way effect what she thought of that kiss she shared with Emma three days ago, nor the messages that Emma had shared with her. “Never confirmed I am on a date, Miss Swan,” she replied with a smirk.

Emma raised an eyebrow. “That’s fine, I can read between the lines,” she replied, reaching for her clutch and tucking it beneath her armpit.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Regina heard herself question before she had time to think about whether or not she really wanted an answer to that inquiry. It didn’t matter, because Emma was probably not going to give her one.

The blonde smirked, “Oh nothing,” she innocently replied as she stepped pass Regina, “I should probably go find my table now. Have a good date,” she finished, and she underlined the last word with a stroke of her finger down Regina’s back, which sent a pleasant tingle all the way between her legs.

Before she had time to answer, Emma was gone, high heels clicking inside the restaurant, and as Regina turned back around on her stool, she saw Tamara come through the double doors, offering Regina a tentative smile. She hated to admit this to herself, but her eyes did not sweep over Tamara’s form the way they had just swept over Emma’s.

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So their date was absolutely horrific and disastrous, this much was clear to Regina already by the start of the main dish. Tamara was not her type at all, and she wondered how it was possible for her mother to know her so little. The other woman was too hard-ass, brazen, and a little too concerned with her job, it appeared.

Or maybe she was just talking too much about her job, because Regina was too busy staring down
the aisles in the restaurant, trying to locate Emma and her perp. It was kind of difficult though, because the place was rather busy this evening, but who could really blame Regina for wanting to keep her sights on Emma? To, you know, make sure that the perp didn’t harm her in any way. Yes, that was it. She was concerned immensely for Emma’s well-being.

Tamara was talking something about an ex-boyfriend, and Regina was nodding her head, daintily eating her goi and dipping her gỏi cuốns in sauce, but she honestly could not recall a word of the story that Tamara was sharing (Mother would have been so disappointed). However, she did hear a loud crash from somewhere behind her, and then the unmistakable sound of Emma Swan cursing.

“Son of a-!”

(So that was why she hadn’t been able to see Emma from her seat; she’d been behind her this entire time). Regina turned around – much like everyone else in the restaurant – only to realise that the table Emma must have previously been sitting at was flipped over, and that it appeared as if her date, the perp, had bolted. Perhaps he’d figured her out after all.

The best part of it though? The part that amused and humoured Regina to no end, was the fact that Emma was covered in canh and something else that appeared to be red wine (which was now seeping into her pink dress in an impressive stain). Regina bit her lip to keep herself from laughing in the silence of the restaurant, where people held their breaths in anticipation of the next move, but it was kind of difficult, because the entire situation was downright laughable, even if Emma had unwillingly become the centre of everyone’s attention. She tried not to laugh, she really did, but as Emma looked up from where she was frantically wiping a napkin on her chest, her eyes met Regina’s and as they stared at each other – for just a few seconds – they both broke out laughing.

This seemed to ease the tension in the restaurant, and people and staff came to Emma’s aid; picking up plates, handing over napkins and turning over the table, so Regina slid back around, reaching for her wine, where she was met with an arched eyebrow from Tamara.

She said, “What?”

Tamara shook her head, “Oh nothing, well, except for the fact that I’ve been trying to get a reaction out of you for the last forty minutes, and nothing, zero, zilch,” she motioned pointedly towards the commotion that was still going on behind Regina (she could faintly hear Emma’s constant murmurs of “I’m sorry, I’m so, so sorry, I’ll pay for everything, I promise!”), “And then that happens and you’re all smiles.”

Placing her glass back down, Regina offered the other woman a glare. “Well, what do you want me to say,” she simply replied, before reaching for another gỏi cuốn.

Chuckling, Tamara did the same. “So, is she a friend? An ex-girlfriend? A lover?”

“Something like that,” Regina replied, suddenly finding this dinner much more manageable after Emma’s little incident. Perhaps Tamara wasn’t such a dull and bland person after all – perhaps she just had to make sure the other woman knew that Regina had no intentions of either sleeping with her or dating her.

Tamara chewed slowly as she spoke, “Oh yeah, so uhm,” she swallowed, “what do you say we cut this short? I’ll head back to the office instead, I swear, my assistant is useless.”

Regina did not even feel the slightest bit put off by that. Actually, she quite admired a woman who knew what she wanted – and once Tamara realised that this wasn’t going to get her anywhere, she’d rather be on her way. “Sure,” Regina agreed, “I’ll settle the bill. My treat.”
Pushing her chair back, Tamara gathered her purse and slipped into her jacket. “Alright Regina, a true gentlewoman,” she winked, sliding her chair beneath the table, “And oh, I see your something hovering at the bar. It appears she’s trying to settle her bill while glaring at me. Perhaps you should go fix that?”

Turning her head to the side, Regina couldn’t help the feeling of warmth that erupted in her chest as she realised that Emma was, indeed, glaring in their general direction. Perhaps it wouldn’t be so horrible to go and settle her bill and then, because Emma was already at the bar, they’d naturally fall into conversation, because anything else would seem rude and foolish. And so what if Emma set her skin on fire, and made her want to break into smiles all the time, that wasn’t necessarily a bad thing. As long as she knew how to control it, so that she didn’t get hurt again. As long as she wasn’t putting herself out there for Emma to do whatever she wanted with. That could work, couldn’t it? At least she was going to say hi.

She and Tamara said their goodbyes and Regina gathered her things to settle her bill at the bar. She found herself leaning in next to Emma, placing her weight against the counter, where the blonde was trailing her eyes over a long paper.

“Didn’t catch the perp, did you?” Regina heard herself question, nudging Emma gently with her elbow.

Emma shook her head, “Urgh, and to think I sacrificed an evening of Disney dvd’s with Henry for this,” she messily scribbled her signature at the bottom of the paper. “My boss was so certain it was a sure thing, and look at this – it ended up costing me money, and now the dude knows my face, so I have to catch him the old-fashioned way.”

Regina wordlessly handed her credit card over to the man behind the counter and offered Emma a questionable look. “And what is the old-fashioned way?”

Turning to look at her, elbow resting on the counter, and the wine stain protruding and settling across her chest, Emma said, “The run and chase kind of-way.”

“Hey,” Regina said, and she wasn’t even really sure what she wanted to say. Except she wanted to reassure Emma and wipe that defeated look off her face, because she did not deserve to be so hard on herself. “You’re going to catch him.”

Emma smiled that sheepish smile of hers. “Thanks.”

Regina was handed back her credit card and she stuck it back into her purse as she slowly got into her peacoat and her scarf. She sort of wanted to say something, but she wasn’t really sure what. Perhaps she should mention those messages, Emma had – after all – left it up to her. But how would she approach talking about them? This was hardly the place for that. But Emma did look so beautiful, even covered in wine and canh and with her make up slightly smudged.

Thankfully Emma – always the saviour – spoke before Regina had to settle on anything. “So uh, how was your,” she wriggled her eyebrows, perhaps because she found it funny, perhaps because she tried to hide another emotion, “business meeting?”

“We’re not going to do business together,” Regina simply replied, flipping out the lapels of her coat to make sure that they sat perfectly. She looked up at Emma with a raised eyebrow, daring her to continue.

Emma was never one for being scared. “Yeah? You taking your business elsewhere?”
“Careful, Miss Swan,” Regina husked then, leaning slightly forward. And she didn’t know what
had gotten in to her – perhaps it was the wine, perhaps it was the way Emma’s previously styled
hair was now dubiously tousled – but she couldn’t help it. “One might say you sound jealous.”

Not daring to tare her eyes away from Regina’s before completely necessary, Emma blindly
reached into her clutch and got out her phone. Finally darting her gaze down to look at it, she got a
soft smile on her face. “Well, one good thing came out of this then.”

Regina said, “Yes? And what is that, Miss Swan?”

“It’s still so early that I can pick Henry up and take him back home,” Emma replied, holding up her
phone which lit brightly with the time of 07:14 in front of a background of a smiling Henry with a
missing tooth. She bent her head and appeared to be shooting off a quick text. “He’ll be so glad,”
she finished, looking up at Regina with that smile that was reserved only for the boy.

Her heart practically skipped a beat when Emma mentioned Henry’s name; she simply couldn’t
help it. Just the mere thought of that boy did something entirely strange to her insides. She
straightened down her scarf. “And where is Henry tonight?”

Emma grabbed her clutch then and moved towards the doors – Regina followed after, because
what else could she do, she was done at this restaurant for the evening and she wasn’t going to
stand there like some insipid fool – while she said, “He’s at his grandparents’. I’ll just drive back
there to pick him up. Better now than fucking early tomorrow, am I right?”

As they stepped into the cold night air, Regina shuddered slightly in her coat and her eyes landed
on Emma’s bare arms. “You must be freezing,” she exclaimed, and quickly slipped her scarf off,
wrapping it around Emma’s shoulders before the blonde could even object to it. She stepped back
then, her fingers trailing down Emma’s pale arms and dangling perhaps just a second too long at
her fingertips before she dropped them.

“Thanks,” Emma sheepishly whispered, and motioned for Regina to follow her, “My car’s just over
here.”

Regina did follow her; they stepped down the busy sidewalk, and their high heels clicked in unison
against the pavement. They walked in silence for a while, and Regina had no idea what to say to
the other woman. In theory, there were so many things that she’d like to say, but she couldn’t just
come out and say them. She didn’t know how. All she knew was that Emma looked incredibly
beautiful in the light from the streetlamps, and she had to physically force herself not to reach her
hand out and intertwine their fingers.

“So this is my car. How are you getting home?” Emma breathed.

They had stopped in front of a yellow coffin on wheels. Of course Emma had the audacity to call it
a car, but Regina could clearly see that it was in no shape to be given that title. It looked like a
disaster, a death trap. She turned to the other woman with wide eyes, mouth agape, and Emma just
grinned at her, teeth peeking out. It was the smile that Regina was starting to label as the goofy one
in her mind.

“You call this a car?” Regina breathed, eyes falling upon the unmistakable sight of rusty patches
on the hood, “You drive Henry in this thing?”

“Relax,” Emma padded the roof, smiling fondly at the thing, “She runs smoothly.”

“You’re insane,” Regina replied as she stuck her hands into her pockets.
Emma opened the passenger side’s door then, pulling out her jacket (the red leather one, which looked absolutely ridiculous paired with the pink dress) and slipped it on. She offered Regina back her scarf and said, “So, do you need a ride home?”

Regina did not have her car with her, but she had no desire to go into the yellow beetle next to her. “In that thing?” She arched an eyebrow, and she was pretty sure her tone of voice said it all.

Stepping around the car, Emma opened the door on the other side and smiled at her over the roof. “Yeah, I’ll drop you off,” she offered, before she slipped into the seat and stuck her keys into the ignition.

Regina thought about it for a second or maybe two, before she slipped into the passenger’s seat and smacked the door close behind her.

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“I have to pick up Henry,” Emma repeated to her suddenly, breaking the silence that had erupted in the car after they took off from the restaurant. They’d been driving for roughly five minutes.

Regina folded her hands in her lap and tried not to stare too obviously at the blonde next to her, “Yes, I gathered that.” Why was Emma telling her this again? Surely they had established this earlier at the restaurant, “You can just drop me off on the way there.”

Emma bit her lip, hesitant. “Well, unless…

Sighing, Regina twisted her upper body to stare at the other woman fully; she looked concentrated as she drove, all the while going through the motions of driving the vehicle almost mechanically. “Unless what, Miss Swan?”

“Unless you want to come?” Emma questioned her, her eyes darting briefly – just briefly, she was driving a car after all – to look at Regina, before settling back on the road. She changed gears as they rounded a corner.

Did Emma want her to come pick up Henry? Was Regina hearing this correctly? She felt her breath hitch in her throat. “You… want me to come?” She wasn’t entirely sure that she was understanding this, Emma surely had to mean something else by her words. Because her driving with Emma to pick up Henry at his grandparents’ would simply be ludicrous and a waste of her time. Except for the fact that now she actually really wanted to.

Emma’s tongue darted out to wet her lips before she answered. “Yeah, I mean… If you want to?” Her brow furrowed as she stared out of the window. “I can totally drop you off, but I think it would make Henry very happy to see you there.”

Regina fell back into the seat with a sigh. “Well, he did say that he wanted to see me, correct?”

Humming in response, Emma turned the wheel.

“I’m not opposed to this idea,” Regina said then, once more folding her hands in her lap and staring out of the window. She tried desperately to tell her heart to stop beating so madly in her chest at the mere thought of what this could possibly mean, but she was failing miserably.

Emma chuckled, “Great, ‘cuz we’re there in fifteen,” she replied, just as her hand darted out to fiddle with the radio and soft music started streaming through the old, screechy speakers.

Huffing out a breath of air, Regina squared her shoulders and glared at the passing streetlamps.
Emma seemed to ignore the way she was silently stewing at the audacity, and instead Regina took out her phone and shot off a text to Kathryn that the date did not go well, and then once more she found herself looking at the text messages Emma had sent her way. She really did not understand the meaning of those two messages, even not as she thought more about them. Blacking her screen, Regina dropped the phone in her lap and said, “And what, pray tell, will you say to your foster parents when they ask you who I am?”

Shrugging, Emma didn’t answer her. Instead the blonde came to a stop at a red light and glanced briefly at Regina and the phone in her lap. “Why didn’t you answer my texts?” She questioned, hitting the coupling with her foot and changing the gear.

Regina ran a hand through her hair. Honestly, she wanted to tell Emma that it was presumptuous of her to just believe that Regina was interested in discussing their locking of lips again; she wanted to write her off, to tell her to knock it off. But when she glanced up and saw Emma’s worried brow, the shimmering look in her green eyes, Regina simply couldn’t get herself to say those words. So instead she just… said this. “I… I don’t know.”

Emma nodded, hands clutching the steering wheel. “Oh… okay,” she simply replied, as if that answer was acceptable and not at all confusing.

“I wanted to. Perhaps,” Regina offered then, brown eyes trailing from Emma’s whitened knuckles, up her leather covered arms and to the nape of her neck. She stopped, eyes landing in the vicinity of Emma’s face. “I didn’t know what to write,” she offered, the words slipping out of her on their own accord. It was impossible to keep up this stupid charade, because Emma kept looking at her with that gaze, like she wanted to kiss her and yell at her at the same time, and Regina really wasn’t sure how she was supposed to handle that.

Emma licked her lips, “It’s cool,” she said, and Regina didn’t quite believe her. “Maybe we can like… decide to put a pin in this? If you promise to actually do unpin it with me eventually,” she hitched in a breath, and Regina was confused for a moment, because they’d just opened up this conversation and now she was supposed to close it down? “It’s just that,” Emma continued, “we’re there now, and Henry will be waiting, and he’ll be excited, and…”

“I promise,” Regina quickly answered, nodding her head and vowing to herself that this was a promise that she was going to keep. Vowing to herself that she wasn’t going to run this time and leave Emma hanging. They had to talk about it, even if it meant agreeing to nothing more than friends. “I promise to… unpin it with you,” she cringed inwardly at the choice of words.

Smiling brightly, Emma turned to look at her as they came to a stop outside a small terrace house in the midst of a lot of similar looking terrace houses. “Great, ‘cuz we’re here,” she proclaimed as she unfastened her seatbelt and grabbed her keys and clutch. She looked at Regina expectantly. “Are you ready? I know a five-year-old who will be very happy to see you.”

Regina couldn’t hide her smile at the thought of little Henry and his cute giggles, and she found that she didn’t even want to. Very much. Instead she nodded and unfastened her own seatbelt before climbing out of the car. Emma guided her up the small path to the front door with a hand on her lower back, and she tried to remind herself that this was not a regular occurrence and that she really shouldn’t feel so happy and comfortable with it; that she and Emma were not returning from a date night to pick up their child and go home, together.

Emma rung the doorbell and Regina held her breath. She could hear bare feet padding on the floor inside, someone yelling Henry’s name, and then the door was yanked open and Henry threw himself into Emma’s waiting arms.
“Mamma!” Henry cheered, clutching on to her tightly, burrowing his head in the crook of her neck and wrapping his legs around her midsection. Regina felt her heart clench at the scene.

Pressing a kiss to Henry’s hair, Emma said, “Hi Kid, I’ve got a surprise for you.”

Henry opened his eyes then, and it took him mere seconds to realise who was standing right next to his mother. Regina could practically see the second the light went on inside his head and he practically threw himself out of Emma’s arms and onto Regina with a squeal. Thankfully, she was adapt enough to catch him, and he had his arms around her neck in an instant. “R’gina,” he whispered, hugging her tightly, “R’gina, I missed you.”

Pressing her nose into his hair, Regina had to close her eyes for just a second and will herself to keep standing. She had really missed him too.

On the porch right next to her, Emma was smiling brightly.

Chapter End Notes

You guys are really the best with your comments and kudos. It means so much to me! I hope you’re ready for some David and Mary Margaret plus some more Henry and Regina feels in the next chapter, because the night isn’t over yet!
Chapter Summary

Mary Margaret tries to save a dress from a vicious stain, and Emma tries to save herself and Henry from a possible heartbreak.

Chapter Notes

This chapter took on a life on its own, and therefore it’s quite long. I hope you enjoy it though, I personally have many feelings about it. Also because it explores Emma’s relationship to her foster parents, which I think is quite important to understand her in this story.

The door swung entirely open, and Emma was face to face with her foster mother – her mother for all intents and purposes since Emma was officially adopted in her late teens – whose eyes took in Emma for just a second, before she realised that Emma was not alone, and they landed on the person next to Emma on the porch. Regina was clutching Henry, nose buried in his hair, and Emma tried not to let the sight warm her as much as it was starting to.

"Emma," Mary Margaret breathed, green eyes settling back on Emma’s face as a smile overtook her features.

"Hi M&M," Emma said, tucking her hands into the pockets of her jacket and awkwardly shifting on her feet. Why was this situation awkward again? Perhaps she should have thought more about it before inviting Regina along, but it had just felt so right, and the smile she knew would be on Henry’s face had been enough to get her to do it. Not to mention the smile she had known would be on Regina’s face as well.

Mary Margaret’s hand tightened around the doorknob. “And who’s this?” She glanced softly at the beautiful brunette next to Emma, and Emma knew that about a thousandth different things had to be going through her mind right now; her foster mother was nothing if not capable of making up scenarios in her mind.

Henry tilted his head back, “It’s R’gina,” he informed her as a matter-of-fact.

Regina wriggled her fingers in greeting, “Hello.”

Mary Margaret seemed to ponder about something for a second or two, before she took a step back, door swinging open with her, and said, “We were just about to make some evening tea. Why don’t you join us?”

Regina shot Emma a questionable look, and the blonde urged her forward with a gentle smile, pressing a hand to the lower part of her back as she guided her into the only semblance of a childhood home she had. Henry grinned at her over Regina’s shoulder, and Emma knew that she
had made the right decision in bringing Regina here - regardless of how confusing it might be for herself.

“If Emma doesn’t mind,” Regina answered hoarsely in front of her, her arms still wrapped tightly around Henry and her hand stroking soothingly down his small back. “That would be lovely, Mrs. Swan.”

Mary Margaret froze slightly as she closed the door behind them. “Nolan,” she replied, her voice soft in the cramped space of the entrance hallway. “It’s not Swan, it’s… Nolan,” she finished, her gaze wavering slightly, not daring to meet Emma’s eyes.

Regina hesitated. “Oh, I apologise, I just assumed…”

Emma reached a hand out and gently clasped it over Regina’s arm. “It’s okay,” she assured her, eyes meeting the other woman’s, “I was a Swan long before I got here, I’ve never really… wanted to change that.” Emma didn’t dare meet Mary Margaret’s eyes at this time either, because she knew how much is still pained the other woman that she had never been ready to share a last name with them. It was what made it slightly awkward sometimes, what made it so that Emma often felt more comfortable around David than around Mary Margaret, even though she loved the other woman deeply.

“Well, come inside then,” Mary Margaret softly said, hand waving for Regina to follow. Her eyes were still full of questions, but they were mainly shot in Emma’s direction. “And Henry, why don’t you climb off our guest, hm? You know better than this.”

Reluctantly, Henry slid out of Regina’s arms, his small, bare feet hitting the floor. Emma swore she heard Regina mumble something like “it’s okay, I don’t mind,” before the padding of Henry’s feet against the tiled floor filled the silence as he ran towards the living room.

“David,” Mary Margaret softly greeted, as they entered the small common area; the kitchen only separated from the living room by the island in the room. Emma saw her foster father sitting in his chair – the big and comfortable one he had had since Emma first moved in – and he was half asleep, eyes closed, and his hair littered with patches of grey; a true sentiment to how he was growing older, same as the glasses tucked in his shirt pocket, the glasses he really needed but refused to wear most of the time.

“Gramps,” Henry squealed, hopping onto his lap and taring him out of his impromptu nap. He woke with a snort, eyes immediately landing on the stranger in his living room.

He stared at her in confusion, and Emma didn’t blame him. She was pretty sure that no one as refined and beautiful as Regina had ever been inside their small living room, and she diverged from all of their furniture, as she stood there, back straight, dressed to the nines in that black dress that Emma had not been able to stop looking at since she saw her at the restaurant earlier in the evening. She was poised, like a queen, and there was nothing exaggerated about that. Regina really was the most beautiful woman Emma had ever seen.

“This is Regina,” Emma told her foster father, a sheepish smile finding its way onto her lips with no will of her own. “She’s uh, she was at the restaurant where I was meeting my mark, and yeah…” she trailed off, not sure how to explain how they got from that to Regina standing in their living room. Not that David would ever demand an explanation anyway. Emma unzipped her jacket.

Mary Margaret’s eyes immediately zoned in on the huge stain on the front of Emma’s dress, and she gasped loudly. “Emma,” she chastised, stepping forward, hands immediately seizing the
material of the dress. “What happened?”

Emma had the decency to shrug in embarrassment. She knew how much Mary Margaret loved whenever she dressed in dresses and skirts (probably a leftover from how much she’d wanted desperately to have a girl to dress up as a toddler, but never had the opportunity to do so), and this evening had not been different. She’d taken one look at Emma in that pink dress when she dropped Henry off, and there had been tears in her eyes, and it had almost been like Emma’s first high school dance all over again. Except that time she’d still not believed that the Nolans would be hers for good, and she’d refused to dress up, instead opting for jeans and a tie and taking some girl named Lily as her ‘friend’ date.

“There was an accident,” Regina rasped, her brown eyes searching Emma’s, probably to make sure that it was okay for her to insert herself in the conversation.

Mary Margaret shook her head to herself and seemed to make a decision. “Henry,” she said, turning to her grandchild who was still sitting happily on his grandfather’s lap, “why don’t you show our guest the room you stay in when you’re here? David, you can make the tea,” she added, lifting her eyes to meet her husband’s, “and Emma and I will take care of the dress.”

David and Henry appeared to follow orders immediately, scooping out of the chair to go do what they were told, but Emma was not as quick to obey, she never had been. “Hey, don’t worry, M&M, it’s probably too late anyway.”

Shaking her head, Mary Margaret was not deterred. “No, no I can fix it, if we just get to it now,” she insisted, her hand moving into Emma’s as she interlinked their fingers. She started dragging the blonde towards the bathroom, and Emma shot an apologetic look in Regina’s direction as she went. The brunette looked okay though; she simply smiled warmly at Emma and allowed Henry to fit his little hand in hers and tug her towards Emma’s old teenage bedroom which was now mostly littered with all the toys that Henry’s grandparents spoiled him rotten with.

They entered the rather small bathroom and Mary Margaret closed the door behind them and immediately opened one of the many cabinets. “Off with the dress, Emma,” she ordered, not meeting Emma’s eyes as she filled the sink with hot water after putting the plug in. “What’s the stain?”

As petulant as always, Emma crossed her arms in front of her chest. “M&M, it’s okay, just let it be, it’s just a dress, it doesn’t matter.” She knew that she should probably just do what the older woman wanted at first hand, because she usually ended up acquiescing anyway, but there was something about their relationship that had always been like this. Which was probably why Emma didn’t dare venture to the suburbs for dinner as often as her foster parents – and Henry for that matter – would like.

“Yes it does,” Mary Margaret argued, small hands unfolding Emma’s arms and slipping beneath the lapels of the leather jacket to slide it off. It hit the ground with a flush, and the older woman repeated herself. “What’s the stain?”

Emma sighed, “Red wine and some kind of soup,” she replied, not yet moving to take off the dress. “I mean, what am I even gonna wear? It’s gonna be all wet,” she wrinkled her nose and reached pass her foster mother to turn off the water.

The brunette screwed her eyes closed for a second, a painful look flashing across her face. “We’ll find something in your old room. Just take off the dress, Emma!”

Finally giving in, Emma huffed and bent slightly over to unzip her dress. “Why are you even
bossing me around? I can do this myself at home,” she argued, even though it was in vain. Mostly, at this point, the arguing was just because. Because she didn’t know how else to be around Mary Margaret, how else to react to the kind of motherly care and affection the other woman always, and without a doubt, threw her way.

“Because I am your mother, and you are my daughter,” Mary Margaret said, and she sounded so tired as the words slipped pass her lips. For the first time Emma noticed just how old her foster mother had started to look; like her husband, grey hairs were visible in her otherwise short, black pixie cut, and the wrinkles on her skin had never been more visible.

Not knowing what to say to that, Emma let the dress pool around her feet and stepped out of it, high heels clicking soundly against the bathroom tiles. She bent down then, picking it up and handing it over to Mary Margaret, who immediately dipped it into the hot water and watched as it was soaked through. Emma was pretty sure she had never seen anyone look that seriously at a stain before. Humming to herself, Mary Margaret started putting something into the water and rubbing furiously at the stain.

There was a silence for a little while, and Emma sat down on the closed toilet to slip out of her heels. She had some slippers in the Bug, she was sure of it, and she could wear them on the drive home.

“See, it’s already getting better,” Mary Margaret mumbled, probably more to herself than to Emma. Reaching a hand out to grab Mary Margaret’s soapy, wet one, Emma stilled her movements. “M&M,” she said, and green eyes – so similar to her own that people often thought they were genetically linked – turned to meet hers. “I’m sorry, OK? Thank you.”

Tension seemed to leave Mary Margaret’s shoulders as they sagged noticeably. “Who’s Regina then?” She scrubbed angrily at the disappearing stain on the pink dress, “Are you dating her? Henry seems to know her very well. Have you been together long? Why didn’t you tell us?”

“Whoa whoa whoa,” Emma said then, pulling her hand back and raising it in self defence. She knew that her foster mother was good at making up stories in her head; probably always too quick to jump to the (often) wrong conclusions, but this was some next level shit. Especially because she wasn’t dating Regina, even though now that she thought a bit more about it, she could see how it would be easy to come to that conclusion since she brought her here tonight. “Calm down, M&M, Regina and I aren’t dating, she’s just…” she trailed off, not sure what word to use to describe Regina.

Mary Margaret dropped the dress into the sink and wiped her hands on the towel next to her. “Isn’t she a little old for you, Emma? I mean, what is she, thirty?” She ran a hand through her hair, “You’re 23,” she finished, her voice straining in that whisper-yell she was so good at.

Emma glared at her. “Also not dating her,” she replied, covering her arms in front of her chest, for the first time remembering that she was naked except for her bra and the hot pants she wore underneath her dress that thankfully covered her butt and part of her thighs. She couldn’t help but be a bit frustrated with her foster mother for noticing something as silly as Regina’s age, for questioning that and questioning whether or not it was appropriate for Emma to date her because of that. It frustrated her, because she didn’t think that age had any importance in romance, especially not her own, but also because she feared that Regina might think the exact same thing as Mary Margaret seemed to think: That Emma was too young for her.

“You never brought anyone home before,” Mary Margaret softly said as she reached a hand out and gently cupped Emma’s face. “Not even that awful, awful boy who had the guts to knock you
up and send you to prison for his crimes,” she shook her head to herself, her fingers stroking Emma’s chin. “And now suddenly you’re here with a woman next to you, a woman that Henry seems to like, and who seems to care for him a great deal. I mean,” she paused, “what am I supposed to think then?”

“We’re just friends, M&M,” Emma whispered in a promise. And that’s probably all we’re ever going to be.

Mary Margaret dropped the hand she had cupping Emma’s face, “But you want to be more,” she softly whispered as realisation dawned on her. Emma could tell when exactly it happened, because the small fire of anger that had been looming behind the green eyes suddenly died out and turned into a look of sorrow and understanding. “Oh, my baby girl, my sweet, sweet Emma,” she continued to whisper as she leaned forward and pressed a kiss to the top of Emma’s hair, much like she had done the first night Emma had spent in her new bed, in her new home, with her new family.

Pushing herself off the closed toilet, Emma said, “It doesn’t matter, okay,” she turned towards the door, “Henry really likes her, and I’m not about to take that from him. Regina’s really cool, you’ll see,” she added as she placed a hand on the door knob and pressed it down. “I’m gonna go find an old t-shirt and come join you guys for tea. Then we’ll be on our way, I have to drop Regina off and get Henry to bed.”

“Okay Emma,” Mary Margaret softly replied as she stepped forward and pressed a kiss to Emma’s cheek. “I’ll go help your father then.”

She brushed pass Emma and towards the kitchen, and the blonde flicked off the lights, jacket swept over one arm, before creeping down the hallway towards her old bedroom. As soon as she stepped closer, she could hear Henry prattling on inside the room, only accompanied by the soft murmurs of Regina’s agreements, and she stepped closer, peeking around the open doorway and into the bedroom that still held most of her old teenage possessions; all the things she hadn’t wanted to take with her when she found an old, crappy one bedroom apartment for her and Henry when she was eight months pregnant. She hadn’t had room for anything that wasn’t necessary for the baby, but David and Mary Margaret hadn’t wanted to throw anything out; instead they’d opted to keep her room, saying that she and their grandchild would always be welcome if the need arose.

And they’d lived there, briefly, between the crappy one bedroom and the place they had now, and her foster parents had been every bit the grandparents that she had wanted for Henry. That didn’t mean she was good at being close to them all the time; she was a loner, she always had been, but it still felt nice to know that she was wanted here if nowhere else.

The sight inside the room took her mildly by surprise, if not entirely. Regina’s peacoat and scarf were draped over the old desk chair, and she was crouched down on the floor – dress slightly hiked up as it was a tight fit – in her nylon panty hose. Her heels were discarded too, placed neatly by the side of the bed. Henry was sitting next to her, rolling a car over her leg and talking animatedly, all the while looking incredibly tired, yet way too excited to sleep any time soon.

Emma leaned her forehead against the doorway and took in the sight before her, basking in the image of Henry and Regina together on the old, carpeted floor.

“…and this car’s my favourite, it’s the fire truck.” Henry explained as he rolled it over Regina’s knee. “I have all the dolls too, sometimes I play wedding with Grams, it’s her favourite.”

Regina’s smile could positively light up the entire room as she beamed down at him. “Is that so?”
“Yeah,” Henry simply replied, green eyes trained on the car.

“Do you spend a lot of time here?” Regina asked next, running a hand through Henry’s messy hair in an almost motherly fashion. Emma’s heart hurt painfully right at the sight.

Henry nodded. “Yeah. When Ma has to work, like tonight,” he said, “We play wedding, and Grams says that Ma never wanted to do the girl things, she always wanted to run around,” he held out his hands then and showed off his nails, which Emma was only now realising were painted in a glittery purple, “We did nails today, aren’t they pretty?”

Regina tittered. “They’re beautiful, Henry,” she said, and Emma was very certain that she meant it.

Emma was also very certain that Regina would not take kindly to being spied on, so she cleared her throat and stepped into the bedroom. “Hi you two,” she said as she beamed down at them.

Only when Regina’s brown eyes turned comically wide, did Emma remember that she was wearing nothing but her hot pants and bra. She felt the other woman’s gaze on her skin, saw the way her cheeks seemed to flush pink, and self-consciously wrapped an arm across her stomach. She knew she had faint stretch marks – a true reminder of Henry growing inside of her – but she also quickly realised that Regina was not staring remotely close to that part of her body. No, her eyes were… settled around Emma’s lace-covered breasts.

“Mamma,” Henry said then, and both she and Regina was dragged out of the weird spell they had both been under, “you’re not wearing any clothes! That’s silly.”

“Sorry Kid,” Emma replied as she moved towards the old dresser in the corner, her eyes never truly leaving Regina’s brown ones after they’d finally settled on hers, “my dress is all wet, so I have to find a shirt, yeah?”

Henry pummelled his fire truck into Regina’s thigh. “And shorts!” He made a crashing sound.

Reaching over to ruffle his hair, Regina’s eyes trailed towards Emma’s backside – the blonde felt it clearly as she bent over to find a pair of old gym shorts – and said, “And shorts too, Miss Swan, listen to this smart, young man,” she tsk’ed, tongue darting out to wet her lip as Emma threw her a look over her shoulder, “How else are any of us supposed to think in here?”

Emma couldn’t hide her grin as she pulled out a pair of shorts and a t-shirt. “There’s a point,” she said, before she brazenly lifted the shirt above her head and pulled it on. “Why don’t you go get started on the tea so we can head on home soon? We still gotta tuck you in and read you bedtime, Kid.”

Henry’s face lit up as he dropped his truck. “Can Regina come?”

Stepping into the shorts and pulling them up – very aware of just how intensely Regina was watching her still – Emma said, “I’m not sure, Kid, Regina’s gotta get home too, yeah?”

“I want Regina to read me bedtime,” Henry argued, his bottom lip pulling out into a pout; the pout that Emma knew all too well and that no sensible adult was able to resist at all.

Regina was a sensible adult if there ever was one. “Well, I don’t mind,” she said, as she pulled herself off the floor – as gracefully as possible in that black dress – and reached for her jacket, scarf and heels. “I can just take a cab home after.”

Emma raised an eyebrow in her direction, but couldn’t help the flutter she felt in the pit of her belly
by the mere prospect of Regina in her apartment, in her home, tucking in her kid, and doing something as domestic as reading him his bedtime story. “You sure?” She had to ask. Even if she didn’t want to give Regina an out, she had to ask. Sure, it might be better for her sanity if Regina back pedalled and went home before, but Emma was already too far gone to care. This was about Henry; Regina being here right now was about Henry and making him happy. And the kid? He was having the time of his life right now.

“I’m sure,” Regina confirmed as her hand, almost instinctually, went down to grasp Henry’s.

He awkwardly pumped his little fist in excitement. “Yeah! I’ma tell Gramps!” He dropped Regina’s hand again and took off in a run towards the living room.

Emma smiled sheepishly at Regina and shrugged. “You up for some tea?”

“Yes,” Regina replied, before they followed in Henry’s tracks, both ignoring the awkward tension that had suddenly erupted between them. Emma had no idea what was going to happen, how she was going to handle this new situation when all she kept thinking about was Regina; Regina in the restaurant, in that black dress, on a date-not-a-business-meeting with someone who wasn’t her.

She hated to admit it to even herself, but she was pretty sure that those flutters in the pit of her stomach was joined by the gnawing feeling of jealousy.

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Emma fidgeted around the small kitchen in search of two unchipped wine glasses. She had a bottle of unopened red somewhere, she just had to find it between all of Henry’s lunch snacks and the small herb garden project they’d started at preschool and he’d continued at home with much enthusiasm. With one ear on the conversation in Henry’s small bedroom she quickly disposed of their dirty dishes in the sink and roamed through a drawer for the corkscrew.

She could hear Regina’s quiet reading voice streaming from the open door (and Henry was right; there really were some good voices in there) along with Henry’s chipper commentary that sounded more and more tired by the minute. It was past his bedtime, and he was going to be hell to deal with tomorrow morning, but Emma couldn’t find it inside herself to care. Actually, she could hardly focus on Henry right now, because Regina was in her apartment. And not only was she in her apartment, she was tucking her son into bed like it was some kind of regular occurrence and nothing out of the ordinary.

That beautiful, quite frankly very intimidating, woman saw everything in their small, not very impressive Boston apartment. Sure, it had everything they needed, and Emma had never before felt like making excuses for how well she did for her son, but there was just something that made her want to impress Regina. A lot. And yeah, maybe that had something to do with the fact that she kind of really liked the other woman – maybe even more than she had first thought possible – and kind of also really liked kissing her the other day. And she would like to do it again maybe. Possibly.

But Regina was on a date, that stupid voice in the back of Emma’s head reminded her once more, like it had done several times throughout the evening. Ever since Emma saw the other woman at the restaurant, she had been sure that she was on a date. And then she’d seen the stunning, older, more together woman that Regina had been dining with, and Emma had barely had half a mind to focus on the perp she was about to catch.

It made sense though. The woman Regina had been dining with was everything Emma was not, and that made her much more Regina’s type, Emma suspected. Someone grown-up, with a grown-
up job, no delinquent past and certainly not a five-year-old at home. That other woman could provide Regina with everything that she certainly had to want, which Emma could not.

Sure, Emma wasn’t stupid. She knew that Regina was attracted to her. The incident in her teenage bedroom earlier, plus their kiss on Thursday, were clear examples of that. But just because Regina was attracted to her, didn’t mean she wanted to be with her. Those were two very different things, and Emma had been discarded enough times in her life to not want to jump into that without second thoughts. Regina just made it so damn difficult, because Emma was wildly attracted to her, and the more she got to know her, she realised that she was also quite attracted to the person Regina was. Which made this situation all the more difficult.

Emma sighed heavily and found the wine bottle in the cupboard, well hidden behind several boxes of Henry’s animal crackers. She worked on unscrewing the cork while listening to movement from Henry’s room. He’d grown entirely quiet, and history told her that he’d fallen asleep, so Regina was probably just making sure of that while continuing reading in her hushed voice. Emma juggled the glasses and the bottle towards the living room couch and quickly swept some of Henry’s dirty clothes and toys to the side, before taking a seat and tugging her feet beneath herself. It was nearing nine, and it had been a long day. Her feet were sore from wearing those stupid date-heels, and she had to get up first thing tomorrow and plan on how to catch the guy anyway.

She poured two glasses of wine and reached for one of them – there was no shame in getting started – as she leaned back in the couch and closed her eyes. She kept thinking about Mary Margaret’s words earlier, and, combined with her own thoughts and feelings after the restaurant, there were just so many fears and doubts ruminating inside her head. Yet there Regina was, in her apartment, tucking in her son. That had to mean something, right?

The sound of the door creaking close pulled her out of her own head, and Emma squinted her eyes open just in time to see Regina softly tiptoeing across the floor. She didn’t need to though; Henry would be out like a light until the morning, but Emma didn’t have the heart to tell her that.

“Is he asleep?” She motioned towards the wine on the table and took a long sip of her own.

Regina sat on the couch next to her, reaching for her own glass, and relaxing back into the cushion. “He’s snoring,” she replied, and there was a fond smile on her face, “He really loves those fairytales, huh.”

Emma nodded. “Yeah, it’s been going on for a while now. It’s good though, at least he has something that makes him happy.”

Regina took a long sip of wine as she glanced around the small living room area. “So,” she said, eyes settling back on Emma, “nice place you two have here.”

“Yeah, it’s probably not giant like yours or whatever,” Emma replied, immediately on the fence about it. She knew she wasn’t made of money, but she did the best she could. She worked her butt off, juggling multiple jobs, all to give Henry everything he deserved.

Furrowing her brow, Regina said, “I didn’t mean it like that. It’s a great place, Emma.”

Eying her quizzically, Emma wasn’t sure if she should really believe her, but her gut told her that Regina would never say anything just to spite her. So she nodded her head and trailed a finger over the side of her glass. “Are we gonna talk about your date now?” It was out of her mouth before she could even stop herself, and she did realise that she sounded like a petulant child. But how could she not? She’d spent time with Mary Margaret and that always tended to bring out the child in her, and she was kind of pissed – which honestly she had a right to be, didn’t she? – that Regina went
around on dates when they’d shared a mind-blowing kiss just three days ago and she didn’t have time to answer Emma’s two messages.

Frowning, Regina rested the wine glass on her thigh. “Alright,” she huskily replied, her brown eyes trailing over Emma’s face carefully. “I was on a date.”

“Called it,” Emma childishly replied as she took a long gulp of her wine.

Regina visibly stiffened in her seat. “I don’t have to excuse myself to you, Miss Swan,” she retorted, and suddenly the voice that had been so warm the last couple of hours sounded harsh and cold, “I can go on dates with whomever I want.”

Emma reached for the bottle of wine and refilled her glass to the brim with the red liquid. She smacked the bottle back onto the table, thankful that Henry was mostly a deep sleeper. “But you can’t take the time to answer my messages? I know you said you didn’t know what to say, but really Regina, I thought that that would have been pretty straightforward.”

Tucking a stray hair behind her ear, Regina leaned slightly forward. “How so?”

“I don’t just kiss random people in bars,” Emma replied, the words slipping out of her rapidly as all the things she had thought the past three days threatened to make themselves known. “I really don’t. I simply don’t have a life for that, with a kid, and two jobs and everything. There’s not much time for random make-out sessions with pretty girls.”

Regina seemed slightly taken aback by Emma’s attack of words, and her lips thinned visibly. “I don’t either,” she cooly replied.

Emma stared at her, eyes boring into the woman across from her on the couch. She had a gut feeling that she should believe her when she said that, but it still didn’t change the fact that Regina had been on a date tonight. “But why not answer my texts then?”

“I-”

“Is it because I have a kid?” Emma questioned out loud, pondering into nothing as Regina watched her, “No, that can’t be it, because I can see that you adore Henry. Is it because I’m so young? I swear, on paper I might be young, but I’m really not, not technically, I haven’t been since I had Henry, a child really changes things, and I-”

“Emma,” Regina cut her off with a warm hand on her knee, “schuss, okay? You’re going off on a tangent, that is neither here nor there.”

Emma swept her eyes from where they had been firmly planted on the couch to look at Regina instead. The older woman was staring at her with such kindness that Emma could hardly contain it inside of herself; sure she’d never been good at keeping happiness, but this was really saying something. “I’m sorry,” she croaked.

Regina offered her a small smile. “I didn’t answer your texts because I didn’t know what to say,” she whispered, hand still firmly clutched on Emma’s bare knee, which did nothing but light a fire in the pit of the blonde’s stomach, “and that’s the truth.”

Emma drew in a shaky breath. “If you don’t want to have a coffee with me, you can just say so,” she heard herself whisper then, honestly, because how else could she talk to Regina about all of this. “I understand it, I do, I know I’m not what most people want, I have a ton of baggage, but…”

“It’s not that I don’t want coffee with you, Emma,” Regina breathed out, her warm fingers stroking
tantalisingly slow across Emma’s skin. “It’s that… How do I put this?” She stared into space, questioning herself as she thought it over, and Emma just watched her, wanting for her to find the words to explain what was going through her mind right now. “I don’t care for a lot of people,” she finally settled on, brown eyes darting to meet Emma’s green ones, “but I find myself caring about you and Henry. A lot. And very quickly at that, and I got… I got spooked,” she finished, before her eyes landed on her glass and she took a long drag of her wine.

Emma felt her heart thundering on inside of her chest. Regina cares about us. She licked her lips with a swipe of the tongue. “Spooked?”

Regina gave a curt nod. “Yes.”

The blonde furrowed her brow and relaxed a bit into her seat. “We care about you too, in case you hadn’t figured that one out,” she lamely offered next, unsure of what else to say. Everything threw her for a loop with Regina; she’d never been good at getting girls, but this was seriously the worst game she had ever managed. Perhaps it was because there was so much at stake at this point. Henry had really grown to like Regina – just as she had grown to like him – so it wasn’t just her own feelings, but an innocent child, her own nonetheless, was mixed up in everything. Emma wanted to proceed carefully, aware and in protection of everyone’s emotions, but at the same time she also just really wanted to put those stupid wine glasses on the coffee table and press Regina against the couch in a soaring kiss. Her mind was a mix of wayward emotions, and at this point she had no idea what was going to win out for this evening.

Regina smiled softly at her. “I had,” she croaked, leaning forward and placing her wine glass on the coffee table. “Emma,” she whispered, as he sat back, perhaps just an inch closer to the blonde at this point, “I don’t just have flings,” she whispered, as if that was supposed to be an explanation to everything.

“Okay,” Emma answered, because she had no idea what else to say. Her eyes seemed to be trained on Regina’s lips, with lipstick impeccable as always, even after hours of eating and drinking.

“I really enjoyed our kiss,” Regina continued slowly as she bent her head and let her hair shield her face slightly. “I’ve been thinking about it almost constantly for the past three days, and I…” she trailed off, lifting her eyes and letting them settle on Emma’s face. They were glistening madly, the faint light from the kitchen illuminating her face beautifully, and Emma could practically feel the vibration amongst them; the attraction flickering like electricity in the small space between their bodies. She could practically feel how their bodies were drawn to each other, like they’d been dancing around this all night.

Emma had no idea how or when, but she’d somehow moved closer to Regina, their legs now touching and her hands resting dangerously close to the other woman’s. “You what,” she breathlessly whispered, and it felt like her face was moving closer to Regina’s entirely on its own accord.

Regina closed her eyes and drew in a shaky breath. It definitely felt like they were playing with fire at this point. “I’m so attracted to you,” she finally husked. She opened her eyes, and they were staring straight into Emma’s heart.

Tilting her head slightly, Emma’s forehead came to rest against Regina’s as their breaths mingled in the air between them. Regina was so close to her then, yet at the same time – and Emma felt this deeply – so far, far away from her. “I really want to kiss you right now,” Emma whispered, because she was only a woman. And sure, she was a mother, and she wanted to shield Henry from everything, but how could she shield him from this, when she felt a desire so deeply inside of her that she could hardly contain it.
“I can’t lose you,” Regina huskily said, her nose bumping slightly with Emma’s as she hardly moved her mouth to speak. Even so, their lips brushed faintly, because they were simply that close to each other. “Emma, I can’t,” she repeated and there was the faint sound of warning in her voice.

Emma squeezed her eyes shut and heard herself say, “You won’t,” even if she had no way to promise that. Even if she wanted to mean it because how would she ever let Regina go after feeling this and because Regina sat her skin on fire and made her feel things on a level she had never experienced before. Although she was scared. Although she feared that the other woman would find something better. Although everyone always found something better.

“But what if I do?” Regina’s voice cracked, and Emma’s eyes flew open to find brown eyes staring intensely at her, filled with tears threatening to spill.

“You won’t,” Emma repeated, before she surged forward and closed the remaining distance between them. Her lips found Regina’s with an almost animalistic groan, and as she clutched onto the older woman’s shoulder, Emma breathed in the scent of her – apples and cinnamon meshed perfectly together – and she was reminded why their first kiss had left her desperately urging for more.

Regina was intoxicating. Their lips fit perfectly together, all teeth and tongue and faint whimpers, and she felt delicate fingers tug impatiently at her hair, and Emma swore she could never get enough of this. Never ever could she get enough of this. She whimpered into the brunette’s mouth as nails raked the skin at the nape of her neck, and she met Regina’s tongue in feverish kisses. Sloppy and wet as they were, with the distinct taste of the red wine they had been drinking, Emma had never tried anything quite like this. She could feel herself grow hotter as the temperature heated, and she moaned, ready to do that thing where she pushed Regina into the couch to press against her, but unfortunately she was still carrying the wine glass in her hand.

And it fell to the floor in a small clatter as wine spilled around their feet.

Regina pulled back, breathing ragged and hair deliciously tousled. Emma stared at her, watched as she stared at the wine seeping into the already damaged wooden floor; a hand was on her lips, the red of her lipstick smudged unrecognisably around her face. Emma had never seen anyone as beautiful, and she wiped the back of her hand over her lips as Regina finally lifted her gaze to meet hers.

They stared at each other in silence for a little while. The only sound in the room was their laboured breathing, and none of them said a single thing. Regina was just looking at her, fingers still on lips, and brown eyes wide.

The door into Henry’s bedroom creaked open. “Mamma,” his soft voice questioned as his little face peeked through the crack in the door, “what was that sound?”

So much for being a deep sleeper, Emma mused to herself as she mastered a smile for her son. “Nothing, Kid, I just dropped a glass,” she managed to say reassuringly, “Go back to bed, I’ll come check on you in a minute.”

Henry tiredly rubbed his eyes. “Kay,” he simply said, before closing the door after himself and trodding back to his bed.

Regina was still touching her lip as Emma turned to look at her. “Look, I’m crazily attracted to you,” she honestly told the other woman, because they really only had time for honesty at this point. “But I get it if it’s too much or too scary or too big a risk,” she offered a meek smile as Regina finally dropped her hand, “Just… figure it out, okay? I have Henry to think about, so you
really can’t just… swoop in here and be all amazing for me and the kid, and then run away again in two weeks,” she finished. There, she’d said it, the important part.

Breath hitching in her throat, Regina said, “Yes, I… I’ll think about it.” Her brow furrowed and she offered Emma a soft smile too.

“Great,” Emma replied. Her mouth was still tingling like crazy from their kiss, and she really still wanted to do that thing with Regina against the couch, but perhaps it was a very good thing that she had dropped that wine glass. It allowed her to be grown up and motherly, and try to make sure that no one got hurt. “So uh, we can be friends or whatever, if you’d rather not risk it, but like,” she awkwardly wiped her hands against her old gym shorts, “I really, really like you, Regina, so uh… just figure it out, yeah?”

“I will,” Regina said then, and Emma really wished that she knew what was going through the other woman’s head right now, what she was thinking. It was so hard to tell with the way she had those walls up so high.

Emma had to repeat herself, just for good measure, and she did so after she’d crossed the room and was standing awkwardly in front of Henry’s bedroom door. “Just… don’t like, be here and then… not be here,” she winced at how stupid she sounded, at how the words were coming out all wrong. “You know,” she added, “for the kid.”

Nodding, Regina was off the couch and had gathered her things in mere seconds. High heels back on her feet, peacoat and scarf on her shoulders and purse in hand, she looked at Emma from where she was standing at the front door, one hand on the knob, ready to leave. “I’ll get back to you on that,” she hoarsely breathed, and her lipstick was still smudged, and her hair was still sexily tousled, and damn it, if Emma didn’t want to press her against the door and kiss her again. But there was also something so serious looming there, right behind her eyes. “Talk to you then?”

“You’ve got my number,” Emma offered with a shrug, even though it was immensely painful to watch the other woman leave when she might as well had been able to lead her into her bedroom had the night gone just slightly different. That was what she did though; watched Regina open the front door and slip outside, before clicking it close behind her.

Letting her head fall back against the closed door, Emma breathed out heavily. Being grown-up and responsible seriously sucked sometimes, especially when she had to watch the woman she cared so deeply about leave her behind. Had she made the right decision? The way she felt right now, the way her heart ached and tears pricked hotly behind her eyelids, it didn’t feel like it. But she crept into Henry’s bedroom, only to realise that he’d already fallen asleep on his own, and she knew that she had made the right decision.

My precious boy. She tucked the blanket tighter around him and placed his favourite teddy bear just within his reach, in case he woke up again and needed it, before she placed a lingering kiss on his forehead. She might have made all of tonight’s decisions based sorely on what was best for Henry, based on how she thought she could protect him.

But she would be lying if she couldn’t admit that it was a little bit for her own sake too. She had no idea how she would be able to cope if she got Regina – like really and truly got her – only to lose her again.

Chapter End Notes
I know some of you wanted more at this point - but I promise we’re getting there. We’re just dealing with two incredibly protective closed-off women. I love to hear what you all think though, it’s seriously my favourite part.
Regina

Chapter Summary

Regina is really trying to do some thinking.

Chapter Notes

TW: Someone is at the emergency room with a broken bone. No blood though!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Regina and Marian were trailing along the dusted gravel path, each with a cup of coffee nestled between their fingers for extra warmth and energy. It was the first real feeling of spring; the sun was beaming down on them on this late afternoon, and Regina had had to unzip her coat and fold down her scarf.

Roland and Mulan were running around on the grass somewhere nearby, duelling with their make-believe swords made out of sticks they’d found lying on the ground. Roland’s squeals and Mulan’s fake gasps could be heard vividly from where Regina and Marian were trailing slowly, following their game from the safe distance of the path.

Regina couldn’t help but notice the look of complete fondness that Marian had on her face as she watched Mulan fall to her fake death on the grass. Regina knew that things hadn’t been easy for Marian since her uncouth ex-boyfriend – someone who’d quickly been deemed the unmentionable by Zelena – up and left them for a job in LA. Her friend deserved this chance at love, more so than anyone, and Roland seemed pretty smitten with Mulan as well. His giggles when the young woman pulled him onto the grass with her were a clear sign of that.

Marian sighed happily as the two of them took off in yet another duel, running across the grass. “He likes her so much,” she fondly said, eyes following them as they ran.

Taking a sip of her coffee, Regina hummed. It was late afternoon, and she’d probably end up joining the three of them for dinner at Marian’s apartment, but right now she felt pretty contend just walking in the park with them, zigzagging through families, children, joggers and people walking their dogs. “Mulan’s good with him. She’s not at all like I would have expected.”

“She’s filled with such honour,” Marian explained, turning her eyes to look at Regina, “She doesn’t do anything half-assed and now Roland and I are a part of that, and I just can’t help but find myself extremely lucky.”

“That’s a sign of happiness suits you,” Regina simply replied, remembering the mess her friend had been in three years ago, and how she’d practically had to take care of Roland for a month, because Marian was too heartbroken to function.

Marian’s face warmed in a slight blush. “She was in trouble for a little while, had fallen in love with a married woman – her best friend’s wife nonetheless,” she revealed, and Regina’s eyes
strayed towards the lithe, athletic woman who was now carrying Roland around on her shoulders. She had a hard time imagining someone like Mulan – even if she knew her so very little – fall for someone else’s wife, but the heart always did work in mysterious ways. She was beginning to realise this herself as well. “They were expecting a baby, so Mulan had to get out of there, to shield herself from pain. She had to… start anew somewhere. So that’s why she came to Boston and met Dorothy and Ruby and… Emma.”

Regina let her eyes fall to the plastic lid on her coffee cup. There was a slight smear of lipstick there, and she pursed her lips and took another sip. “Emma has some good friends, I think,” she replied. She really wasn’t sure what else she had to say. Thoughts of Emma had filled her mind constantly since Sunday night, and she had not come closer to a decision. Perhaps she was just a coward, not ready to take on what the world was offering her, but perhaps that also made her smarter.

Kathryn seemed to think it made her an idiot, which she’d had no qualms telling her – repeatedly – yesterday at the office.

Marian appeared to hesitate as she sipped her coffee too. Regina knew that it was coming, this conversation and these questions, because her friend knew what had happened between her and Emma last week – she had to have known; Emma got her number from Marian – and it was not like Regina’s friend to ever be quiet about her thoughts. “Regina, can I ask you something?” Marian softly queried with a timid voice, Mulan and Roland on the grass momentarily forgotten, which Regina thought said a lot about Marian’s relationship with Mulan. She trusted the other woman completely with her son.

“What?” It came out a lot harder than was intended, but perhaps that was just because she had been expecting it.

Not deterred, Marian soldiered on. “What’s this Emma business? I mean, she told me you guys kissed, and I know you, and you don’t just kiss, yet Kathryn tells me you were out on a date with some woman on Sunday?”

Regina glared at her. “What, do you two and my sister have some secret text conversation where you just prattle on about me and my life?”

Maria rolled her eyes. “We care about you,” she said, as if that even had to be clarified. “But seriously, be frank with me, Regina.”

For a little while it was only their steps on the gravel that could be heard between them, and Regina searched her mind for the right things to say to her friend. Marian was biting her time, letting Regina stew patiently. Regina was finding it hard to comprehend that it should be this difficult to find the words – she was a well-educated, cultured woman after all – but the words just didn’t come to her. Maybe it was because every time she tried to describe the feelings that Emma Swan elicited inside of her she simply came up short. There were no words apparently.

Eventually she settled on, “We kissed again. On Sunday. It’s a long story.”

Marian’s face lit up in a giant grin, and she seemed entirely too grown-up to have such a strong reaction to her friend kissing someone. For a second, Regina was taken back to Kathryn in college when Regina had shared her first kiss with a woman – after that entirely certain that she was indeed a lesbian – and Kathryn had been almost ready to pop the champagne in support and happiness.

“Oh, wipe that smirk off your face,” Regina breathed, coming to a halt in front of a bench. It had a clear view of the playground where Mulan was now busy helping Roland on the monkey bars, half
carrying him as his small arms weren’t strong enough to get him across on his own.

“What smirk, there’s no smirk,” Marian replied unabashedly as they took a seat on the bench and basked in the warm sunlight.

Regina eyed her pointedly. “Basically she told me to figure out what I wanted, that I had to be, you know,” she arched an eyebrow, “certain.” She paused, eyes following a jogger who was speeding pass them feverishly, “It makes sense, she has Henry to think about.”

Maria watched her, a peculiar look edged across her always warm face. “But what’s there to think about? You want to jump her bones, yeah?” She smirked as she took a sip of her coffee, watching Regina intensely for a reaction.

Huffing, Regina said, “Must you be so crude.” There was a pause. “And there’s many things to think about. Like I just said,” she paused again, “Henry.”

“So many things,” Marian teased her, and there was a lilt to her voice. “What I wouldn’t give to be able to jump Mulan’s bones, you know.”

Turning her head to the side, Regina stared at her friend in surprise. She would have thought that they’d have done the deed weeks ago, because Marian was never one to take things slow. That was after all how she and the uncouth unmentionable had ended up having Roland so quickly. “You mean you guys haven’t…”

Marian shook her head. “No. Mulan’s a gentlewoman. She insists on wining and dining me beforehand, but all the dates we’ve been on until now have included Roland.” Her eyes trailed back to watch the two people in question again, as Mulan was now pushing the boy on the swing. “Which I love by the way. I love that she cares enough to include him. It’s every mother’s dream, isn’t it.”

Regina couldn’t be sure, but she imagined it would be. “Then why don’t you let me watch him for a night?” She smiled warmly at her friend as she offered. She’d watched Roland many times whenever Marian needed it, and Marian and Roland had always been there for her, even if it was just with a dinner invitation at their apartment. “He can come stay the night we me, and you and Mulan can…” she clicked her tongue, teasing her friend for good measure.

A laugh slipped from Marian’s lips, and for the first time did Regina realise that her friend was actually starting to fall in love. How she had missed it before, she wasn’t sure, but suddenly it was as clear to her as day. “Yeah? I’ll get back to you on that one.”

“I can invite Henry and Emma over then,” Regina said as she leaned back on the bench, already making up plans and picturing how such an afternoon and evening would go. Her, Roland, Henry and Emma, all together in her apartment. It would be lovely. “The boys can play.”

Marian’s eyes twinkled as she replied. “They get along great. They met at the diner.”

Regina nodded and took a long sip of her coffee as her eyes turned back to watch Mulan and Roland goofing around on the playground. She could imagine taking Henry and Roland to play there as well; how much fun they would have, and how Emma would be the one fooling around with the boys while Regina herself had snacks ready at hand, perhaps even snapping pictures just because. She felt her stomach do that weird flip that she couldn’t entirely figure out what meant.

“Marian,” she softly queried as the thoughts became too much in her head. Her rasp voice drew the attention of her friend, who snapped her head to the side to look at her.
“Yeah?”

“Does it bother you,” Regina continued on, brow furrowed and tongue running across her teeth in a way to stall for time, “that Mulan is… younger? Than you?”

A flicker of something akin to understanding appeared on Marian’s face and she reached a hand out to gently clasp it over Regina’s free one. “Nah… Mulan’s mature for her age. She knows what she wants, and she works hard for it. Now, if I had started to date Ruby I might have been a bit more concerned…” she laughed again, her eyes shining with mirth.

Regina felt a kind of calm settle around her, and perhaps Marian had said the completely right thing. She didn’t even know why she was suddenly thinking of age, because that had never been a problem in her mind before Emma brought it up. “I’ll have to meet this Ruby person at one point,” Regina replied next, brushing the subject of age off the table. “She sounds like a character.”

“Perhaps you should join us for dinner then,” Marian offered Regina, and it wasn’t really a question, mostly it was just a formality because they both knew that she was going to do it anyway. “We were planning to go to Granny’s – that’s the diner I told you about, you remember? – Ruby’s got Henry for the evening because apparently Emma’s having trouble catching her mark.”

Regina felt her heart flutter in her chest by the mere thought of seeing Henry. She might not have needed much convincing to go before, but knowing he’d be there, she couldn’t leave fast enough. “Is it her mark from Sunday?”

Marian shrugged. “Mulan knows more, you gotta ask her,” she said. She stood up from the bench then, throwing her empty paper cup in the trash and dusting off her butt. She wriggled her fingers at Regina. “You comin’?”

Throwing her cup in the trash as well, Regina accepted Marian’s offered hand. “Emma really needs to find another job,” she commented – and it was really not the first time she had had that thought after meeting Emma and Henry – as they made their way across the grass. It wasn’t because she didn’t think that Emma’s job was good enough or that Emma didn’t provide for her son well enough (although now she was put off on mentioning it to the other woman, especially after Emma had spilled out all of her self-doubts the other day), it was simply because she could see how tough this line of work was on Emma, and how much it strained the relationship between mother and son.

“Mulan says so too,” Marian commented as they neared closer to the playing pair.

Regina could feel her heels seeping into the soft ground beneath her. “I think I might have an idea though,” she said next, the words slipping off her lips before she even had time to contemplate them. Marian mentioning Mulan brought Regina back to the first time she’d met Henry; that faithful afternoon at The Hills where they’d bonded over fairytales, and Mulan had mentioned her friend who might be a good fit for the children. She hadn’t thought much about it after that day – mostly because she’d been busy figuring out why it was that Emma infuriated and intrigued her to no end – but now that she knew Emma, she also knew her backstory and she felt pretty confident that Emma had to be the friend that Mulan was referring to that day that felt so long ago.

Marian gave her hand a light squeeze. “Let’s talk about it on Wednesday when you come to The Hills?”

Squeezing her hand back, Regina agreed with her friend. “Yeah, let’s.”
It was Friday at noon when she got the call.

Regina remembered it clearly, because she was having a working lunch – with her mother of all people – in her office, enjoying a bit of daytime drinking (as lunch with her mother always required) when Emma’s name flashed across the screen of her iPhone.

She’d only just now taken the time to code it in there, because Emma had taken to sending small updates every day, a habit Regina was not going to question in the slightest, even if it seemed to somehow contradict this ‘thinking’ concept they had agreed upon. One of those small updates had been a picture of a grinning Henry, who was nestled in front of the television in a mountain of blankets, entirely consumed in the old Disney cartoon of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*. That picture was now flashing across the screen as well, because how could Regina not have made it so.

She almost didn’t answer the phone because her mother was right there, and she was working, and whoever it was could just leave a message, but when she saw that name and that picture on her screen, she knew that she had to answer. Even if her mother was daintily wiping her mouth with a napkin and sending prying eyes in direction of the phone. Even if Regina knew she’d have several questions to answer afterwards, because her mother was never one to be kept waiting and definitely never one to not demand answers from her youngest daughter.

Regina almost didn’t answer because of all of that, but she did pick up the phone, because Emma had not called her before – it wasn’t something they did – and it was such an odd time of the day, and she knew Regina was working, and there was just this feeling in the pit of Regina’s stomach, a feeling that she couldn’t exactly name.

Worry. Worry was the name of that feeling, she’d realised hours later.

“Emma,” she breathed into the phone, avoiding her mother’s gaze and staring straight at the half-eaten salad on her plate.

“Regina,” Emma said, and there was a lot going on behind her; Regina could hear clearly that she was on the move. She was breathless, and there were sounds, and people were yelling, and —- was she at the emergency room? Regina felt her heartbeat speed up. “I need you to come, there’s, there’s been an accident, and Henry, he’s—”

Regina practically dropped her phone when she pushed back her chair, seeing nothing but a blur of colours and shadows. “I’ll be right there,” she promised, and never had she meant any words more than that. She threw all of her possessions, phone, keys, wallet, into her purse and rushed into her jacket.

“Regina,” Cora said as she looked up at her from where she was still sitting in her chair, the chair she always sat on whenever she had lunch with Regina at the office, “what’s going on?”

“I have to go,” Regina explained, and she was pretty sure that there maybe was tears trailing down her cheeks, because they were definitely wet. “Please do stay and finish your lunch, Mother. Call for Kathryn if you need anything.” She pressed a kiss to her mother’s cheek and was out of the office before she could hear her mother’s reply.

She mumbled something to her secretary, she wasn’t entirely sure what, but she thought it would be evident that all of her appointments were to be rescheduled, and she was unlocking her Mercedes and leaving the underground parking within five minutes of receiving the call. She wasn’t entirely sure how she made it to the emergency room; she was driving frantically, and her usually calm and collected composure had vanished in favour of dread and worry the second Emma had said the words ‘accident’ and ‘Henry’ so closely together. She had no idea that caring
for a child came with this much panic. When had this happened to her?

And oh goodness, how wasn’t Emma feeling at this point? It was her son. She had to be a mess at this moment, and Regina felt her heart clench tightly at the idea of Emma being in pain. Not just because it had something to do with Henry, but because she couldn’t bear it if Emma was in pain. Out of all the things she was feeling, the thought of Emma in pain frightened her as much as the thought of Henry being severely injured.

Regina parked as closely to the double doored entrance as possible, and was rushing into the emergency room as quickly as she could. Logically she knew that perhaps Henry wasn’t that injured and maybe it was just minor scratches, but he was at the emergency room so it couldn’t be that minor after all.

“I need to see Henry Swan,” she informed the man behind the counter. She had no idea if she was at the right place or what was happening, but this was the place to start. “Or Emma Swan. A Swan.”

The man pushed his black rimmed glasses onto his nose. “Are you a parent, a partner or a family member?”

Feeling herself deflate, Regina said, “No, but I need to see them.”

“Sorry, only family members are allowed,” he replied, but he did not look the least sorry at all.

Regina hammed her closed fist into the counter, and she wanted desperately to reach across and pull the man to her by his collar. If she was forceful enough, he’d understand, he’d tell her. She could make him understand that there was a little boy somewhere in this building with a worried mother and that Regina needed to see them as desperately as she need the next breath of air.

Turning around on her heel, she reached for her phone as she paced back and forth next to the counter. Emma hadn’t tried to contact her since they ended the call, and Regina contemplated phoning her to figure out where she was, when muffled crying and a recognisable voice pulled her attention.

There they were.

In the far corner of the waiting area, with their backs turned towards where Regina was standing, she could just make out the two people she wished to see the most right now. She could see Emma’s messy hair, thrown into a bun as she was bent over a crying Henry, whose brown mop of hair was the only part of him Regina could see right now. She could recognise the sound of him crying though, the telltale way he whimpered as the day he’d hurt himself on the playground, and she could hear Emma’s voice whispering words of encouragement. Even if Regina could also hear the worry behind the comforting words, a worry not meant for Henry’s ears.

She shot the receptionist a glare for good measure, before she crossed the waiting area and fell to a crouch in front of mother and son. “I’m here,” she whispered, a hand landing on Emma’s knee and the other moving to cup Henry’s face.

“R’gina!” Henry grimaced out a whimper of her name, but she could tell by the shimmer in his green eyes that he was happy to see her.

Regina pressed a tentative kiss to his forehead, noticing how his cheeks where wet with dirt and tears. “What happened, Henry?”

“There was an accident at recess,” Emma explained, effectively pulling Regina’s eyes away from
the boy. They landed on Emma’s face instead; a face scrunched up with worry and tears running hotly down pale cheeks. “I think his arm might be broken, but we have to wait for an x-ray. Also a CT, they think he has a concussion.”

“Oh Emma,” Regina whispered, and before she knew what had come over her, she had pressed her lips to Emma’s forehead and pulled the woman as tightly into an embrace as possible with the child in her arms. “I’m glad you called me.”

Emma whimpered again, “Henry wanted you here,” she sniffled, and Regina could feel hot tears seeping into her blouse where her jacket was hanging open. “I wanted you here,” the blonde continued to reveal, before burrowing her head further into Regina’s body.

“Mamma,” Henry whispered, blinking up at them from where he was huddled in Emma’s arms. “It hurts so bad.”

Pain flashed across Emma’s face at his words, and Regina could only imagine the kind of agony it had to be to watch one’s child in so much discomfort and hurt. Regina was feeling it herself, and Henry wasn’t even her child. “I know it does, Kid,” Emma whispered, carefully running her fingers through his hair. “But we’re gonna have to wait, yeah? You’re probably gonna have your arm in a cast. How cool is that?”

Henry wriggled his little nose. “Cool, I guess.”

“You know they come in different colours, right?” Regina offered as she took a seat on Henry’s other side, dropping her purse to a spare chair and brushing her hair back. “So what colour would you like?”

His eyes lit up by the thought of that. “Can I have pink?”

Emma chuckled, and Regina couldn’t help but feel a strange sense of pride that she was partly to blame for causing that reaction. “Sure, Kiddo, you can get pink. You’ll look so pretty. It’ll match your nails!”

A small smile overtook Henry’s face then, and Regina absentmindedly reached her hand out and tried wiping the dried tears off his face with the pad of her thumb. He closed his eyes, face still scrunched up in discomfort, and Regina wished they’d hurry up and see to him. She knew however, that they would not be first priority. Henry might be a child, but he wasn’t severely injured or life-threatened, so other people would be ushered in before them.

“Close your eyes for a little while, hmm Kid,” Emma suggested in a low murmur as she nuzzled her nose into Henry’s hair. Regina was pretty sure that this was the most motherly she had ever experienced the other woman, despite the fact that she often spent time with Emma and Henry at the same time. “Just close your eyes and think good things, and time will go by much faster.”

Henry nodded softly, eyes still closed as he tried to settle in Emma’s arms.

“What can I do anything to help?” Regina asked, eyes turning to meet Emma’s green ones. For a moment she was taken back to Sunday on Emma’s living room couch, and right there she couldn’t for the life of her figure out why it was that she was not kissing this woman every chance she got; why she was not cooking dinner for her and Henry and reading him bedtime stories every night.

“Can you sit with him for a little while?” Emma asked her, lips pulled into a frown. “I gotta go make some phone calls and I’ll find him some sugar to ease the pain.”

Regina furrowed her brow. “Sure, but…” she trailed off, not entirely sure if she wanted the answer
to the next question she was about to ask. “Who are you going to call?” She whispered, and she smoothly reached her hands out to cover Henry’s ears gently, not sure if this was something that he’d benefit hearing.

Emma ran a hand down her face, her cheeks red and eyes tired. She looked so beat down, like she was about to crack in half, and Regina wondered if she was still having trouble catching that bail-jumper. She looked like she hadn’t slept in days. “I’ve gotta figure something out, I have a shift at GaY tonight, and Henry was supposed to be with Ruby, but I can’t just throw this at her. He’s gotta be up every few hours, and he’ll be real clingy, and honestly I’d feel like a shitty mother if I went to work after this,” she sighed as she looked down at the boy. There was a really conflicted look on her face, and Regina didn’t know how to best help her.

She thought she knew what was troubling Emma though. It had to be what always appeared to trouble – as well as fuel – Emma; the question of money. “Can you afford not to work tonight?” Regina heard herself ask, and honestly, it was probably none of her business, and she wasn’t even sure if Emma was going to answer her, but she could also see the desperation in Emma’s eyes. And perhaps Emma was just happy to have someone to share her doubts and fears with.

The blonde softly shook her head, another round of fresh tears gathering in the corners of her eyes. She pulled her bottom lip between her teeth and awkwardly shifted Henry into Regina’s lap instead. He appeared to be resting, probably wound up from crying and the pain, and his little eyes were droopy and tired. “No,” she said as she pulled herself out of the uncomfortable plastic chair with a groan, “especially not with these medical bills now. All my savings will disappear.”

“Then work,” Regina said, and she thought she said the two words with enough conviction and finality to make Emma understand that this should not be up for discussion.

Emma opened her mouth to argue. “Regina, didn’t you hear what I just-“

Rolling her eyes, Regina continued with the same force. “I’ll take Henry,” she said, brown eyes conveying the seriousness of this proposal. “I’ll be up with him every hour on the dot, I’ll handle his needs. He can come to my place and tomorrow when you get off work, you can come too, and I’ll cook breakfast and watch Henry again so you can sleep.”

Opening her mouth to object – because it was always to object when it was Emma – the blonde paused. “What?” There was a look of serious confusion edged across her face.

“Go get that soda, and we’ll sort everything out, okay?” Regina replied, voice going soft as she shifted slightly in her seat and hugged Henry closer to her chest.

Emma offered her an insecure, yet dopey, smile, before she shuffled off to find the closest wending machine. Regina wasn’t entirely sure what had just happened between them, or what her actions conveyed about their relationship and this ‘thinking’ she was supposed to do. There was this feeling in the pit of her stomach though – and not just the feeling that she’d done the absolutely right thing for both Henry and Emma, but also herself – that she’d also kind of, sort of, perhaps told the other woman that she would be there. That she wasn’t going to run.

That she’d told her with her actions and no words, and that this meant something. That her reaction – and Emma’s reaction to her reaction – meant something. Something more. Something very dangerous and yet so appealing. Something that meant that running was out of the question.

But as she looked down at Henry, she couldn’t for the life of her figure out why it was that she’d thought she’d be able to run anyway. Henry was special. Emma was special. Oh God, was Emma special.
And Regina thought that maybe, perhaps, it was about time that she made sure that Emma knew that.

Chapter End Notes

You guys are the best, and I thank you deeply for your wonderful support. Next chapter will feature Swan-Mills family feels before Emma has to go to work!
Emma

Chapter Summary

Emma and Henry go to Regina’s place at Mifflin, and then Emma has to go to work. Tentative steps are taken.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Emma drove home to the apartment to pack an overnight bag for Henry and herself, as well as her GaY-shirt. She didn’t spend much time on it, quickly just throwing all the necessities into the bag as well as whatever she suspected Henry would need to feel comfortable. His favourite teddy bear was one of those things, as well as his firetruck pyjamas he could change into.

She still wasn’t entirely sure why it was this solution felt so incredibly natural and perfect to her. In theory, it felt like she and Henry barely knew Regina and that she should be reluctant to put so much trust in her, but when it came down to it, she’d called Regina – not Ruby & Dorothy, or Mary Margaret & David, or even Mulan – no, she’d called Regina when she was in need of help, and the brunette woman had been there in a heartbeat. And she’d also suggested to take care of Henry, which to Emma meant a whole lot, because money was tight as it was, and she’d taken way longer catching that bail-jumper than she probably should have. She needed these two shifts at Gallium & Yttrium, because she still planned on getting Henry on that water park vacation.

Returning to the Bug, she threw the bags into the trunk, before slipping behind the wheel. She fidgeted with her earphones and her iPhone for a second, before pressing Ruby’s name on her screen and setting off towards Regina’s apartment.

It took Ruby five rings to answer the phone. “Swannie, what’s up?” She sounded out of breath, and Emma only had half a mind to imagine what her best friend could be up to at the moment.

“Rubes, there’s been a change of plans,” Emma said as she bent forward to navigate around a corner. “You don’t need to watch Henry tonight or tomorrow.”

This confused Ruby. “Uhm, okay yeah, sure,” she said, and it sounded like she was fidgeting with something on the other end. “...why?”

Emma rolled her eyes. “Alright, so don’t freak out, okay?” She knew that that was probably the completely wrong thing to start with, because that would only make Ruby freak out even more. It was a thing she did. “But Henry’s kinda... broken his arm.” She mumbled the last part, afraid of Ruby’s reaction.

She was completely silent on the other end of the phone. “Uhm,” she paused, breath held, “there must be something wrong with my ears, because it sure as fuck sounded like you said that Mini Swan broke his arm.”

“There’s nothing wrong with your ears, Ruby, you have super-scary-good hearing we both know that,” Emma bit her lip to keep back a chuckle, “and Henry broke his arm.”
“Oh my God,” Ruby screeched, and it sounded like she just dropped something on the floor, “are you at the ER? Do you need me to come? Should I bring snacks? Should I bring Dorothy? Are you going to work later?”

Momentarily taken aback by all the questions fired in her direction, Emma wasn’t sure what to address first. She figured she’d better just let Ruby know everything, which was the point with the phone call in the first place, because she was going to be at Regina’s soon, and then Henry would need her full attention before work. She should probably question this deep trust she had in Regina, but she simply couldn’t find it in herself to do so. She trusted the other woman, completely, and she knew that Henry would be well taken care of when she wasn’t there to do it herself.

“Relax Rubes, he already has a cast on, and he can’t wait to show it to you at some point,” Emma promised her friend. The first thing Henry had said, when he’d seen the pink cast, was that Aunt Ruby was going go love it.

Ruby seemed to calm down at this information. “But not tonight?” It seemed like she already knew where this conversation was going.

Emma stopped at a red light, waiting for the other cars to pass. “It seemed like a lot to dump on you,” she carefully explained. It wasn’t that she didn’t think Ruby could take on the responsibility, because she knew that she could, and she trusted Ruby with Henry’s life, otherwise she wouldn’t be Emma’s go-to babysitter and Henry’s favourite aunt, but it was for Ruby’s own sake. She knew that Ruby would not tell Emma that she was asking too much (which Dorothy had also been pretty clear about with Emma that day that seemed so long ago, when they last went to the ER), and this simply was too much to ask, because Ruby had work all weekend, and she couldn’t afford to be up all night, checking on Henry.

“Emma, you know I would do it for you,” Ruby softly replied. “If you’re missing work tonight because of it, then I think you should reconsider. Dorothy and I can take turns or something…” she trailed off.

Emma’s hands clutched the steering wheel, her knuckles turning white. “I’m not missing work, and you guys shouldn’t have to bend over backwards for me.”

Ruby sounded confused when she answered. “You’re not?”

With a sigh, Emma continued to explain, “No,” she firmly said, taking a right down Mifflin, looking out the window to find building number 108, “Regina’s… Regina’s going to watch him. I’m heading there right now with his stuff.”

“Regina, huh,” Ruby pointedly commented, and Emma could just see her face in her mind; how that perfectly plucked eyebrow rose to her forehead in thought. “How did that happen?”

Emma said, “She offered.”

Humming, it was clear that Ruby was now in a teasing mood, knowing that the immediate danger was over and that Henry was okay. “The girlfriend’s watching the kid, huh? Big steps, big steps.”

“You’re an idiot,” Emma retorted, coming to a stop in front of number 120; the closest free spot on the street.

“State the obvious, why don’t you,” Ruby retorted right back, and there was their easy banter, the characteristic way they’d always communicated with each other. “Where does Regina live though? It’s gotta be somewhere fancy.”
Emma stared through the side-mirror, eyes searching for the white building with the number 108 on top of the door. As far as she could see, there was a frigging doorman in the lobby. “Mifflin,” she commented. There was a weird sense of nerves taking over her body right then, at the idea of entering the building and going upstairs to Regina’s apartment, to her private space. She knew Henry was up there already and Regina had invited them – quite insisted actually – but she still felt on edge, nervous. She had to calm down.

Ruby whistled lowly into the phone. “That’s a rich people street.”

Nodding, even if Ruby couldn’t see her, Emma agreed, “Yeah, but uh… I’m there now, so…”

“So you gotta go,” Ruby guessed, sighing heavily, “Alright, kiss the kid from me, and please Ems, just…” she trailed off, probably not sure how to phrase the next part of her sentence. Knowing Ruby, Emma would probably much prefer not to hear it anyway.

Still, she prodded her friend on, “Just?”

Ruby cackled into the phone, “Just bang that woman already and be sure to tell me all about it after, m’kay? Love you and kisses.” She smacked her lips together a couple of times as she made crude kissing noises, before rudely hanging up the phone.

Emma glared at the piece of electronics in her hand, and she took a minute to gather herself for what was going to happen - not only the next four hours before she had to go to work, but also the next couple of days when she’d return here rather than to her own home. She and Regina had quickly agreed that it would be better for Henry to have a base at her place this weekend, when the accident was still so fresh, before Emma took him back home on Sunday evening. This arrangement essentially meant that Emma would also be spending all of her time at Regina’s place when she wasn’t working.

When she was pretty certain that she could not feel calmer, Emma grabbed the bags from the trunk and locked up – momentarily cringing when she realised just how out of place the Bug looked on this street – before making her way to number 108. She entered the bright lobby and gave her name to the doorman, who had been informed that she was expected, before she made her way to the elevator and pressed the sixth floor. Of course Regina would be on the top floor in this fancy old building, and Emma had high expectations of what the insides of her home might look like.

She took the time in the elevator to make sure that her hair wasn’t too disheveled, which was tough since it had been in a messy bun for hours. She pulled the scrunchie out and combed her fingers through her blonde locks to tame them slightly. As the elevator dinged, she stepped into the hallway and made her way straight to apartment 6B. She paused in front of the door, fisted hand raised to knock, when she heard the tell-tale signs of Henry’s loud singing coming from the apartment. She could hear music too, and the sounds of someone moving around inside.

Knocking on the door, it took only few seconds before it was pulled open, and she was face to face with a smiling Regina who had… tomato sauce? on her cheek. Henry was grinning toothily from behind her.

“Emma,” the older woman breathed, opening the door to let the blonde pass easily inside.

Emma dropped their bags on the floor with a loud thud and kicked off her boots. The door opened pretty much into an open-floor space, and she could see the living room, a dining table and the open kitchen from where she stood. Something delicious appeared to be cooking in the oven, and the radio was on. “What’s going on? Something smells good in here,” she tentatively commented.
Regina chuckled. “We are cooking and having a dance party.”

“Yeah!” Henry cheered on, before he started signing again and wriggling his little butt around while doing these weird side-step thingies. The boy did not have much rhythm.

Emma couldn’t help the smile that appeared on her face then, when she closed the door behind her and turned to Regina. “I sure hope his cooking is better than his dancing, eh?”

Making a tsk-tsk sound, Regina led Emma further into the apartment. “We’re having lasagne, I hope that’s okay? It’s my own personal recipe with a secret ingredient,” she explained, high heels clicking against the floor as she moved. Of course she’d be someone to wear high heels inside, because how could she not.

Emma stuck her hands into her pockets and swayed awkwardly on her feet as she tried to take in everything of the apartment that she could. Her and Henry’s place could easily fit into just the common area of this place, and to think that Regina lived there all alone. It had to be kind of lonely sometimes. “So uh, anything I can do to help?”

Regina raised an eyebrow. “I have it from a very reliable source that you are no talent in a kitchen, Miss Swan,” she said, and Emma swore for a second, that it sounded like she was flirting with her; just the way the words slipped across her lips and the look she offered in Emma’s direction. It gave the blonde a strange sensation in her body. “And by reliable source I mean Henry, of course,” Regina added, for good measure.

“Of course,” Emma replied with a serious nod. She was finding it kind of hard not to smile goofily at the beautiful brunette in front of her, and all the thoughts she’d had in the car were evaporating into thin air. “I feel bad about not helping though. Can’t I chop something?”

“And risk another trip to the emergency room?” Regina shook her head fondly. “I think not, Emma. Besides, you’re going to work later, so I suggest you rest up. Henry might need to rest up as well, he’s been running around, checking everything out, but I suspect the events of this afternoon will soon catch up to him.”

Emma suspected that as well. She was reluctant though, to leave Regina in the semi-privacy of the open kitchen and join Henry in the living room. He was still dancing around and singing on the top of his lungs, but she should probably get him settled on the couch or something. She reached a hand out to grasp Regina’s, needing some sort of personal contact, a way to show her how much this meant to not only Henry, but also Emma herself. She clutched the other woman’s hand tightly, and Regina’s brown eyes met hers in a fond gaze. “Thank you,” Emma whispered, her thumb stroking absentmindedly across the back of Regina’s warm hand, “you’re… you’re the best, Regina. Seriously. Thank you for this.”

Regina squeezed Emma’s hand back, her eyes twinkling slightly in the natural light streaming into the kitchen from the huge windows. “Don’t mention it,” she whispered, tongue darting out to wet her dark red lips, “I wanted to do all of this for you.”

Emma swallowed a lump in her throat, eyes fixated on the way Regina’s darker skin contrasted her own pale hand, “Henry is so happy. We really appreciate it,” she flatly replied, not sure what else to say to Regina’s kind words and the sudden openness of her admission.

“Mostly for you,” Regina replied next, forcing Emma to look up at her with an extra tight squeeze, “I wanted to help you. That Henry is happy is just a nice addition for both of us. But I meant you, helping you.”
Staring at the older woman, Emma wasn’t sure what to say to that. She could feel how her heart was suddenly beating wildly inside her chest, like it was trying to find its way out of there and break away, and all she could do was just stare at Regina. She just stared; stared at her kind, brown eyes that held so incredibly much emotion it was ineffable, and the way her red lips quirked into a little smile, and mostly the way she just looked so damn beautiful all the fucking time. Emma was a loss for words. “Regina, I-”

“Don’t say anything,” Regina interrupted, their hands still linked together, even though it had been entirely too long to be platonic, which Emma was starting to realise that it never really had been with them. “Just,” she paused, “go be with Henry. Let me cook for you, and we’ll figure everything out.”

Emma knew this was the final say in the matter for right now, because Regina said it in a way which left no room for discussion, and it was fine anyway, because Henry was there, and he needed attention before work, and she wasn’t even sure what it was that she wanted to say, what this matter even was. So she dropped her hand from Regina’s and retreated back into the adjacent living room. She turned off the radio and grabbed Henry mid-dance move before squeezing him tightly for a hug.

“You okay, Kiddo? Everything good?”

“Can I have ice cream?” Henry cheekily asked, green eyes round and serious. “I saw some in Regina’s freezer, she has so much ice cream, Ma.”

Emma arched an eyebrow and shot a teasing look in Regina’s direction. “Oh, does she now?” Regina was busy chopping vegetables, but she heard them anyway. “Hush now you two.”

Henry let out a long yawn. “So, can I have some or what, Ma?”

“Definitely not before dinner,” Emma told him as she pressed a kiss to Henry’s forehead. “If you’re good, maybe Regina will let you have some after dinner, but you’ve gotta ask her about that, because she lives here, you know?”

Nodding dutifully, Henry said, “Well, can I have my pyjamas and a movie then?”

Pushing him towards the bags, Emma gave his butt a light pad, “That we can do, Mister, you find your stuff and we’ll get you settled, hm.”

Henry trotted towards the bags, humming lightly as he started searching through the contents one-handed; he managed to spill most of it on the floor next to the bags, but Emma would clean it up later. She found the bathroom with Henry as her tour guide (he’d already checked everything out, it was no lie), and she helped him get changed and ready for a night in. Then she got him settled on the couch, nestled in three different blankets Regina told her she could find in a closet in the hallway, and he got a juice and his teddy bear, and Emma put *Brave* into the dvd, before settling down next to him. She was pretty sure that he’d be so consumed in the movie that she could catch a catnap without him noticing, which she really needed if she was going to last until the morning, dealing with drunken patrons.

She couldn’t be entirely sure, but it felt like Regina was watching them carefully from her place in the kitchen as she moved around, and even as Henry fell asleep on top of her, Emma joining him soon after, she was pretty sure she heard someone pause the movie and wrap the blankets tighter around them. She couldn’t be entirely certain, because she was very tired, but she did wake up comfortable and warm, so that had to mean something.
They ate around the massive dining table; Regina was seated at the end, with Henry and Emma on either side of her. The lasagne was piping hot from the oven, and there was a mixed salad and some bread in front of them, too. Henry had a juice box and Emma and Regina were nursing each a glass of wine – Emma couldn’t indulge too much, because she had work after all.

“Dig in,” Regina happily told them, motioning towards the meal in front of them. Emma could tell that she was anxious about the food, so she immediately reached forward and started scooping out servings with gusto.

Henry dug his fork into the steaming lasagne, blowing exaggeratedly on the food before trying a tentative bite. Regina was watching him in anticipation, and it became very clear to Emma that their reactions were important to the brunette.

Emma dug into her own food eagerly. “Remember to eat your veggies too,” she told Henry, who was busy picking around the salad on his plate.

Regina scooped some salad onto Emma’s plate and said, “You need your vegetables too, Miss Swan,” before serving herself.

Chewing her food, Emma felt hotness burn in her mouth. “Is really good,” she informed, before gulping down some water.

There was a smirk on Regina’s face when she said, “The red pepper flakes gives it an extra kick, I think.”

“Sure does,” Emma managed to reply, before stuffing a piece of bread into her mouth.

Henry seemed entirely unbothered by the hot spice and kept eating his food. Regina reached over to cut the lasagne into smaller pieces for him since Emma had troubles reaching and it was even more difficult for him since his arm was now in a cast. “Can I have the juice?”

Regina handed him the juice box, and she had a completely contend look on her face as she watched him suck on the straw.

Emma had already demolished all her lasagne and was reaching forward for seconds. “You’re an awesome cook, Regina. Damn,” she said as she scooped up cheesy goodness. She sneakily avoided the bowl with salad and sipped her wine.

“I’m glad you like it,” Regina replied as she daintily lifted her fork and ate slowly. “I never really get to cook for anyone, since it’s just me.”

“Well, you can cook for us anytime,” Emma said seriously, “I’m not complaining.”

It appeared to be the completely right thing to say, because Regina smiled happily as she continued to eat her food. Emma couldn’t for the life of her figure out why Regina did not have a family of her own to feed and care for, because it came so naturally to her. It seemed like she was born to play hostess, mother, to care in the way she was caring for them right now. Emma was perhaps a bit reluctant to admit it, but she could really get used to this.

They talked happily while they finished their dinner; Henry spoke about his school and what they were currently doing, while Regina listened carefully and Emma munched away on her food. When Henry was full, he was excused, and he trotted back to the couch and turned Brave back on. Emma and Regina finished eating, Regina asking timid questions about Emma’s mark – whom
she’d finally managed to catch yesterday - and what Emma was supposed to do whenever she worked at GaY.

After dinner, Emma insisted on cleaning up, and Regina ventured into her bedroom to change into something more comfortable. It was only 7:30, so there was a while yet before Emma had to go to work, and she figured that she’d let Henry finish the rest of his movie before getting him tucked into the guest bedroom.

Emma sat back at the table, nursing the rest of her wine, and smiled happily when Regina returned; barefooted and wearing yoga pants and an oversized sweatshirt. Of course she could make such an outfit look absolutely beautiful.

“I poured some more wine for you,” Emma told her as the other woman reclaimed her seat by the end of the table.

Regina tittered, “Thank you.”

Emma ran a finger over the side of her glass. “You’re too good to Henry and I,” she said then, the words slipping pass her lips effortlessly.

Shaking her head, Regina dismissed her, “No Emma, that’s where you’re wrong,” she lowly hummed, brown eyes following the movement of Emma’s finger the stem of the glass. “You and Henry deserve the absolute best,” her breath hitched, “especially you.”

Feeling a faint blush rise up her cheeks, Emma bashfully stared down at the table. She wasn’t sure what it was with Regina tonight, but she felt like something had shifted between them. The energy was different, charged. “You really think so,” she breathed, eyes still downcast, “I don’t.”

“I do,” Regina replied, and she reached her hand forward to clasp it gently over Emma’s, thus stilling her movement.

The blonde raised her eyes, surprised by the sudden touch of the other woman, and she met Regina’s sizzling gaze; there was so much emotion looming in those brown eyes, and their gazes locked, green meeting brown. Her fingers felt hot to the touch, and suddenly her throat felt dry like parchment.

Regina’s red lips curled into a little smile. “You deserve everything, Emma,” she said, and there was a seriousness to her voice that Emma couldn’t really pinpoint.

“Yeah?”

“Mh,” Regina lowly hummed, and she tugged Emma’s hand down, trailing her fingers closer, so their hands intertwined on top of the table. She seemed hesitant, her other hand curled around her own wine glass, and Emma wondered what was going through her mind. “Emma, I-“

“Mamma,” Henry interrupted them, stepping in between their two chairs. He was tiredly rubbing his eyes, teddy bear hugged beneath his armpit. “I wanna sleep now. Tired.”

Emma dropped Regina’s hand and immediately pushed her chair back. “Sure thing. Let’s get you to bed, Mister!” She picked Henry up, and he immediately wrapped his legs around her midsection.

“Can both you and R’gina read me bedtime?”

Regina stood up as well, smiling fondly at them both. “Sure thing, little prince,” she promised, “you can choose whichever story you want. I’m sure Montgomery and Anniston won’t mind you
Henry smiled sleepily against Emma’s neck, and she suspected that it wouldn’t take many pages before he was snoring away in Regina’s guest bedroom bed. She felt bad that Regina would have to wake him every hour when he was this tired, but such were the doctor’s orders.

They made quick work of tucking him in after his teeth were brushed and his face washed. He looked utterly comfortable in the bed Montgomery usually occupied whenever he and Anniston slept over at Regina’s, and he stared happily up at them, covers wrapped tightly around him. They sat on either side of his bed, and Emma held his chosen book – one of the books about Narnia – open so both she and Regina could read to him. She started, reading down the page, and as one of the characters was supposed to say something, Henry interrupted her.

“R’gina, you do the voices!”

And so Regina obliged, every time there was a line, she took over, differentiating her voice with each character, and it took no more than ten minutes, before Henry was snoring lightly between them. Emma and Regina carefully excised the room, leaving only the night light on, before closing the door behind him. They’d have to return in an hour or so, but for now he could sleep peacefully. Emma didn’t really believe him to have a concussion, but it was better to be safe than sorry.

She cleaned up their mess of things by the door, dragging them into the guest bedroom she would be staying in, while Regina busied herself with some tea. She returned after, dressed for work, placing her warm clothes on the back of the chair, before settling herself next to Regina on the couch.

“Ready for work?” Regina questioned, her brown eyes following Emma’s movement as she nestled into the couch with a happy sigh. This day seemed to be never-ending.

“As ready as can be,” Emma replied as she lifted her cup to her mouth and carefully blew on the hot liquid.

Regina seemed hesitant as she herself settled back further in the comfortable cushion. “I’ve got something to talk to you about,” she offered, running a nervous hand through her short hair, “Regardless of what happens with… us,” she paused, fidgeting, “it’s something I want you to think carefully about.”

Emma felt her forehead furrow in confusion. “Sure…” she trailed off, urging Regina on with her eyes. It sounded serious, if Regina’s demeanour was anything to go by. But what did she mean by what happened with them? Did that mean that she had made a decision already? Did it mean it was a decision that Emma wouldn’t like? But what about everything that had happened today? It had pointed so clearly in one direction — oh shit, what if she’s going to tell me that this weekend will be the last she wants to do with us? What was she going to tell Henry?

“I think you should start working at The Hills,” Regina said next, and for a second Emma just stared at her, not sure what it was that had just slipped past her lips. The Hills? What? She must have looked very confused, because Regina simply continued on, “Hear me out, okay? I know it’s a lot different from the things you do now, but I think you could really resonate with the kids, and Marian agrees! They need someone like you, someone who’s been there,” Regina finished, looked at Emma with such expressive brown eyes.

The blonde placed her still hot tea on the coffee table and turned her body fully to face the other woman. “Uhm… sure? But like – what? I’m confused.” I’m hella fucking confused.
Regina’s lips curled into a fond smile. “My eloquent darling,” she mused as she reached a hand out and carefully cupped Emma’s cheek. “You should go talk with Marian on Wednesday when I’m at The Hills too, she’d love to meet with you there, see how you do with the kids. It’s only part time for now, but who knows what will happen in the future.”

Emma was still gaping at her. “You want … me … to work with the kids?”

“Yes Emma,” Regina breathed, carefully reaching for her own cup of tea. “You’ll be perfect. I understand if you need to think about it, which is why I’m telling you this now.”

“I could do outreach?” Emma dumbly questioned, and when Regina nodded encouragingly, Emma couldn’t help but let the thought settle into her mind. *I could work with kids – kids like me.* It was a pleasant thought, something she’d never thought she would be grown-up enough or educated enough for. Something that she had thought would never be a possibility because of her delinquent past and her small stint in juvie. But maybe Marian could see past all that – see what unique insight she had to offer these kids. She’d be lying if she didn’t say that this was something she could very much see herself doing. And even better – she’d be able to work better hours, not endangering herself every time she had to catch a bad guy. That’d make Mary Margaret very happy as well.

Regina chuckled hoarsely. “Think about it, Emma, okay?” She sipped her tea. “No pressure, it’s just a suggestion because I care immensely about you.”

Emma couldn’t ignore the heat that soared through her chest at that admission. “You do?” She smiled widely at Regina and hoped her cheeks weren’t burning hot pink.

Sipping her tea yet again, Regina assured her. “Yes I do, you fool. Now rest your eyes before work, I’ll make sure to wake you up by 9:30.”

Smiling cheekily at Regina, Emma discarded her tea and let her head rest back against the arm rest. Oh how she wished she didn’t have to go to work soon. Then she and Regina could have stayed on the couch all night, drinking tea and watching bad television while checking in on Henry. It was a very appealing thought, something that – scarily enough – felt very natural and comfortable.

Emma had never fully had the experience of family, but she suddenly felt like this might be just that.

——-

Regina was good about checking in with Emma all through her shift. She sent a small update – always with good news – every time she had checked on Henry, and around twelve there was even a photo of a bleary-eyed Henry to prove it. Emma appreciated the gesture, small as it was, because even if she was supposed to be working, she’d left her brain and heart back at Mifflin when she drove off in her Bug at 9:45.

Thankfully she was working with Tink tonight, and Mulan had gotten in at twelve. By this point she’d already heard what had happened to Henry, so she went easy on Emma, sending her to the basement to stand in a corner and make sure that nothing bad happened. There was a lot happening tonight, because there was a famous queer DJ, and the entire place was filled to the brim with people. Emma had discarded her jacket and beanie behind the bar and was just spotting her t-shirt, because it was crazy hot in the basement. So many people her own age were dancing and making out in the corners, but she was pleased, because nothing bad seemed to be under way. She leaned herself against the wall not far from the DJ and tried not to look too bored while she discreetly checked her phone for an update from Regina. It had only been twenty minutes since the last one.
Emma looked up from the phone, quickly blackening it, to come face to face with a beautiful brown-skinned girl. She was holding out a bottle of coke and watching Emma with kind, black eyes. Her long dark hair was twisted over her shoulder, landing mid-thigh even in her elaborate braid, and Emma’s first thought was that she looked incredibly beautiful. And that she was holding out a soda expectantly.

“You look thirsty,” she explained, stepping closer and smiling brightly at Emma.

The blonde dumbly took the offered bottle. “Uh… thanks?”

“I’m Jasmine,” Jasmine said, propping herself against the wall next to Emma. She wasn’t as tall as her, even in heels, and she was dressed in a beautiful pink dress and no apparent make up. She looked tired though, and slightly bored of the scene in the basement. “And you are…”

“Emma,” Emma quickly cleared her throat and took a gulp of the soda – damn, she actually was quite thirsty, she’d just been so consumed in thoughts of Henry and Regina that she had forgotten all about it. “I’m uh, Emma,” she repeated, as she let the bottle slip from her lips.

Jasmine laughed. “Hello Emma,” she said, kind eyes trailing over Emma’s form as they stood there, shoulder to shoulder, “and how are you this evening?”

Emma figured that it wouldn’t hurt to talk to this woman, she seemed nice after all, and Emma herself was inexplicably bored, because no one was getting into any trouble; all the patrons seemed adamant about having a wonderful time and dancing the night away. She should probably be pleased about that, but tonight she’d really needed a distraction. “I’m okay. Just working,” she shrugged, “And what about you? Why aren’t you dancing with your friends?” She looked towards the dance floor where a group of girls were watching them with curious glances, not at all hiding the fact that they were snooping.

“They wanted me to come talk to you, because I told them I think you’re cute,” Jasmine sheepishly replied, and Emma couldn’t help but be happily surprised at the honesty. Jasmine’s eyes crinkled hopefully, and Emma so wished that she could give this girl a positive reply – because Jasmine was cute, she really was – and if things had been different, maybe she could have. But not many girls her age were pleased when they learned that she had a five-year-old (soon six-year-old, damn Henry was growing quick), and now there was also the matter of Regina… Regina who was watching over Henry, and whom Emma was thinking entirely too much about, and whose lips were red and kissable, and…

Emma must have shown her hesitation on her face, because Jasmine frowned slightly.

“You’re not single, are you?”

Taking another gulp of the soda, Emma let the question linger in the space between them for a beat. “Uhm… I uh,” she licked her lips, “it’s very sweet of you, and you’re also very cute, but.”

Jasmine sighed. “You’re not gay? You have a girlfriend? You just got out of a bad relationship?” She rattled off the excuses, having probably heard them all too many times before; perhaps she’d even used some of them herself at times.

Emma squinted down at her. “I have a son,” was all she could get past her lips, because she couldn’t say yes to any of the suggestions that Jasmine shot her way, and at the same time it didn’t feel like she was single, even though she was. She just kept seeing Regina’s face in her mind, and
what was up with that? You know what’s up with that. Emma scowled to herself.

Blinking in confusion, Jasmine continued, “A kid? I don’t mind that. I just want coffee,” she explained, and she looked so utterly adorable that Emma was tempted to say yes and just cancel on her later. It was definitely going to make this interaction easier if she did just that, but there was just something inside of her – Regina, Regina, Regina – that stopped her.

The blonde took another long gulp of the soda, effectively emptying the bottle, before she looked back at Jasmine. “Look, it’s just… you’re, it’s not a good time right now.” It was lame, but it was everything she could offer the other woman. Damn, when had her life turned out so complicated? It was easier when it was just her and Henry and she could have said no to Jasmine and honestly added that she just simply did not have time to date, but that they could meet for a fuck if she wanted, and that had been it.

Jasmine’s smiled faltered slightly, but she reached into her purse and pulled out a pen and a scrap of paper. “Okay then,” she mused, propping the paper against the wall and scribbling her name, followed by digits, “you’re not interested. Perhaps you are in the light of day. Call me if you change your mind, eh?” She held the paper out for Emma with a tentative smile.

“I don’t want to lead you on, I’m not gonna call,” Emma said, even though she was very flattered and she wished she could just take the paper and be done with it.

The black-haired woman took a step closer and boldly placed her hand on Emma’s hip. “There,” she offered with a cocky arch of the eyebrow, “now you did not accept my number, and you did not lead me on, okay Emma?” She pulled back, paper now disappeared from her hand, and stepped towards the crowded dance floor.

Emma couldn’t help but watch her leave. She was very certain that her pocket now held a piece of paper with Jasmine’s name and number on it, but she was reluctant to look. Instead she pretended that this interaction hadn’t happened, handed the empty bottle back at the bar, and went to relieve either Mulan or Tink by the door. Perhaps she could slip a call to Regina – just to make sure that everything was still going smoothly back at Mifflin.

It wasn’t like she was missing the other woman or anything, it was purely to check in on Henry. At least keep telling yourself that, Swan. She pulled her phone out of her pocket and was happy to find a text from the object of her thoughts.

Everything is still good. No sign of any concussion. Henry misses you. /Regina.

Chapter End Notes

You needn’t worry, Jasmine will not mess (much) with the tentative progress that Swan Queen is making here! That said, I hope you enjoyed this chapter. Next up: A bit of Zelena, and some Henry and Regina time.

Thank you so much for all your wonderful support!
Regina

Chapter Summary

Henry has an important question for Regina, and Emma has really nice legs.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Emma was sleeping in the guest bedroom. She’d arrived back from work very tired, wolfed down some waffles, pressed a kiss to Henry’s head and then shuffled off to bed. Henry hadn’t minded much, too engulfted in his syrup-soaked waffles to really notice, and Regina thought that that was as well as could be.

And instead of moping around at home, trying to be quiet – even though Emma had assured her that she would most likely sleep through everything – Regina decided that she and Henry might as well run some errands and then visit Zelena, her husband and the two terrors. She thought that Emma deserved some time to relax and not worry about Henry being taken care of. She knew, of course, that Emma’s friends always tended to Henry when Emma needed it, but felt like Emma never wanted to burden her friends too much and therefore still didn’t have much time to herself. Which everyone deserved. Most of all Emma.

So Regina wanted to give her that. She’d left a note for the blonde, telling her to enjoy the bathtub in her bathroom and just relax, which she hoped that Emma would listen to. Regina planned for her and Henry to be out and about for most of the day, and she might or might not be planning to spoil Emma rotten when they got back later. Emma’s shift didn’t start before midnight, so that left her plenty of time for a good home-cooked meal and dessert.

She’d dropped some shirts and a blazer off at the dry-cleaner’s, and now she and Henry were strolling down the street, enjoying the sunbeams warming their faces. Henry’s little hand was clammy in hers, but she could not deny the wonderful warmth it produced in her chest; the feeling of having him with her like this. It was strange, because she’d walked many times with Anniston and Montgomery like this, even with Roland, but the other children didn’t leave her feeling this way. When she was with them, she was Aunt Regina, and that was a wonderful feeling as well, but with Henry – with Henry it felt maternal, it felt like she could parent him, love him that way.

Regina really didn’t know what to do with that feeling, but instead of letting it freak her out and worry her, she decided to just enjoy it for now.

“Henry, sweetie,” she said then, as they stopped in front of a small florist, “what’s your mother’s favourite flowers?”

Henry looked up at her with big questions in his eyes. “Uuuuhhnn.”

Regina chuckled, “Your mother doesn’t like flowers, huh?” She clutched his hand tightly, to reassure him that it was okay, “I don’t know why I thought she would.”

He tugged at her hand, pulling her towards his level. “She likes bear claws and beer,” he whispered conspiratorially as he motioned towards the little baker’s shop a few stores down. He continued,
“And she really likes it when I get hot chocolate, that’s for sure.”

She smirked down at him, enamoured by his childish attempt at tricking her into a hot beverage. She felt like she should pretend with him for now; it was their day anyway, and who knew when – or even if – she’d get this opportunity to spoil him again. “Does she now? Well, then we better get you some!”

Henry practically skidded into the small baker’s shop, and Regina ordered a coffee for herself and a hot chocolate (“With cinnamon,” Henry feistily informed her) for Henry. She also ordered bear claws to go because. Well, just because. They took a seat at a small table in the back of the shop – they still had a little time to kill before their lunch with Zelena, and Henry dove into his hot chocolate with gusto, looking up at her with whipped cream and a gigantic smile all over his face. She snapped a picture for Emma to see later.

They were silent for a little while, Henry eagerly drinking and looking at the other people in the store, and Regina watching Henry while sipping her coffee. She could watch him all day; he really was Emma’s son. So much of her was evident on his face, not only that they looked alike (the eyes was a dead give-away for certain), but also their mannerisms. The sheepish smiles they could both offer her, the way Henry was so filled with mischief, and how he so easily wormed his way into her heart. She had no idea what was going to happen, but she felt like the Swans were going to be her undoing.

He looked deep in thought now though. Caught somewhere, perhaps in his fairytale land, as he absentmindedly liked the leftover whipped cream from his lips and stared at the white mug. She didn’t want to interrupt him, he seemed so caught up in his thoughts, so when he finally spoke, she did a little jump in surprise, truly startled by the sudden sound of his voice.

“R’gina, can I ask you something?” His green eyes were serious, like he’d been thinking a lot about this and just had to have the answer.

Regina placed her cup on the table and nodded her head. “Sure Henry, you can ask me anything.”

He was silent for a little while then and she just watched him, letting him take his time to get the question right. “Are you a lesbian?”

Of all the things she’d thought he’d ask, this most certainly hadn’t been it, and for a second Regina was glad that she’d placed her cup back on the table, otherwise she’d probably have been covered in coffee by now. She glanced briefly around the small store, afraid that someone might have heard or was looking at them, but no one paid them any mind. She willed herself to keep calm and looked at Henry’s charming little face, so honest with his question, and she felt her shoulders sag. “Yes, Henry,” she said, grabbing her cup and taking another sip. “I am.”

“Oh,” he licked his lips again, before meeting her gaze. “Does that mean you’re gonna marry a woman someday?”

Regina felt her brow furrow, not at all able to detect where this conversation was going, which she was usually so good at. With everyone. Except Emma, and now Henry too, apparently. What was it with these two people that had her so unable to act like a rational human being? “I suppose so,” Regina kindly whispered, offering him a little smile. “If I’m ever lucky enough to meet someone who wants to marry me and whom I want to marry back.”

Henry nodded as he took in the words she was saying. “But what if…” he trailed off, his eyes once more focused on the remains of his hot chocolate, gathered in a cooling pool in the bottom of his mug. “I mean,” he stopped talking, a small blush rising on his cheeks.
Reaching across the table, Regina gently placed a finger beneath his chin and lifted it, so their eyes could meet. “You can say anything to me, Henry,” she promised, and she knew that she was speaking the truth; that she would, truly, tell him just about everything as long as she could. “Ask me your question.”

“Well, if you’re gonna marry a woman,” Henry said then, resolutely deciding to share his thoughts with her, which she found very brave, “can’t it be my mamma? I know she would want to marry you, and then we could all be a family!”

Truly touched – and quite surprised – by his kind words, Regina’s fingers dropped to the table. Her entire body was a mess of emotions; happiness at Henry’s willingness to share with her, to welcome her into his home, but also fear; frightened that if she were to be accepted into their family, it meant that she would lose them, and how could she ever go on if she did? Henry and Emma had so quickly turned her entire world upside-down, changed everything she knew, and how could she ever go back? But that was why things were the way they were. So she could go back, so she wouldn’t be broken.

“Henry,” she whispered, her voice soft and barely audible across the small table. He watched her with kind, green eyes, attentive and listening. “It doesn’t work that way, my little prince,” she offered a small smile. “Even if I want to marry a woman, I can’t just marry whoever. And who says your mother would even want to marry me?”

Why would she? I always push her away whenever she gets too close.

Brow furrowed, Henry said, “She would, I know she would!”

Regina continued. “Perhaps so, but people still have to fall in love.” She paused, her brown eyes searching his little face, and she hated that she saw nothing but disappointment and displeasure there. “You know what that means, right? To fall in love?”

Henry nodded and pushed that last of his chocolate away from him, the mug scraping across the table. “Yeah, like in the fairytales. True Love’s Kiss.”

“True Love’s Kiss, yes,” Regina agreed with him, because that was something a five-year-old Henry could understand; it was his language and his love for fairytales, and it made sense to him. “So you see, right? I need to marry the woman I share True Love with.”

Henry glared at her through partly hooded lids. His eyes were on fire, and he’d never looked more like Emma than he did right now; a petulant child. “Then it can still be Ma, ‘cuz you just need to kiss her,” he argued.

Quick flashes to kisses in the bar and on the couch, nothing but fire and electricity, but no True Love. That was only for the fairytales.

If only things were as easy as in the fairytales. “I’m sorry, Henry,” Regina whispered as she reached a hand across the table to gently grasp his and squeeze it. “I would love to be a family with you. And I promise you that no matter what happens, you can always come to me, okay?” She needed to make that promise, to reassure him that she was there. And perhaps she needed to feel like he’d still want to see her, still need her in his life, even if – when – Emma married someone else.

Regina’s heart clenched uncomfortably by the thought of Emma marrying someone; some woman she met at a bar or at work or out about town, and she had to remind herself to breathe calmly and focus on Henry, the innocent child in front of her. Logically, she knew why the mere thought of Emma with another woman hurt and jabbed at her, pulled at her heartstrings and made her want to
punch something, but she could not let herself succumb to that, she could not let love, let desire and want overshadow the clear knowledge that if she dared love, dared want and desire, she’d eventually lose everything. Just as she always did.

Scowling, Henry said, “Are we done yet?”

She knew she had hurt his feelings and shattered his childhood dreams, so she didn’t reprimand him or tell him to behave. Instead she downed the last of her coffee, grabbed the bear claws – that now felt so heavy in her hand – and grabbed Henry’s hand to walk the short distance to the car so they could make the small drive out to Zelena and Walsh’s mansion home.

Walsh was tumbling around on the grass with the kids at Zelena’s demand (“Kids need exercise, Walsh! Football, dirt on the shoes and scrapes on their knees! Energy spent, tired children, you do the math!”), and the two sisters were enjoying a post-lunch glass of rosé from the porch.

They were sitting on the bench together, watching the four people mess around on the grass with a ball (Henry and Montgomery versus Walsh and Anniston, the riveting football match), and Zelena was going on about something their mother had said yesterday about Regina’s behaviour (always Regina’s behaviour) when she came for dinner, and Regina was only half listening as she had a careful eye on Henry, making sure that his arm didn’t get more hurt than it already was.

He looked to be having the time of his life though; he was much smaller than Anniston and Montgomery, but they were – for once – very mindful and not like the wicked bullies Regina knew them to be, and Walsh was good about giving Henry some leeway. Henry had taken to Zelena’s husband immediately; one stupid magic trick and Henry had been sold, convinced that Walsh was a part of the fairytales from his beloved book.

Regina felt her phone buzz in her coat pocket, and she slipped it out, still humming along to Zelena’s story, only to find a message from Emma. She swiped it open and could not contain her grin when she read the words.

Omg Regina, your tub is amazing! Thank you thank you thank you. I hope you and Henry are having a great day. Can’t wait to see you later! I owe you one.

And attached was a picture of two pale legs and feet sticking out of Regina’s tub; they were covered in soapy bubbles, and she could just make out the remains of a blue nail polish on Emma’s toes, and oh goodness, those were some very nice legs. Regina could just imagine trailing her hands up those calves. No. Wait, not her hands – her tongue. Trailing her tongue up those calves, and then further up, over the thighs. Perhaps Emma would be ticklish there, Regina imagined she would, and then she’d wrap those legs around herself and bury her nose in the blonde wiry hair between Emma’s thighs, and oh, she’d tug her closer and prod her open and-

“Regina, hello, are you seriously staring at your phone instead of me?” Zelena gawked as she pulled Regina out of her train of thoughts. “I was trying to tell you about what Mother said of how you ran out of lunch!”

Regina felt her face flush, truly caught in the middle of a very naughty daydream that she had no business making up inside her mind, least of all with her prying sister next to her and three children mere feet away. “Well, if your voice wasn’t so annoying, perhaps I’d listen more,” she fired back, glaring at her older sister.

Zelena snorted. “Really, that’s what you’re going with? What has your attention so fully anyway?”
She leaned over, prying eyes moving towards Regina’s cell phone, and the brunette tried vainly to pull it away, black the screen and stick it back into her pocket, but she was too slow – as she always had been when it came to Zelena, because her sister had a knack for snooping in things that weren’t hers to snoop in. “Oh my God,” she cackled as her fingers settled over Regina’s and her eyes landed on the picture that had had Regina so caught up, “of course it’s a woman, it’s always a woman with you.”

“What does that even mean,” Regina flatly commented and ripped her phone out of Zelena’s claws to put it back inside her pocket.

The redhead nudged her head towards Henry on the grass, “It was his mother, wasn’t it? The young and perfect Miss Emma Swan.” She rolled her eyes and took a long gulp of her wine. “What, are you guys finally shagging or what?”

Regina straightened her back. She was not prepared to have this conversation with Zelena right now, but she also knew that she had to give her something, otherwise she’d never get back to her apartment alive. “We’re not having sex,” she just said and took a sip of her wine.

Zelena made a sad face. “Boohoo, little sister.” She stuck her tongue out at her and wrapped her scarf tighter around her neck. “But then what? Here you are, watching the kid for her and bringing him with you to family lunch. What am I supposed to think, Regina? Are you just a glorified babysitter?”

“I’m watching him,” Regina spat back. She fully knew that she was being played by Zelena – her sister had a knack for pushing all of her worst buttons – but she could not find it in herself to stop being played by her. “Emma’s got work and Henry broke his arm, and it just seemed like they needed someone to take care of them, so…” she trailed off, letting her eyes linger on Henry – who was busy being carried around on Walsh’s shoulders at the moment – for a second.

Her sister spat, “So, what?”

Regina shrugged. “So,” she let the word linger between them before she lowly, almost so lowly that Zelena couldn’t hear over Anniston’s loud squeals, replied, “I offered for them to stay at my place for the weekend.”

Zelena broke into a guffaw. “Tell me you’re joking.”

Not daring to meet her eyes, Regina was busy twirling her wine around in her glass. Why was she letting Zelena make her feel like this? She could very well make her own decisions about who could stay at her apartment and when.

“Oh for the love of-” Zelena sighed, “you’re not.”

“Emma just needs someone to care for her sometimes,” Regina defended herself.

Zelena rolled her eyes. “Sure, sure, and what? You’re not dating?” She shook her head, red hair flying in the mild breeze as she downed the last of her wine and moved to pour herself some more from the bottle. “You’re just watching the kid, hanging out with him, what? Probably spoiling him rotten and cooking dinner for them both,” she paused and shook her head to herself. “You’re so daft, Regina.”

“I am not daft!” Regina argued as she placed her glass of wine on the ground beside her.

“You are so daft,” Zelena repeated and motioned eagerly towards her. “What? Why are you not seeing this? Who are you trying to convince here? Me or you? Not dating, pssh.”
Regina crossed her arms in front of her chest and glared angrily at her sister. “Emma and I are not dating, we’re just friends.” She said it softly, so softly that it perhaps startled Zelena who was used to a Regina who fought back with mean words and cutting remarks, not a Regina who spoke timidly and carefully as a way to explain herself.

Raising an eyebrow at her, Zelena’s demeanour softened too. “Regina…” she trailed off, her eyes moving carefully over Regina’s face, “what’s going on? You can talk to me, you know? For some reason you’re…” she paused, searching for the right words, “protecting yourself. But why? And for what? You’re positively besotted with her, everyone can see it. We’ve all got eyes, you know!”

“I am not besotted,” Regina replied back stubbornly, but even she could hear the lie on her tongue.

“Don’t worry,” Zelena said, slipping closer on the bench and wrapping an arm around her shoulders, “from what I hear, she’s besotted right back. By all means, it should be smooth sailing from now on.”

Grumbling, Regina shook her head and stared straight ahead, towards the lawn. She didn’t know what to say to Zelena. Sure, she found Emma attractive and she would like to shag her as her sister so eloquently put it, but that didn’t mean she was in love with her like Zelena was saying. That was something else entirely, and she knew for sure that Emma was not at all besotted with her, so Zelena had the wrong information on that one. Who even gave her information? Marian of course.

Regina sighed heavily.

Zelena pulled her arm back and stared down to look at Regina. “What, are you not even going to argue with me? Where’s the fun in that?” She sighed dramatically and placed her own glass on the ground as well. “Regina, for heaven’s sake. Don’t you see what I’m getting at?”

Shaking her head, Regina simply replied, “I don’t see what you’re getting at.”

“For all intents and purposes, you’re already dating!” She motioned towards Henry once more, underlining her point.

Regina crossed her arms in front of her chest yet again. Something about Zelena just always undermined her to a petulant kid who was not getting her way. “We’re not dating. I can spend time with her and Henry without us dating. It’s better that way.” At least that was what she was trying to tell herself, and Zelena being Zelena was seriously not helping right now. It had to be better this way. Logically. But then why does it feel like it’s not?

Zelena looked about ready to rip her hair out of her scalp. “Oh my God, don’t tell me this is about you protecting your heart?” It was a rhetorical question, and Zelena did not wait for Regina to answer; she was on a roll. “You’re already putting your heart out there, little sister. You’re doing all the stuff, getting attached to both mother and son….” she paused, letting the words hang in the air between them.

Staring at her big sister, Regina didn’t know what to say. Of course she was attached already, anyone could see that. But she wasn’t so attached. She could lose them and be fine, right? She’d just move on. Sure, Henry was a wonderful kid and they clicked so perfectly, and Emma – how could she even begin to describe her? Emma was un-boring. She was fun and new and different. And she challenged Regina and made her want to fuck her up against the kitchen counter. “I’m,” her voice cracked, “I’m not that attached.”

Rolling her eyes, Zelena just stared at her as if saying ‘are you serious?’. “You’re attached,” she spat, before turning to look at the four people on the lawn, “But don’t mind that, it just seems to me that you’re missing all the good parts by acting this way.”
Okay, so Regina was going to take the bait. “The good parts,” she commented, staring at Zelena in confusion. “What do you mean the good parts?”

Cackling, Zelena theatrically whispered. “Why, the toe-curling, out of your mind, leave this planet, amazing, wicked sex, Regina!”

“Sex.” She should have known it would be about sex. Most things were when it came to Zelena. And even though she was probably on to something (Regina was not having sex at the moment, and she hadn’t had sex for a very long time, thank you Mal), sex also had a way of messing everything up. Sure, she had been thinking an awful lot about Emma in compromising positions that also sometimes consisted of her in not that many clothes, but that was only natural. She was a woman who had needs, and Emma was attractive, so of course she would have thoughts.

Zelena made a duh-face and said nothing.

“Sex complicates things,” Regina said with a big sigh. “Don’t you see? As certain as I am that Emma and I would have more than satisfactory sex,” she paused, because she was very certain of that and for a second, Emma’s naked legs reappeared in her mind, “it’s not worth the risk. Now that we’re friends, I can have all the other parts, but not with the risk of losing it…” she stared fondly at Henry and reminded herself why it was that she was not having sex with Emma. Because Henry mattered, and Emma mattered so much too, and she couldn’t lose either of them. “Sex changes things, ups the stakes. It makes relationships different.”

Shaking her head, Zelena was quiet for a good while. She stared straight ahead as well, watching as Montgomery juggled the ball around Henry and scored a goal on his father. Finally, Zelena let out a soft sigh. “It may changes things, Regina, but in a good way,” she whispered, turning her head slightly to watch her.

Regina shuddered visibly in her coat and said nothing.

“Really sis,” Zelena continued, and there was a certain sincerity to her voice that wasn’t found in Zelena very often. “You’re quite daft, you know that? You have your happy ending right in front of you, and yet you’re too stubborn to reach out and claim it.”

“It has nothing to do with stubbornness,” Regina said as she brushed a piece of runaway hair out of her face. She tucked it behind her ear.

Mirroring her position, Zelena huddled even closer. She was still soft, so unlike her usual brash self, but it also underlined the seriousness of this conversation. “You’ve always been afraid to risk it, sis, and quite frankly it disgusts me,” she added the last part with a twinkle in her eye, and Regina huffed. “Do you think I would have Walsh now with our two darling, talented children if I’d been afraid to grab my happy ending, when it was staring me in the face? No!” She motioned towards her family again, wild mannerisms and exaggerations as always. “Walsh was dating that insipid goodie-two-shoes Glinda when I met him.”

Regina stared at her sister in confusion. She’d not known that.

“But I knew I wanted him,” Zelena said, nodding her head to herself and pulling off a slight smirk, “so I went ahead and grabbed him. And now we have our perfect love story with our beautiful children who’re surely going to become Doctor-Lawyer and Hollywood-A-List-Darling, and all because I wasn’t afraid to go after what I wanted.”

Biting back a laugh, Regina said, “You really think Anniston is going to be a doctor and a lawyer?”
Zelena scowled at her. “My darling daughter is going places, just you wait and see.”

Regina chuckled lowly as she shook her head. “Alright, and what about Montgomery?”

“He’s not that clever, he’ll be an actor,” Zelena brushed her off, a small smile playing at the corners of her lips as well. “Anyway, don’t deflect, little sister, and don’t be daft. Your happy ending’s right there!” She motioned towards Henry again, who’d stopped what he was doing to let Walsh help him with the ball, and he caught Regina’s eye and waved enthusiastically with his good arm.

For a second, the scene shifted before Regina’s eyes, and it wasn’t Walsh standing there with Henry, teaching him how to kick and play – it was Emma, and there were other kids too, not Montgomery and Anniston, but Regina’s and Emma’s kids, together, and she was watching them from the porch – just as she was now – looking at her family with so much love in her heart, and goodness, she wanted. She wanted it all so bad, and as the scene shifted again, she couldn’t quite figure out why it was that she didn’t just do as her sister said and just grabbed it.

Henry conked out on the couch to cartoons as soon as they returned home, and Regina put away groceries before venturing into the guest room to look for Emma. The blonde was splayed out across the bed, popped up on her elbows with Henry’s book in front of her; the sheets were rumpled and her clothes were lain out on the desk chair. Regina let her eyes linger for a second – just a second to appreciate Emma’s backside and those legs which were still bare due to the shorts Emma was spotting – before rapping her knuckles against the doorframe.

“We’re home,” she said as Emma turned to look at her in surprise. She’d been so consumed in the book, it appeared.

A huge smile lit up Emma’s face and she snapped the book shut and rolled over, glancing at Regina from her side. “Where’s the kid?”

Regina stepped closer, venturing into the room, as she said, “Sleeping on the couch already. Zelena’s kids tired him out.”

“Hm,” Emma had a small smile on her face. She padded the mattress next to her, motioning for Regina to join her. “Come sit.”

She was hesitant at first, not sure what to read into this interaction, but wanting desperately to join Emma on the bed, so she did. She crept across the room, slipped almost soundlessly out of her heels and sat carefully on the bed next to the blonde. She didn’t dare sit too close or get too comfortable, but she could feel Emma’s body heat vibrating even with the space between them.

Emma reached a hand out and gingerly brushed a finger against Regina’s leg. “Did you have fun?”

“Yes,” Regina nodded, smiling down at the other woman, who was seriously just so inexplicably beautiful that Regina could hardly contain it. Oh, how she wished to reach a hand out and brush those loose tendrils behind Emma’s ears. “We bought bear claws for you. Henry tells me they’re your favourite.”

“No way!” Emma’s face lit up in a big smile. “They’re totally my favourite. Thank you.”

Regina nodded, and relaxed a bit more into the bed, pleased with herself. “I’ve also got everything we need for dinner. And dessert. I thought you deserved a treat.”
Emma’s smile grew wider if even possible, and her eyes shimmered with so much happiness. “Are you even for real? Thanks!” She hummed and pulled herself up into a sitting position, somehow ending up even closer to Regina – which the brunette felt clearly, because her skin tingled at the increased intimacy. “Seriously, today’s been like… heaven for me. Your tub, God!” She moaned as she closed her eyes. “I don’t think I’ve been this relaxed in years.”

“Well, then it’s about time,” Regina concluded. She wanted to pull her eyes away from Emma’s as the other woman opened them to look at her, but for some reason she couldn’t. She just found herself staring foolishly into green orbs, wondering how anyone could be quite this beautiful.

The blonde was apparently not going to unlock their gaze either. “So, uh,” she swallowed thickly, “you’ve been really awesome to me and Henry these two days, it’s like… wow.” She breathlessly laughed, eyes shining with mirth, still locked to Regina’s, “It’s just, I can’t quite,” she struggled to find words, “it just seems to be too good to be true. You’re too good to be true.”

Regina felt embarrassment tinge her cheeks and she bashfully ducked her head. “That’s hardly true,” she whispered, letting her fingers trail a soft pattern against the cover on the bed. They were stopped seconds later by Emma’s pale ones, coming to lay atop them. Regina stared at their fingers, awed by the contrast as she’d been so many times, before daring to look up again – only to find Emma watching her curiously.

“Hey,” Emma whispered, and her voice was hoarse and scratchy as she licked her lips with the tip of her tongue. “I mean it, Regina, you’re… you’re fucking amazing.”

The blush was back in full force now, and Regina could do nothing but roll with it. What was it with Emma and this effect on her she had? She was usually so good at being in control and being collected, even around suitors and beautiful woman. Very few people had ever managed to catch her off guard the way Emma had, and she strongly believed that no one had ever been able to read her like the other woman. “I’m just… helping. I want to help you.”

Emma’s finger stroked absentmindedly against her hand. “Well, you’re definitely helping, that’s for sure. And I bet Henry’s had the best day,” she smiled fondly, her cheeks tainting pink as well. “I know I had, although… I wish I could’ve spent more time with you.”

“I wish you could have to.” The words were out of her mouth before she was even able to stop herself. Maybe she wouldn’t even have wanted to, if she could have, because the smile on Emma’s face was so sincere and heartwarming that it made it all worth it.

“So,” Emma said, and her fingers were still doing that thing; stroking up Regina’s palm and wrist now, and it was getting increasingly difficult to think properly with the way her skin tingled and her breath seemed to catch in her throat. She was starting to feel hot all over. “Henry’s birthday is coming up.”

This got her attention. “It is?” She breathed, eyes popping wide open. Henry was having a birthday. She’d have to ask him what he wanted, and she’d have to make time to get it, and perhaps she should offer Emma to help with the preparations, surely there was enough to do beforehand.

Emma nodded her head and hummed in agreement. “Actually, we’re having a party on Saturday – at David and Mary Margaret’s – and it would mean a lot to both Henry and me if you were there,” she finished, her fingers now trailing slowly up towards Regina’s elbow. “I would have asked sooner, but I wasn’t sure if it were,” she swallowed loudly, “cool. You know, with everything going on.”

Regina nodded too, eyes training on the fingers resting against her arm. “I would love to come.”
“Great,” Emma agreed, smiling brightly at her. “I told Mulan to bring Marian and Roland, so you’re not going to feel entirely alone. There’s gonna be plenty of people though, I hope you don’t mind.”

“I don’t,” Regina replied, and she felt her heart thud madly in her chest. “You’ll uh, you’ll have to get me a list… of wishes. Henry’s wishes,” she babbled. Since when did she babble? Since *Emma’s fingers on your arm*. “So I can get him a present.”

The blonde moved her other hand then, to carefully brush a piece of brunette hair out of Regina’s face, only to it linger lightly on her cheek. “You don’t have to. You being there is enough.”

Regina wasn’t sure if she was still breathing or not, because Emma was inexplicably close; her fingers on her skin, only touching few places, but feeling like it was everywhere. Her scent was teasing Regina’s senses, and her breath was hot against her skin. Somehow it was coming closer. Was Emma coming closer? Regina’s eyes followed the movement of Emma’s lips as they parted slightly in a breath. “I want to.”

“Mhm,” Emma agreed, and she screwed her eyes shut, dropping her hand from Regina’s cheek and fisting it against the mattress. She huffed out air, nose crinkling, and Regina felt the loss immediately. “Shit, I’m… I’m sorry,” Emma whispered as she retreated, hand still lingering on Regina’s arm.

Tilting her head, Regina watched her. What was she sorry for? It was hard to tell. With Emma it could be anything, but she was undoubtedly confused at the moment. “What for,” she breathlessly questioned. She didn’t want Emma to retreat; as badly as she knew how this would go, she wanted nothing more than to push her against the mattress, lock the door and spend the next hour getting to know every part of her skin intimately. She wanted to, so badly, feel close to the younger woman, to be buried in her and forget that there was a reason – a soon to be six-year-old reason – sleeping right in the next room on her living room couch.

Emma dropped her hand at last, letting it fall to her own lap. “Space,” she rasped, green eyes moving upwards to meet Regina’s in a questioning look. She was having doubts, conflicts, and Regina knew that those emotions had to be mirrored in her own eyes. Someone had to be strong. “We said we’d have space,” Emma finished, before she pulled herself off the bed and moved to grab her cell phone from the night stand.

Regina knew that it was the right thing to do, but that didn’t make this rejection – or whatever the hell it was, because she hadn’t even made a move or anything – any easier. “I’ll go get started on dinner,” she whispered as she moved towards the door.

Emma hummed in response, and Regina went into the kitchen, feeling like this thing they had agreed on was just too difficult. How could something that appeared to be the right decision feel so wrong at the same time? Zelena’s comments lingered in the back of her mind, and Regina was beginning to doubt herself. Perhaps there was something to what Zelena had said. Who was standing in the way of her happiness? If she really thought that Emma – oh goodness, amazing and caring and just beautiful Emma – could be that for her, then why was she not grabbing it, like Zelena had said?

Her eyes fell to Henry, who was snoring lightly on the couch, hugging his teddy bear, and she knew the answer to her question. *But you could have this everyday*, a traitorous voice whispered in the back of her mind, and that voice sounded scarily much like her sister.
Regina rested her forehead against the closed cupboard and drew in a shaky breath. It was really very difficult to be strong when the thought of having this – *everyday* – was so appealing to her. She knew she’d wanted to withdraw, to protect herself and have that space, but somehow she’d ended up here anyway, with Emma in her bedroom and Henry on the couch and everything just felt too perfect to be true.

She set to work on dinner to stop herself from venturing back into the bedroom and push Emma against the bed.

Chapter End Notes

So we’re getting closer - it won’t be long, I promise. You guys rock with your support, it’s seriously the best!
Emma

Chapter Summary

Emma has startling realisations, and Regina becomes the brave one.

Chapter Notes

I had so many feelings writing this chapter, which I hope you guys will have too. It’s also slightly longer than usual, which is because I could not stop myself and I added something unplanned (which now means I have to rethink the rest of my plot-line); that often happens when I write though - I go where the characters take me more than I follow my plans.

Please enjoy the story of these two idiots in love.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Emma woke up after yet another nightshift feeling well-rested and refreshed – despite having slept only five hours. She’d set her alarm, knowing that she couldn’t sleep all day if she planned on sleeping at a reasonable hour tonight, which she did, because Henry had school tomorrow.

Regina’s bed was wonderful though. Actually, everything in Regina’s home was wonderful. Emma had never felt so at ease anywhere so quickly, and Regina had taken such good care of them. It was scary, really, because Emma could most certainly get used to this. Which was why she’d almost kissed Regina again yesterday, which – damnit! – she shouldn’t. They’d agreed to do some thinking – not that Emma really needed to think so much, because she damn well knew that she wanted Regina, even if it was scary, even if it meant not running, and the only thing holding her back was her fear of Regina running – and yet she went ahead and almost kissed her, and it just wasn’t fair that Regina was so damn sexy and attractive, and looked at Emma with those brown soulful eyes. Those eyes made it really fucking difficult to not press Regina against the mattress and kiss her senseless.

Emma just really wished that she knew what was going through Regina’s head. It wasn’t hard to tell that she was conflicted – perhaps so even more than Emma was, which evidently said a lot – but she couldn’t really tell what was going on. It had seemed like Regina had wanted to kiss her, too, to do all those things that Emma had shamefully been thinking about with her hand between her thighs in the bathtub, but still she’d pulled away. Had she really not wanted to? Or maybe Regina was just a lot stronger than she was, had more self-perseverance.

Rolling onto her back, Emma stared straight up at the ceiling. She could hear Regina and Henry moving around in the apartment; today they’d opted to stay home, since Henry had been so tired after all his adventures with R’gina yesterday. Emma knew that she should probably get a move on; gather their things and take Henry home. She needed to do the shopping, get planning for the week. She still had a ton to do before the birthday party, and she needed to plan with Mary Margaret.
Pulling herself out of the bed, Emma slipped into her shorts and pulled her hair back in a messy bun on top of her head. She grabbed her glasses from her bag; it was a glasses kind of day, she was too tired to work with contacts, and padded barefooted towards the voices in the living room.

She peeked around the corner of the doorway and saw that Henry and Regina were huddled together closely by the table, colouring pictures. Regina’s head was bent and she had a pot of coffee and a cup next to her, and Henry had a juice box next to him. Emma couldn’t entirely tell what he was drawing, but it sure looked like a lot was going on.

She croaked out, “‘Morning.”

“Mamma!” Henry squealed as his head popped up to look at her. He opened his eyes wide and she crossed the floor, bending down to hug him tightly and sniff in his scent. He smelled clean, perhaps Regina had had him in the shower? She pressed a kiss to his forehead and Henry pressed a kiss to her cheek. “I missed you,” he pouted.

She ran a hand through his still moist hair as she pulled back, “Missed you too, Kid,” she smiled, before she turned to look at Regina next to Henry. “And good morning to you, too. Is there coffee left?”

“It’s a fresh pot,” Regina offered as she pushed her chair back, watching Emma carefully with a surprised smile. “Sit. I’ll go get you a cup,” and she was off to the kitchen before Emma had time to argue.

She took Regina’s open seat and stared briefly down at the drawing the brunette had been making (was that a horse?) before she looked at Henry’s drawing. “What are you drawing, sweet child of mine?” She chuckled to herself and smiled warmly at Regina in appreciation as the other woman placed a cup in front of Emma and took a seat across from her. She pulled her drawing and her cup closer, returning to her picture with the black marker.

Henry immediately pointed on his drawing, “This is me,” he said, flicking his finger against a stick figure in the middle of the paper. “And this’ my birthday wishes,” he nodded his head to himself. “I want a bow and arrow like Robin Hood,” he pointed at something resembling his wish at the corner of the paper, “and a princess gown and I want a goggles for when we go swimming, and uh, lots and lots of things.”

Emma smiled down at her son, true love engulfing her chest as she stared at his neat, yet childish drawings. “Do you now? We’ll see about that, sweetie,” she pressed another kiss to his head and Henry returned to focus entirely on his birthday wishes.

Regina looked up from her drawing and took a sip of her coffee. “I told him to draw his wishes for me,” she said as a matter-of-fact, “I’m not sure how I’m going to do with that shark though, it might be a bit over budget for me,” she smiled fondly at Henry, eyes shining with mirth.

Chuckling, Emma reached for the pot and poured herself a cup of coffee. “Ah c’mon, Regina, if you get him a shark, I’m sure we’ll find room for it in our two-bedroom apartment,” she winked as she lifted the cup to her lips and breathed in the wonderful scent of coffee.

“Oh no, I promised Henry it could stay in my tub,” Regina continued with a serious face. “He was very realistic about the space issue in your apartment, you’ll have to give him that.”

“My smart little boy,” Emma deadpanned, taking a gulp of coffee. Ah yes. That was the stuff.

Regina bent her head again, now reaching for the red marker to continue her drawing. Emma
watched her for a little while, enamoured by how deep in thought she appeared to be, tongue between lips as she concentrated. It looked like she was drawing an apple tree next to the horse, blooming with plenty of red apples. Emma reached for a piece of paper and the yellow marker, determined to join in on the fun – and what better way than to draw her trusty steed, the Bug?

She was done pretty quickly with that – just a yellow square and some black circles, damn she was effective – and the only sound in the room was the radio softly playing from the kitchen counter and Henry furiously drawing next to her. She had to figure out how to add to this drawing because she really didn’t want this quiet and wonderful moment to end just yet. There was just something so heartwarming about it – her and Henry and Regina, gathered around the kitchen table on an early Sunday afternoon. Henry was still in his jammies, Emma had just woken up, and even Regina appeared to be relaxing today; no make-up and no coiffed hair. Just Regina, bare and naked in front of her, drawing a horse and an apple tree.

Emma decided that she should draw herself into the drawing, because that made perfect sense now that she had the Bug, so she copied Henry and made a stick figure with yellow hair and green eyes before looking up from her drawing in search of red. Regina was holding the red marker in her spare hand, looking contemplatively down at her paper where she was now colouring in the green parts of the tree, and Emma cleared her throat. “Can I have the red one?”

“Pardon?” Regina looked up at her, pulled out of her daze, “Yes, of course.” She slipped the red marker across the table and watched as Emma picked it up and started to draw her jacket on top of the stick figure. Regina snickered. “Is that supposed to be you? That atrocious jacket.”

Emma stuck her tongue out at her. “It’s my favourite jacket, and I’m doing my best, okay.”

“I see where your son gets his artistic talents,” Regina flatly retorted as she raised an eyebrow in Henry’s direction. The boy was so consumed in his project – as he always were whenever he truly engaged in something; holding his attention had never been a problem for Emma – that he didn’t even hear them.

Placing the red back on the table after finishing her jacket that perhaps looked more like a cape, Emma said, “Well, we can’t all be amazing at everything like you. I mean, of course you draw too. And not just a stick figure, but a frigging horse.” She grabbed the blue marker and set to draw in some pants. “I mean, a horse and apples? Why?”

Regina stared down at the drawing with a fond smile on her face. “I used to have a horse just like this,” she revealed then, placing the markers on the table and picking up her cup of coffee. “His name was Rocinante, and I spent all of my time at the stables with him.”

Emma couldn’t help but gape at the other woman – if there was one thing she hadn’t thought Regina would have been into, it was horses. But then again, the other woman continued to surprise her all the time. She didn’t say this though, instead she snickered, “Of course you had a horse. Rich people.”

Regina ignored her, continuing on with her explanation, probably understanding that there was nothing malicious about Emma’s statement, just old playful teasing. “And I had an apple tree at my parents’ estate that I tended to with my father since I was a little girl,” she continued and held a slight pause to watch Emma’s reaction, “it was kind of our little project.”

“Apples and horses. I had no idea,” Emma commented as she removed her eyes from her own drawing – her jeans weren’t really looking much like jeans – to lock her gaze with Regina’s.

Brown eyes were playful as well, as Regina retorted, “Glasses. I had no idea.”
Emma said, “Kinda need them to see.”

Regina smirked, smile loose and posture relaxed. “Don’t worry, they look good on you.”

Emma felt her face flush slightly and she bent her head, trying to determine what else she could add to her drawing. It appeared to be finished though. Or perhaps she should add in Henry? She reached for the black marker and decided to make a smaller stick figure. She bit her lip before she said, “So what happened with the horse?”

Letting out a long sigh, Regina’s fingers tensed on the table top. “He’s dead now, but before that Mother sold him off.” She stared at the drawing once more, a finger trailing the tail of the horse. “There was an accident when I was thirteen, it’s how I got this,” she held a finger to the scar across her lip – the scar that Emma had wondered so much about, fantasised about dipping her tongue into – and Emma just stared at her. “So,” she cleared her throat, probably pulling herself out of deep memories of a beloved friend, “Mother didn’t want me to ride anymore. I was never allowed back.”

“Because of an accident?” To Emma that sounded absolutely ridiculous. Sure, Regina had probably been very hurt and shaken up, but she was fine now, and if she really had loved horses as much as she let on, then what kind of mother could keep her child away from that? Emma knew that she’d do everything in her might to let Henry do whatever he wanted to, as long as it was safe and she could make it work. “Isn’t that a little extreme?”

Regina’s brown eyes had that soulful look about them again. “You don’t know Mother,” she simply replied, before she cast her eyes back down on the paper and finished colouring in the remaining apples. Emma watched her for a few seconds, kind of awed by this woman who sat so regally in front of her, who had probably just told her something that she didn’t tell that many people. It was evident – Regina was a very private person, and she did not like feeling weak or small in front of other people. Yet she had shared this with Emma, and that damn well meant something.

Emma finished drawing Henry – with brown pointy hair and green clothes – before she drew another stick figure on the paper and carefully gave her brown eyes and hair and a beautiful red dress.

——-

They’re fresh out of sharks at the mall, so how do you think Henry would like some new books to read?

Damn, I was so looking forward to that shark.

Uh. Yeah? Kid loves books. Dunno where he got that from.

Well I wouldn’t believe it was from you, dear.

——-

By the way, you left your pretty drawing in my apartment. It now decorates my fridge. I have attached a complimentary picture for you.

Shit, that really is a good fucking drawing. Henry says hi.
Emma was very nervous when she entered The Hills that Wednesday afternoon, Henry hopping along excitedly by her hand. He’d been looking forward to this afternoon all week, animatedly chatting about playing outside on the playground’s castle and seeing his R’gina. Emma swore, some days Henry appeared to like Regina more than he liked her (and she was his mother for fucks sake), and on other days, it seemed like he also liked Regina more than Emma liked Regina, which should be impossible, right? Because Emma liked Regina a lot.

She wasn’t sure she’d been entirely, completely aware of exactly how much it was that she liked Regina – not until they returned home on Sunday to their own apartment and it didn’t take more than what felt like ten minutes before she was acutely aware of the fact that she was not close to Regina anymore. She missed her. Oh fuck, did she miss her. Emma was scared to think about what it all meant, and she couldn’t shake this feeling in her chest, this feeling of – Regina. Just Regina.

And that stupid thing about space and how they should both think, and Emma was tired of thinking, and on some level she felt like Regina was too, because they’d been exchanging so many text messages about the most random things. Also, she’d been thinking about seeing Regina today a lot more than she’d been thinking about her conversation with Marian which was probably not such a good thing, but she really couldn’t help it.

“Emma,” Marian greeted her from a big table in an open kitchen. Kids were running wild everywhere, and Emma looked around, trying to take everything in at once. Henry slipped out of her grip and rushed to greet Roland, who was busy playing with cars on the floor next to his mother’s chair.

Stepping closer, Emma met Marian with a loose hug. “Hey,” she said as she stood back, stuffing her hands into the pockets of her jacket and biting her lip awkwardly. “So… this is nice, huh.”

Marian smiled hugely and ran a hand through her loose brown hair. “I’ll show you around first, yeah? Regina will be here soon and the boys can play together until then.”

“Can we go outside on the castle, Ma?” Henry looked up at her with wide eyes and a hopeful smile.

Emma bobbed his nose with her finger. “Sure, go ahead, Kid.”

The boys linked their hands and rushed towards the double doors and into the sun.

Marian dropped her shoulders and offered Emma an excited and expectant smile. “Shall we get started?”

They walked around the center, and Marian took her time showing Emma everything. They small-talked while they walked; Marian asked a lot of questions, and Emma did too, as she saw some of the possibilities in the spaces and how she would be able to contribute to the kids. She thought that there were some very good ideas and projects they were already doing, but there was definitely potential as well. She liked the library and the homework station, and she liked all the physical
activities available for the kids. The other employees were sweet as well; they all greeted Emma and asked her questions and showed her what kind of things they liked to do with the kids.

A lot of the things Marian did was the boring paperwork and making sure that everything ran smoothly, and Belle ran the homework station, while a guy named Killian – who started flirting with Emma the second he laid eyes on her – was in charge of their sports programmes and sometimes took the kids boating.

Emma wasn’t entirely sure how she was going to fit in there, what role she was supposed to play at The Hills, but Marian assured her that there was a lot that she could do. Most of the times, the kids just needed someone to confide in, she told Emma; someone they could look up to and see themselves in. Killian told her that he was an ex-convict – mostly petty thefts and some drunk and disorderly charges – and that the kids talked to him a lot about that because they needed to experience grown-ups who’d been on the wrong side of the tracks and somehow crossed over.

But they didn’t have any employees who used to be in foster care, who didn’t have parents, and a lot of the kids were exactly that; foster kids. And it’s not like they couldn’t relate to Killian or look up to Marian or Belle or any of the other part-time employees, but Marian felt certain that Emma would be a good fit for them; they’d see her as someone who’d been through what they were going through, even messed up and touched the bottom, yet there she was – an apartment, a job, a kid. She was a Success Story.

Somehow Marian managed to get Emma to talk (Emma was pretty sure she had to be a damn good social worker) while they walked around. First, Emma didn’t even notice it, it kind of just happened easily as they walked, but after awhile she realised what exactly it was that Marian was doing, and then she didn’t even mind. She’d never been one to hide her past, neither one to just talk about it freely; she usually had to warm up to people to talk, but something about this place felt secure, safe, and it made her want to talk – because she felt like it mattered.

The Hills was a really nice place, Emma concluded, and she could most definitely see herself being a part of it, in whatever capacity Marian thought suitable. She even felt a little pang of excitement at the thought; of not getting up to a work-day filled with chasing perps or marks, or standing at the door at Gallium & Yttrium. Not that she minded the last part that much because it had somehow brought her Regina – in a weird sense of way, even if it some days felt like they were always meant to cross paths – and she would forever cherish that.

“So yeah, this is about it,” Marian finished with a giant smile, and Emma could tell how much she cared about this place – it was very evident in her eyes – it was the same look Regina got in her eyes whenever she talked about The Hills and the work they did there. “Do you like it?”

“I like it,” Emma nodded her head as she looked around them; she could see a bunch of teens bent over books in the corner with Belle, who was enthusiastically explaining something to one of them, “I just… I’m a bit overwhelmed. I mean, it’s like, it’d be so cool to work with kids like me, y’know? I just can’t help but feel like there’s a catch somewhere.”

Marian stared at her in confusion, and Emma felt a familiar hand nestle on her lower back and the rasp of Regina’s voice. “A catch? Why would there be a catch,” she wondered, one eyebrow raised and a concerned smile on her face as she studied Emma.

The blonde felt her face flush slightly underneath her gaze; it had been a few days since she’d last seen her, and the desire to kiss her senseless had not grown smaller. Also, she was looking at her with those eyes that felt like she saw right through Emma and just – into everything. “Uhm,” she licked her lips, mentally scolding herself for not being cooler about this in front of her potential boss. “Because there always is?” She framed it like a question and because of the look on their
faces, she continued on. “For kids like me, I mean. There’s always a catch.”

“See,” Marian pointed out and nudged her slightly with a foot to the shin. “This is why you’d be perfect for the kids here at The Hills. You know stuff like that.”

Emma smiled sheepishly at her. “Guess so,” she murmured, and she felt Regina’s fingers curl, dangerously close to the hem of her jeans.

Motioning towards the table, Regina said, “Should we talk then?”

They made their way towards the table and Marian fixed them each a cup of coffee. Emma had feared that it was going to be much like a job interview, but it totally wasn’t. It was pleasurable, calm and relaxed, just how she liked her situations best. Formalities were really not her thing. She’d gotten her two last jobs by knowing someone and having casual conversations with her potential employers. It was how she rolled. Regina and Marian did sit down on the other side of the table from her, but she figured there had to be some semblance of formality, so she sipped her coffee and when Marian asked her to tell a bit about herself – even if it was a ridiculous notion, because Emma figured they both knew a lot – she did so without fear of being looked down at.

“Well,” she begun as her eyes focused entirely on the encouraging smile that Regina offered her in support. “I was uh, left by the side of the road when I was a kid? I have an old newspaper clipping, some other kid found me and walked us to the nearest gas station. It was in Maine.”

Regina’s brown eyes went soft as they looked at her; this part of her past was the part she was reluctant to share the most. She was better at talking juvie and having Henry at an early age. That was mostly what people were interested in anyway. Marian nodded her head slightly and seemed to listen intensely.

Emma continued, “So I was bounced around a lot, got in a looooot of trouble as a kid. Had some really horrible foster parents, but I eventually ended up with David and Mary Margaret when I was in my teens. I guess you could say the damage was done by then – and even though they tried their best, I still fucked up a lot and got thrown in juvie and shit,” she bit her lips, green eyes scanning both of their faces for reactions to her quick retelling of her life, “and yeah. I had Henry, I guess, and that sort of made me realise that I had to get my life straight, y’know? If I wanted to keep him and not give him up for adoption.”

Marian’s look softened at that, in a way that only a parent’s could, and Regina reached a tentative hand out to clasp Emma’s across the table. “So what do you feel like you’d be able to do for these kids?” Marian wanted to know, “You have any thoughts on that?”

“Listen to them, I guess,” Emma said as she straightened her back confidently and let Regina reassure her from afar, “Listen to what they really want, because no one does that. And then help them, be there for them. I know what they’re going through, and I’ll let them ask all the questions they want, and I’m not gonna lie to them,” she said this fiercely, conveying to the other two women that she wasn’t going to cover up her past for anything, “I’ll be honest. Because too many people lie to them already.”

Regina pulled her hand back then, her eyes not giving anything away, even though she looked very pleased with herself. “Thank you, Emma.”

“Yes, thank you,” Marian said and eagerly nodded her head. “We have to go talk quick with Killian and Belle, but I can tell you that I’d very much like to hire you. Part-time at first, and then we’ll see,” she pushed her chair back, and Emma felt happiness flutter eagerly in her chest, “We’ll be right back with the final verdict, okay?”
Emma nodded and watched the two of them go towards Belle in the small library of used books, heads bent in eager conversation. She downed her coffee – feeling pretty damn good about herself and her possibilities – before venturing outside in search of Henry and Roland. She found them immediately when she stepped into the sun, their joined laughter echoing across the open ground where other kids were playing as well. There was a basketball game going on in a court and some kids rollerblading, and it all just looked so good.

“Ma,” Henry eagerly called when he saw her, “look at us go down the slide together!”

“I’m looking, Kid,” she smiled gratefully – just feeling this day, feeling it all, perfectly – at them as Roland climbed onto the slide, Henry right behind him as he wrapped his arms around the smaller boy and they rode down together. Roland’s laughter was beautiful to Emma’s ears, and damn, this day was just beautiful, too.

Both of the kids ran to her and Henry gave her a hug while Roland watched carefully. She reached a hand out and ruffled his curls; he was more shy than Henry, more wary around strange adults, which was probably a good thing. Henry had a tendency to open up to adults quickly, especially if they offered him a bit of attention. “You OK there, Mini Marian?” Emma questioned him.

His eyes went right open and he bashfully said, “I’m Roland!”

“That you are, Kiddo,” Emma chuckled and bobbed his nose. “You wanna go on my back to do the monkey bars?”

Roland nodded eagerly, and Emma bent down to let him crawl on her shoulders. Henry climbed up the slide, eager to participate, and he chatted on about their game – they had been knights, conquering a castle where the beautiful Queen R’gina was held captive – while they played and Emma basked in the feeling of doing something like this with her kid, in a place that felt so natural and nice. She hadn’t even noticed that they had an audience before she heard a voice behind her.

“You doing good there, Swan?” Killian was eyeing her from where he was leaning against the side of the castle. She wouldn’t go as far as to call it leering – he actually seemed like quite a nice guy – but he was definitely checking her out, Emma was sure of it. She’d have to shut that one down pretty quickly if she ended up getting a job here.

Roland still on her shoulders, she stepped closer, “I’m good, thank you though,” she smiled. She squinted her eyes, the sun was bright, and gave him a once-over. She supposed he was quite attractive with his earring, his scruff and the black leather jacket. If you were into the kind of thing. If you were into men, really. She wasn’t though, and she saw the true object of her affections – someone feminine, determined and strong, yet fragile, incredibly so – come through the doors with Marian by her side.

Killian reached a hand out and flirtatiously stroked her upper arm. “Your little lad doesn’t have a father, does he?” He motioned towards Henry who had come to a halt on the ground next to Emma and was watching Killian with suspicious eyes.

“What’s a lad,” he flatly commented, and seconds later he was pulled away because he realised that Regina was nearby. He turned around on his toes and ran straight towards her arms, “R’gina!”

Opening her arms up wide, Regina let Henry jump into them, and she carried him – much like Emma always did, even though he was getting entirely too big for it – on her side with his arms and legs around her. “My little prince,” Emma could hear her say, and Henry giggled loudly.

Emma helped Roland off her shoulders and he ran to his mother, slipping his hand into hers, as the
two women came to a stop next to Emma and Killian. Marian looked happy and pleased, and Emma had really expected to see the same look on Regina’s face, but the other woman was positively glaring at Killian, her brown eyes cold as steel and her posture rigid, even if she at the same time ran a soft hand down Henry’s back and had her cheek pressed to his hair.

“What’s going on here?” She finally turned her eyes to Emma’s and they flickered nervously.

“Swan and I were just getting to know each other,” Killian explained as he stuck his hands into his pockets and glared back at Regina. Emma was pretty sure that there was some kind of history there that she did not know about.

Marian shrugged it off and smiled brightly at Emma. “So Emma, you interested in coming here part-time? We can arrange the days according to what other jobs you might need.”

That pure feeling of happiness erupted in Emma’s chest at last and she could not contain her huge grin, not that she would even want to. She swore that she saw Regina’s face light up brightly as well. “Are you for real? I’m so game!”

Regina chuckled throatily. “Great, Em-ma. You and Marian should arrange the details next week. Perhaps you could start on Monday?”

Emma nodded eagerly in Marian’s direction, “I’d love to. Monday’s great, it’s super. It’s perfection.”

Marian laughed; she bent her head back and her hair blew in the wind and she guffawed, and right there, Emma understood why it was that Mulan had fallen hopelessly in love with this woman. “Perfection is good. I can’t wait to get you started. I think you’ll be a hit with the kids.”

Killian interjected, “And with your co-workers I suspect.”

“Don’t you have some kids to mentor or something?” Regina fired at him, and her eyes were positively shooting lightnings.

Mumbling something inaudible beneath his breath, Killian shuffled off towards the double doors, but not before shooting a lingering look in Emma’s direction. It was awkward at best, and she made a mental note to ask Marian how to best go about letting him down easily – it had to be easily, because they were co-workers now (Emma still hadn’t really let the thought settle) – because to some men, and Killian seemed like one of those men, a simple no did not suffice. Telling those kind of men that she was a lesbian usually only urged them on further and made them try harder. She really just did not want any awkwardness.

“You need to talk to him on Monday,” Regina firmly said, the second the doors had closed behind him.

Emma stared at her then – the smile still daring to take over her entire face – and tried to figure out what kind of emotion Regina was hiding in those eyes. She hadn’t seen it before, it was a new one, and it took her a few seconds to realise that — Regina was jealous. She was seething with jealousy, even though she was very aware that Emma would have no interest in Killian Jones (lesbianism, duh), and furthermore, Emma was entirely enthralled with Regina herself. Which Regina should know – even if Emma had not told her that in so many words.

Maria waved a hand and carefully stroked Regina’s shoulder. “He’s a lost little puppy, it’ll be no problem,” she assured her friend, before she turned to Emma, smile back in full force. “So, I just agreed with Regina that I’ll be taking Henry and Roland out for hamburgers at Granny’s,” she
paused and let the two boys cheer happily from their spots, “as soon as I’m done here.”

“You will?” Emma asked, knitting her eyebrows together in confusion. It sounded good though. Henry loved hamburgers, he loved Granny’s and he loved Roland. What she just didn’t understand was why.

Humming in agreement, Marian continued, “Yes, and then Regina is going to take you out to celebrate with a nice meal and a bottle of wine,” she finished as a matter-of-fact.

Regina’s head snapped to the side, “I will?”

Marian gave her a soft look; eyes wide and head tilted. “Yeah, like we just agreed on inside, like, you know, five minutes ago?”

“Oh, I will,” Regina said, nodding her head enthusiastically. Her eyes turned to Emma then, and she let on a small and tentative smile. “If you’re interested of course?” Her eyes were so honest and open, like she was genuinely afraid that Emma might not want to go to dinner with her, and that look was entirely wrong, but at the same time so incredibly sweet, on a woman like Regina. She was nervous. Emma had no idea how she deserved the attention that Regina was offering her. And this form of attention? It seemed very much like a date without anyone actually saying out loud that it was a date.

Meh. Who needed labels anyway? If Regina felt better about it this way, Emma took what she could. She nodded her head in confirmation. “I’d like that! Uhm, should I like, go home and change now then?”

Regina’s look softened even more if possible as she said, “That’d be fine. How about I just text you the address and meet you there at five thirty?”

Emma couldn’t help it, she said. “It’s a date.”

“It’s a… date,” Regina confirmed, and Marian was positively beaming next to them.

———

When she arrived at the restaurant – a cozy Italian place – Regina was already waiting outside for her. She saw the other woman immediately; she’d been home to change, too, and was dressed in a beautiful bottle green dress only revealed slightly by the open peacoat hanging over her shoulders. Emma herself had had a minor breakdown in front of her closet and in desperation face-timed Ruby (who had barked out a wolfish laugh before ordering Emma through her closet with a visual), and ended up with a dress, too. It wasn’t the pink one – Regina had already seen that one – but a black one. She was wearing heels too, and most importantly –

“You’re not wearing your jacket,” Regina greeted her, and Emma saw how her brown eyes swept over Emma’s form appreciatively, a fond smiling edged onto her deep red lips.

Emma sheepishly shrugged her shoulders, “Well, it’s atrocious, so…”

Regina laughed and stepped forward to press her lips against Emma’s cheek. “Come on, I do hope you like Italian. We have a lot to celebrate tonight.”

She followed the other woman into the restaurant, and she might have possibly stared a bit too obviously at her ass when she slipped out of her jacket, and she could not for the life of her phantom how she’d ended up here, on a date, with this woman. Emma rarely felt like a child, because she had a child herself and she’d had to grow up fast when she was actually a kid, but she
did often dress like one; or perhaps she just dressed like the young 23-year-old she was, but Regina was like – a woman. And an incredibly beautiful one at that. And Emma just felt so young and inexperienced, and Regina was just… Regina.

And the dinner was truly Regina, too. She didn’t spare no expense; she spoiled Emma in lieu of celebration, they shared a bottle of wine, and the food was absolutely delicious. Half the time Emma spent listening to Regina talk about The Hills and her relationship with Zelena, the other half Emma spent just looking at her; watching her mouth as she spoke, her eyes shining with true happiness whenever she mentioned her father, the way her beauty was just so radiant. And Emma – she couldn’t help the feeling in her chest; the way her heart seemed to expand, and her body shivered, and she was just –

*So in love with this woman.*

Emma dropped her spoon to the table, in the middle of her tiramisu, and gaped openly at Regina across the table. The brunette paused her speech (she’d been busy telling a story of a very drunk Kathryn in college) and looked at Emma with questions in her eyes.

“Emma, are you OK?”

Emma saw her red lips move, a concerned hand slip across the table to clasp hers, but she couldn’t move. She just sat there, with the startling realisation beating inside of her chest along with her thudding heart. In love. She was in love with Regina.

When had she fallen in love with Regina?

Regina’s voice finally managed to snap her out of it. “Em-ma,” she said, voice soft and throaty, in the way only she could say such a common name.

“Sorry,” Emma breathed, shaking her head and picking up her spoon to continue her dessert. “I just realised something I had forgotten to do.” The lie was easy, necessary, because she could not deal with this information right now; not when Regina was sitting across from her looking so pretty, and they were supposed to think (yet they were on a date?), and Emma just had to – to think about it. To figure it out. Because she still meant what she said, she still meant that she could not let Regina in when the other woman was not certain, was too scared, was, perhaps, ready to run? *But she doesn’t look like she’s running,* Emma’s inner voice told her. She shook it off. She could not have hope, not now, not with these feelings expanding painfully inside of her chest.

Retracting her hand, Regina said, “Oh. Is it important?”

Emma forced a smile. “Just something for Henry’s birthday. I’ll take care of it tomorrow.”

Regina nodded, and they finished their dinner; they were almost done anyway, and Emma had to pick up Henry at Ruby’s where Marian had left him after hamburgers, and Regina probably had to get up early, and Henry needed a shower and sleep before school, and real life was just knocking at the door, so they finished dinner and left the restaurant. Emma was drunk on wine and Regina, and queasy on realisations and too much tiramisu.

Thankfully she’d had sense enough not to take the Bug, so she ordered an Uber, and turned to Regina, whose cheeks were rosy and whose smile was bright, and damnit, Emma wanted to kiss her so badly.

“So,” Regina whispered, tongue darting out to lick her lips, “thank you for joining me tonight. It’s been… wonderful.”
Emma stepped closer, traitorous hand reaching out to take Regina’s. “Thank you for spoiling me.” She squeezed her hand; this evening had been everything to her, something she’d never experienced before. Her dates were always set-ups for work, and she’d not had any real ones since before Henry, and then she’d been so young that dates consisted of sneaking into the movies or fast food in the back of a car. This was a treat, something new for her, special – and Regina didn’t even know just how special it was.

Regina had a soft smile playing at the corners of her lips and she stepped closer too, on the busy sidewalk, where people were walking pass them, going here or there, yet it seemed like it was just them, in a little bubble of Emma and Regina and it was just perfect. “You look really beautiful tonight. Did I tell you that?” Her eyes traced Emma’s features, settling on her eyes with a deep burn.

Bashfully, Emma lowered her eyes. “You said that thing about the jacket. I can read between the lines.”

“You shouldn’t have to,” Regina breathed, and somehow she came even closer, one hand in Emma’s and the other gently stroking her jaw. “I want to tell you that I noticed your effort. You do look beautiful,” Regina’s breath hitched her her throat, “but you always do.”

Licking her lips, Emma rasped. “You look very beautiful, too. Always.” She met Regina’s eyes again, and it felt like her skin was on fire where Regina touched it.

Regina closed her eyes, breath ghosting across Emma’s lips. “I really want to kiss you right now,” she honestly revealed and eyes opened to reveal shining brown orbs and dilated pupils. “Can I?”

Oh fuck, Emma wanted her to. She wanted her to kiss her, to taste her – wine, tiramisu and something so Regina – and then get in the Uber and take her home and forget, for just a night, all about Henry and reservations and fears of running and just get lost. She should say no. “Not if you’re going to run again,” she breathed instead. It wasn’t a no, it wasn’t a yes. It was entirely up to Regina.

“I’m not going to run,” Regina promised, and she pressed her lips to Emma’s – and oh, how had it been so long – and clutched her closer. Everything was fire and heat, and Emma felt it coil in the pit of her stomach as she breathed in the scent that was so Regina and everything she’d dreamt of since that first night when Regina was an ass, and Emma was just doing her job, and she had someone gone home that evening with more than just her pay-check. Damnit, Regina was everything.

Lips caressed lips; it was soft and slow, not the hast and eagerness of their earlier kisses. It was just Emma and Regina, on a sidewalk in Boston, and it was perfect. She breathed in through her nose, hand in Regina’s hair, and when their lips parted, it was to foreheads resting against each other and soft puffs in the cool night air.

“Regina,” she breathed, eyes squeezed shut and fingers curling. She shouldn’t say it, she really shouldn’t, but all of her emotions were threatening to burst out of her, something that only Regina could do. “I-” The words got caught in her throat again and she opened her eyes, only to get captured by Regina’s wet gaze.

She hushed her, hand still stroking her face carefully, softly. “I know,” she breathed, “I know.”

Emma didn’t know what else to say. There were many things she needed to let out, but words failed her, because she didn’t know how. Where to even begin? Her brain was a huge mess of Regina and kiss and I’m in love with you and please don’t leave.
They were pulled out of their intense lock by a huge honk and a brusque voice saying, “Are one of you Emma Swan?”

Emma cleared her throat and offered a faint smile, reluctant to let her hand untangle from Regina’s. “I’m, I’m Emma Swan,” she said, nodding her head. “I’ll be right there,” she added, before she turned to Regina with an open mouth. So fucking many things to say.

“We’ll talk,” Regina said, and her eyes were serious, determined, and she meant it. “I promise. I’m not running.”

Swallowing loudly, Emma offered the other woman a nod and reluctantly dropped her hand. “Okay,” she said, and turned to enter the car with this crazy and weird feeling settling inside of her chest. She watched out of the window as they drove off, seeing Regina still stand there, watching the car drive away, and Emma rested her forehead against the cool window. “Okay.”

She could do this.

Chapter End Notes

Sooooo what do ya’ think!? I really hope you enjoyed it! I promise I have not forgotten about Jasmine’s note and it will have its moment. Next chapter - Henry’s birthday party!
Regina

Chapter Summary

It’s Henry’s birthday, there’s a party and Regina’s nervous and excited to be there.

Chapter Notes

Alright. A bit of a humongous chapter for you guys – but it’s Henry’s birthday, so I figured you wouldn’t mind.

We’re all probably going to be a little bit annoyed and displeased with Mary Margaret in this chapter, but honestly, when are we not annoyed and displeased with Mary Margaret/Snow on the show? She means well, she’s just… yeah. She means well. So bear that in mind when you read on, please.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When Regina arrived at Henry’s birthday party – with Marian, Mulan and Roland in tow – the street outside the Nolans’ small house was already littered with cars. The little front yard was decorated with streamers and flags, and Roland stared in awe at all the beautiful colours. It seemed like Mary Margaret had gone all out, which Emma had warned Regina that she might.

They knocked on the front door, Roland on Mulan’s shoulders, and was greeted by a smiling – though also quite exhausted, it appeared – David. His face lit up though, when his eyes landed on Regina.

“Henry’s been complaining about when you’ll get here,” he said and opened the door fully to let them all pass through, ”Come inside please!” He greeted both Marian and Mulan with a handshake and nudged Roland’s foot. “And who might you all be?”

Marian and Regina shared a look, both confused as to what to say. When Regina was about to open her mouth to try to explain everyone’s relation to each other – goodness, when had her and Emma’s lives become so intertwined, and so quickly at that – Roland beat her to it.

“We’re Henry’s friends!” He cheered from atop Mulan’s shoulders, smile beaming and hand clutching the drawing he had made for Henry himself.

Marian chuckled, “AKA Marian,” she motioned towards herself, “my son Roland and my girlfriend Mulan.” She beamed too, when she said the last part, and Mulan offered them all a sheepish smile.

David clapped his hands together and placed a hand on Regina’s back. “Wonderful,” he enthusiastically proclaimed as he let them through the small hallway, “The party’s in the backyard, so please do keep on your shoes and coats. The weather’s good though, Mary Margaret has been nervous about it.”

Regina hummed in response and caught sight of Mary Margaret fretting in the small kitchen,
joined by a brusque looking older woman, and she heard the distinct sound of children’s laughter, a
dog’s bark and chatter streaming in through the open door to the backyard. Regina wondered just
how many of Henry’s friends would be attending his birthday party and if perhaps the adults would
be outnumbered. She was quite nervous about how other people would view her presence at this
celebration, but she honestly just wanted to spend some time with Emma and celebrate Henry.
Thankfully she had Marian with her too, and she was always much more of a people-person than
Regina had ever been.

She clutched the bag of gifts in her hand as they made their way into the backyard. It was the first
time she’d be seeing Emma after their date – thank you, Marian, for your deviousness. Regina
rolled her eyes when she thought about it – and even if they had exchanged messages, they hadn’t
talked about what their shared (and third) kiss meant, because such a conversation was not to be
had over the phone. They both seemed to agree on that point, because Emma had not attempted to
bring it up either. Regina knew that today would not be a good setting for their conversation either,
but she did plan on broaching the possibility of when she’d see Emma again – to talk. She just had
to figure out how to act accordingly around the other woman when all she’d been thinking about
since Wednesday was kissing her again.

She’d finally come to a decision: She was tired of running, and she was going to take Zelena’s
advice and reach for her happiness. She was positive Zelena would gloat endlessly when she
finally told her, which was why Marian was the only one of her friends who knew exactly how her
date with Emma had gone. Kathryn had been awfully curious to know more, probing her with
questions on both Thursday and Friday at work, but Marian had promised not to spill before Regina
was more certain what all this meant, and the brunette believed her.

The wind was knocked out of her by a solid now six-year-old barreling straight into her arms
before she had the possibility of bracing herself for the impact. Henry’s squeal of “R’gina,” was
loud in her ears, but she could not find it in herself to care. She discarded the bag of presents into
Marian’s hand before reaching down to pick him up in a tight embrace.

“Birthday boy,” she cheered as she pressed a kiss to his cheek and smiled at him, “you’ve grown
since Wednesday, little prince,” she said, and Henry’s eyes shone brightly because to him that was
everything, “I might not be able to carry you anymore!”

Henry tumbled out of her arms, laughing gleefully. “You’re silly, R’gina, I’m not that big of a
boy,” he proclaimed proudly, back straight.

Regina’s chest expanded at the look on his little face. “Oh well, maybe I’ve just grown smaller
then?”

Henry shook his head and grabbed her hand tightly. “C’mon R’gina, I want you to meet
everybody.” He tugged at her hand, urging her to follow him, and Regina shot an apologetic smile
at Marian as she did – because how could she not? – while she also searched the small yard for
Emma who was mysteriously not in sight. “This’ my Aunties Ruby and Dorothy,” Henry informed
her, as they came to a stop in front of two young women who were sitting crosslegged on the grass
and playing with a dog, “and that’s Toto.”

“Hey, I’m Ruby,” the tallest of the women offered. She smiled brightly, teeth showing, and she
was lanky with streaks of red in her hair. She also wore the skimpiest outfit Regina had ever seen
(and she’d been in the basement of Gallium & Yttrium), which was probably not appropriate for a
child’s birthday party.

The other woman – Dorothy – smiled at Regina too, but her smile wasn’t quite as bright. “I’m
Dorothy.” She had brown hair too, a bit more wild and untameable, and she had it in a loose braid
down her back. “And who’s this, Henry, my man!”

Henry tugged Regina’s hand again. “It’s R’gina, and she’s my bestest friend in the whole world!”

Regina could not help the smile that came onto her face at that revelation, and she was pretty sure it was not unnoticed by the other two women either. Dorothy raised an eyebrow questioningly, and Ruby threw a ball to the other end of the yard – sending Toto flying after it – before glancing briefly a Regina with a fiery gaze and then nudging Henry on the arm.

“Hey Kiddo, don’t you think your Ma would be sad about that? I think she wants to be best friends with Regina, hm?” She looked to Regina then and wriggled her eyebrows, the intent not lost on the older woman.

Henry seemed to ponder about that for a second or two, eyebrows knit together in such an Emma-expression Regina could hardly help the bubbling feeling in the pit of her stomach. “Guess she’s allowed to then. Mammies need friends too!” He pumped his little fist into the air and accepted the ball from Toto, who’d come back to place it in front of his feet.

Dorothy ruffled his hair. “Why don’t you show your friends from school some of the tricks I taught ya’?” She pulled herself off the ground as Henry nodded eagerly and went running towards three kids playing on a swing set, and Ruby followed her example. “So you’re the famous R’gina, huh?” She gave her a once-over, pronouncing Regina’s name like Henry always did; with the missing ‘e’ and a throaty ‘r’. “Nice to finally meet you.”

Regina could not help the feeling that she was being judged silently, but she guessed that was unavoidable seeing as these were Emma’s friends and she had not officially met them yet. She’d heard a lot though, and she could see how these two women would be in Emma’s taste. “Likewise,” she said, awkwardly placing her hand in front of her stomach. “Emma’s told me a lot about you two.”

“Yeah, you too,” Ruby agreed, her long hair blowing in the slight wind. She had sunglasses perched on top of her head and she was wearing heavy make-up. Regina really liked her lipstick though. “It’s always Regina this, Regina that, Ruby help me what to wear,” she said mockingly, changing her voice in a faint mimic of Emma as her eyes shone mischievously.

Regina felt Emma’s hand on her back before she heard her voice. “I do not sound like that,” the blonde hastily said as she stepped closer to their little group and her eyes immediately met Regina’s. “And hi,” she added, a shy smile blooming on her lips.

Not able to hide her own happiness at seeing Emma, Regina felt her cheeks warm with colour. “Hi yourself.”

Ruby sighed over-exaggeratedly and rolled her eyes. “Oh my God, just fucking bang already,” she hissed and staggered off in her high heels towards Mulan and Marian, who – it appeared- were trying to persuade Roland to join the other kids on the swings.

Regina felt her face flush even more, and she lowered her gaze, not wanting to look at either Dorothy or Emma. Especially not Emma. She felt a warm hand on her arm and looked up again to find Dorothy smiling toothily at her.

“Ignore Rubes,” she said with a little wink, “she likes to yank Emma’s chain.”

“She really does,” Emma grinned, just as Dorothy followed her girlfriend’s path to their friends.

Regina turned to Emma next, not sure what else to say, and instead of saying anything, she reached
a hand out an tentatively interlocked just the tips of two fingers with two of Emma’s fingers. She felt the contact immediately; never before had she had such strong reactions to skin on skin as she had with Emma, and it was delightfully dangerous. “Your friends seem nice,” she offered.

Emma rolled her eyes. “Yeah, Ruby’s... Ruby. Her Granny’s here too, you’ll see why she’s the way she is,” she quickly explained, and there was something so awkward about the way she stood there, in her red jacket with a grey beanie, and Regina just wanted to kiss those blushing cheeks.

“Who else is here?” Regina wanted to know, as they turned around to look at the gathering party.

“Just friends, really,” Emma explained, hooking a thumb over her shoulder, “the twins over there are Ava and Nicholas, Henry’s best friends from preschool. Their father dropped them off earlier.” Next, she pointed towards two men who were sitting closely together on a bench near the table where Mary Margaret was busy putting plates and bowls of food. “And that’s my best and only guy friend August and his boyfriend Jefferson,” she continued, “who has a kid, the last girl on the swings, Grace. Henry goes to school with her, too.”

Regina could feel herself grin as she looked up at Emma, “Well then I shall thank you even more for having me,” she said, “it seems like everyone else is someone you’ve known for a long time.” Regina could not lie; she felt slightly out of place in the company of all these people that both Emma and Henry considered family. It was strange to be lumped into that, but she supposed there was a first time for it, if she wanted to be close to Emma and Henry. And goodness, did she want that.

Emma stared at her in confusion, “Well duh,” she said as she brushed a piece of blonde hair out of her face, “you were like the most important person to invite. Henry told me so himself.” She tugged at Regina’s hand, “Come on, Mary Margaret really wants to get to know you better.”

The afternoon went by so quickly; there was cake and snacks, and lots of coffee for the grown-ups, and the children played together – even Roland conjured up enough courage to join the older kids – and Mulan and Ruby ran around with them, playing catch, and then hide-and-seek, and Regina had a great time. She got to talk a lot to David – who was actually a very nice man, and she could see why Emma got along with him so well – and also a little with Mary Margaret who was busy with everything, but did try to ask her a few questions. However, Regina felt that the older woman was a little on the fence about her, but wouldn’t any mother be? Especially one who had such a strained relationship with her daughter. Regina suspected that it wasn’t easy for her to be Emma’s foster parent, because they appeared to be so very different, but she could also see that the other woman had most definitely figured out that Regina and Emma’s feelings for each other were more than just friendly.

It was kind of difficult to navigate that, but she complimented her on the cake and on her decor – even though it was absolutely hideous – and it somehow felt okay. She was thankful for Marian who was by her side most of the time, even though she, of course, got along wonderfully with Mary Margaret instantly, because Emma was busy, too. She ran to and from the kitchen and tried to set up games for the kids, and when the cake first came out, she carried it out to an off-tuned *Happy Birthday, dear Henry* and six lit candles, and Henry clutched Regina’s hand as he watched the cake in awe.

It was shaped like a firetruck, and apparently it had taken forever for Mary Margaret and Granny to make it (especially because – David revealed this to her through mouthfuls of cake – Emma had managed to ruin the dough, *twice*). The smile on Henry’s face though, had to be worth, and Regina saw Mary Margaret’s eyes tear up a little. She was a proud grandmother, it appeared, and she seemed to spoil Henry rotten.
When they were all eating cake – the children finally sitting still for the first time in what felt like all day – Emma was next to her, and Regina felt herself lean into her side, Henry squeezed on her other side, refusing to leave his R’gina for too long a time. She loved the feeling; they were sitting on a two-person bench, and it was so wonderful and much like family. Emma smelled familiar, of deodorant and something different, like cake, and even though Marian looked at Regina pointedly with a raised eyebrow at the very couple-y display, she could not find it in herself to care.

“This is the bestest birthday ever,” Henry claimed next to her with a wistful sigh.

Emma glanced at him, a smile playing at the corners of her lips. “Yeah, Kid? And why’s that?” She seemed happy too, contend even, and Regina loved that look on her.

Henry swallowed a piece of cake. “’Cuz the cake’s a firetruck, and I’ve got my Mamma and my R’gina, and it’s just the best, and I’m a big boy now.”

Regina’s heart did that thing again where it was like it swelled up to double size inside of her chest. Had she not become so familiar with its unfamiliarity every time she spent time with either Henry or Emma or both, she would probably have freaked out and gone to the hospital, but she didn’t do that – because she knew. She knew now what the feeling meant, she just hadn’t known before, because it had been entirely too long since she’d felt it. Not since Daddy and apple trees and Rocinante in the stables.

Happiness.

“Yeah, you really are, Kid,” Emma said as she reached behind Regina’s back and ruffled his hair, “I can’t believe you came out of me six years ago! You were so red and squishy and I just wanted to hold you forever.”

Henry’s eyes were round as he looked at her, “You can hold me forever, Ma! Just make sure to leave some for R’gina too!”

Emma laughed, and Regina heard David chuckle too, from where he was sitting nearby, just as she was pretty sure that Dorothy and Mulan’s attention was pointed firmly in their direction as well. They’d grown suspiciously quiet suddenly, and she felt certain that Marian and Mary Margaret were also looking at them from where they were standing by the table, still cutting up cake.

“That’s very sweet of you, Henry,” Regina said to him, humouring him and his thoughtfulness. “Of course I’d love to hug you very much, but you’re a big boy now, right? There’s enough of your hugs to go around.”

Henry shook his head at her with big, round eyes. “You’re being silly, R’gina, I didn’t mean from me, I meant from Ma,” he made a point to roll his eyes – which looked both ridiculous and awfully cute at the same time – before bending his head to scoop in another piece of cake.

Brows knit in confusion, Emma said, “Well yeah, Kid,” she paused, “of course there’s hugs for Regina too. Why would you even think about that?”

Regina could feel eyes on her once more, and she shuddered slightly in her jacket and squeezed herself closer to Emma’s side (which come to think of it, did nothing to further ensure anyone looking that Henry was not on to something). Emma didn’t seem to mind though, she shuffled closer too, the hand previously ruffling Henry’s hair, now loosely draped around Regina’s shoulders.

Henry looked around, his green eyes shining mischievously, and he beckoned them both closer
with a little finger, wanting to tell them a secret. They both leaned in, and he whispered – quite too loudly to even be considered a whisper, though he absolutely tried his best – to them. “Ma, it’s because,” he breathed, “I spreaked to R’gina, OK? And she told me she’s gonna marry a woman someday.” He turned his eyes to Regina’s then, as if asking her if he was still right about the piece of information she had told him.

Nodding, Regina urged him on silently.

“And so,” Henry said, his voice raising as he gained more confidence, “I thought she could just marry you, ’cuz you said, you wasn’t gonna marry a man, right? But a woman, and so instead of me having a daddy and mamma, I could have a mom and mamma, you see?” He nodded his head to himself, thoroughly pleased, as he turned back to his cake and tried to get another piece onto his spoon.

Regina could feel her heartbeat in her throat and tears stinging behind closed eyelids as she breathed in; not because Henry had said something he shouldn’t – they had had that conversation, and it was hardly any surprise to Emma that he’d think those things – but because he’d said the absolutely right thing. He’d said that if they got married – and Regina dared not even hope for that, because it was way in the future, and they weren’t even dating – he’d have a mamma and a mom. Which could only mean —— he’d want her as his other mom.

“Yeah Emma,” David teased from where he was sitting, watching their exchange with curious eyes, “don’t you see? That’s just logic.”

Regina drew in a shaky breath and opened her eyes, only to find Emma’s green eyes pointed at her in wonderment. She didn’t pull back or say anything, but she was pretty sure that Emma could see the wetness and the emotion that Henry had ignited inside of her, because she squeezed her shoulder in support before drawing her hand back. Regina knew Emma had to be worried – it was exactly this kind of attachment she had been concerned about for Henry’s sake, and now there they were, thoroughly attached. But then Regina had to remind herself of her promise to Emma last Wednesday, a promise of talks and of not running, which she intended to keep, so hopefully Emma reminded herself of that as well.

Emma bit her lip, “Henry-” she begun, but Mary Margaret cut her off.

“Time for presents,” she loudly announced, which definitely caught Henry’s attention and saved Emma from having to explain anything to her son that she wasn’t prepared for. Regina had probably also been right in suspecting that both Mary Margaret and Marian had heard their entire exchange as well. Emma’s foster mother was watching her with a knowing look as she picked Henry off the ground and allowed him to pick out his first present.

Warm breath ghosted across Regina’s ear. “Are you okay?” Emma asked her.

Nodding, Regina said, “Yeah, your son just…” she paused, eyes flirting between Emma’s intense gaze and her upturned lips as she felt her mouth go dry, “knows what to say, I guess.”

Emma barked out a laugh. “He’s so different from me then. I always run my mouth.”

“You do okay,” Regina whispered, before their attention was pulled towards Henry, who was tearing the wrapping paper off the gift from Ruby and Dorothy (and Toto) which was a stuffed animal shaped like a dog (Henry immediately named it Lord Toto the Second) and a piggy bank with quarters in it. Next to go was the present from Granny, which was a sweater with Henry written across the chest of it, and it was obviously homemade. Henry tackled David and Mary Margaret’s gift after – what appeared to be the biggest, and it was a cardboard box filled with new
clothes. It was such a grandparent-y gift, and Regina saw Emma mouth a silent ‘thank you’ to her foster mother for all the clothes; Regina suspected that she probably couldn’t afford to give Henry a lot of things, so this gift was also considerate for her.

Henry chose the gift from the twins next – a new colouring book and crayons – before eagerly opening the present from August, Jefferson and Grace. It was a wooden bow and arrow, just like Henry had wished for, and Emma whispered into Regina’s ear that August had probably had his father make it, since he was very skilled with a knife and wood. Henry immediately ran to show Regina his new bow and she cooed at him, because his happiness was just so pure and real.

“You gonna open my gift next, Kid?” Emma asked him, and she was obviously very excited about what she had purchased for him. Regina actually didn’t know; she hadn’t had half a mind to ask.

Nodding, Henry picked up the present from his mother, wrapped in yellow with stars on it, and when he tore it off, goggles and swimming trunks fell out – along with a piece of paper. He immediately put the goggles onto his head and looked at his new trunks in awe. “Thank you, Mamma,” he smiled brightly at her.

Emma chuckled. “Have you looked at the picture yet?”

Henry’s eyes turned wide and he bent down to pick up the paper from the ground, and his face lit up even further when he looked at the picture – then at Emma – then back at the picture. Finally, Ruby broke the silence, as impatient as a child. “Well, slowpoke, what is it?”

“Are we going to the water park!?” Henry’s excited yell took them all by surprise, and by Emma’s enthusiastic nod, he crunched the paper in his fist and ran towards her, jumped straight into her arms and hugged her tightly. “Mamma, thank you, thank you, thank you,” he whispered as he pressed a sloppy, wet kiss to her cheek.

“We’re going in the summer,” Emma promised him, and her green eyes were shining when she looked down at him; their foreheads were pressed together, and it was their moment, mother and son, in their little world. “Before you start the next grade. And we’ll go together, we’ll stay for a few days, and we’re going to try all the rides. The goggles and the trunks are for then, okay? So you can look cool and like a big boy.”

Henry nuzzled his nose to hers and murmured quietly, “Love you, Mamma.”

Emma breathed deeply in, and Regina could not help but feel touched at the moment, and also like she might slightly be intruding. “Love you too, Kid.”

“Oh man,” Dorothy groaned and broke the awkward silence that had erupted between them all. “How can anyone stand so much fucking sweetness? Henry, hurry, open some presents and act like a spoiled brat.”

Sticking her tongue out at her friend, Emma scooted Henry off her lap and urged him to the rest of his presents – there was only three left, along with Roland’s drawing which wasn’t wrapped. “Hey Kid, you still haven’t opened Regina’s gift, huh? I think she left two over there for you.”

Regina did leave two presents over there for him, and Henry ran to the table yet again and grabbed the smallest one off of it. Not able to hide her worry about her choices, Regina bit her lip and tried not to let it show. It was apparent to Emma though, who responded by placing a warm hand on her knee.

Henry opened the gift to find the small, swimming shark that Regina had gotten him. It was
supposed to go in the bathtub, and Henry giggled loudly when he saw it. “That’s so cool,” he proclaimed as he proudly held it out for them all to see. He made it swim in the air in front of him.

Regina chuckled lowly. “I promised you a shark, didn’t I? And see, it goes in the tub,” she told him – and she couldn’t help herself – she moved over to show him the small handle that one turned over so the shark’s fins started moving and it could swim in the water. “So I thought… I thought you could keep it at my place, you know? So when you come visit and you have a bath, you can use your shark.”

Suddenly unsure whether or not that had even been an appropriate gift, Regina retreated back to her seat. The smile on Henry’s face was giant though, and the look that Emma shot her told her that the gift was certainly not inappropriate. She wasn’t so sure what the rest of the company thought though.

Henry reached for her other present. He could hardly carry it off the table – David rushed to help – because it was a gift of several books. Regina hadn’t been able to choose, just wanting Henry to have them all, so she might have gone a bit overboard. Henry seemed to like them all though, and he loudly proclaimed which one he’d liked to hear at bedtime tonight. The last present was from Mulan, Marian and Roland and it was a princess dress and a tiara. Henry immediately pressed the tiara on top of his head, before him and his friends rushed towards the swing again, Toto barking loudly as he followed them.

Mary Margaret was watching Regina with questions in her eyes from her seat across from them.

“That was a really sweet gift you got him,” Emma whispered into her ear, and Regina was pulled out of her silent stare-off. “You also spent way too much money on him. You shouldn’t have.”

Biting her lip, Regina replied. “I couldn’t help it.”

Emma chuckled. “I can see that.” She stared at Regina in silence for a few seconds, and the brunette could see that there was something going on inside that head of hers, some kind of silent conflict or debate, and she wondered what had her pondering so hard about things. “Hey, I wanted to show you something,” she finally said, seemingly having made up her mind. She pushed off the bench and extended a hand to Regina. “Care to join me inside for a second?”

Regina did not need much time to think about it; she grabbed Emma’s hand and let herself be pulled up off the bench. Emma murmured a hasty ‘be right back’ to her parents, before she tugged Regina with her inside the house, through the sparse living room, down the hall and into her old bedroom. Regina let herself be lead; she had no idea what Emma wanted with her, but she was curious to find out, and when Emma closed the door silently behind them, she found herself almost pressed up against it, Emma’s body mere inches from hers. She was suddenly feeling hot. Had there always been this hot? She seemed to remember needing a jacket all day long.

Emma reached a tentative hand out and softly stroked her fingers across Regina’s cheek. The brunette shivered, but it wasn’t because the touch was cold. She felt her breath hitch and her eyes fall close on their own accord, and before she knew it, she was pressed fully up against the door by Emma’s body as the blonde traced a line of soft pecks across her cheekbone, to her chin, before landing on her mouth. Each kiss made her heart pick up speed, and she felt her fingers clutch awkwardly at Emma’s sweater.

Their mouths joined together softly; lips brushing against lips, a small swipe of tongues and noses touching gently. It was soft, softer than anything they had shared before, and Emma tasted great, like coffee and cake mixed together, and Regina breathed in through her nose. Emma pulled back then, lips barely leaving hers, foreheads pressed together and eyes meeting in a heated gaze.
“Hello,” she shyly said, and Regina could get lost in her green eyes forever.

She bit her lip to keep herself from smiling too much, while she mentally told herself to calm down. “How long have you wanted to do that,” she teased, but really she understood Emma’s desire: She’d wanted to kiss her all day long as well.

Emma nuzzled her nose again. “Since you came here in that skirt. Damn,” she licked her lips and pressed another kiss to Regina’s mouth. She looked hesitant, before adding, “I hope that’s okay.”

“It’s more than okay,” Regina breathed as she untangled one of her hands from Emma’s sweater and gently combed her fingers through her blonde hair.

“That’s nice,” Emma hushed, eyes closing and head tilting slightly to the side to meet Regina’s soft caress. She moaned in delight, before popping her eyes open again. “I don’t actually have anything to show you,” she confessed, and she did have the audacity to look guilty and sheepish at that, “I just really needed a second to do that without an audience.”

Regina throatily chuckled. It wasn’t like she’d thought Emma had actually had something to show her – not after being pressed against the door and kissed – so it wasn’t like she was heartbrokenly disappointed. “Hmm, what a shame,” she teased, and she could not hold back her grin.

“When will I see you again?” Emma whispered. She had still not pulled back from her, and Regina did not mind at all. It was nice, having Emma close like this, comforting and familiar, and something Regina really wanted. And in other ways, too, she was starting to realise. Perhaps in one of their bedrooms with preferably less clothes on. They had that talk to have though, and it was important that she said all the things that she needed to say, because she wanted to do this right. It was Emma. Her Em-ma, and it had to be done the right way. After all this time, she could not afford to risk it.

She pressed her lips to Emma’s in a chaste peck. “Tomorrow? I can come by tomorrow.”

With a nod, Emma confirmed. She pulled her head back slightly, their eyes still locked with an intimacy that Regina had never experienced before, and her hands were tangled in Emma, and Emma had one hand on the door and the other on her cheek, and it was decidedly difficult to accept the fact that they had to return outside to the backyard and the party before someone decided to question their whereabouts.

“Hello, Emma? Regina?”

Too late for that, apparently. Ruby was banging on the door behind them, and she was doing it quite loudly. Emma sighed and Regina bent her head; their two seconds of peace were gone.

“I swear,” Ruby continued through the closed door, “if you’re banging in your old bed while your son’s having a birthday party, I will frigging-”

She was cut off by Emma opening the door widely. Regina stood next to her, cheeks slightly flushed, and Ruby’s eyes immediately ran over their forms as her nose crinkled slightly.

She faltered. “Oh, you’re not fucking.”

Regina thought she sounded slightly disappointed by that fact.

Emma rolled her eyes “Nope, Sherlock, thank you for that assessment,” she retorted, but her eyes were playful all the same. Regina hugged her coat closer around herself and carefully ran her fingers over the corner of her lips in search of smeared lipstick.
Ruby stuck her tongue out at her. “Well I had to be sure,” she childishly answered, jutting out her hip. “Henry’s looking for you,” she said, and as Emma moved to brush past her, she held an arm out to stop her. “You have lipstick,” she said as she extended her other hand to point at her own lips in vague reference, “right there.”

“Oh,” Emma’s movement faltered for a second as she brushed the back of her hand over her lips. Regina winced when she realised just how much of her lipstick had actually made it onto Emma’s face, even though their kissing had been minimal and chaste.

“Here,” she stepped forward and ran her own finger over the corners of Emma’s lips, “that’s better. Go find your son,” she smiled and pushed Emma gently down the hall.

Ruby stared at her quizzically, when Regina turned to look at her. “You better get your act together, lady,” she commented, before she sauntered down the hall too, high heels clicking as she went.

Regina stared after her, mouth slightly agape, before she made her way to the bathroom.

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The party was coming to an end; Henry was conked out on Emma’s old bed, August, Jefferson and Grace had gone home, and the twins had been picked up by their dad awhile ago. Roland was crashing on the couch, snoring loudly, while most of the grown-ups were enjoying a beer in the backyard, huddling close together as it was turning colder outside.

Regina was helping Mary Margaret in the kitchen though. She couldn’t drink, because she had the drive back home to do, so she’d opted to help Emma’s foster mother clean up instead. Dorothy had promised to drive Emma’s Bug back to town, so Emma was on her second beer, and Regina couldn’t find it in herself to interrupt the other woman’s light-hearted conversation with Marian; they were talking shop, and Emma was just so enthusiastic about it. Instead, Regina found herself moving about in the kitchen silently, putting away leftovers and stacking the dishwasher.

Mary Margaret seemed tense, but Regina wasn’t about to question her. She hardly knew the woman after all.

“Does this go in the dishwasher?” Regina questioned and held out a beautiful glass bowl that had contained chips and nuts.

The older woman nodded, “Yes, that’s fine. Thank you.”

Regina bent down to make it fit inside the machine – she had to rearrange a few plates; it seemed like it was just about ready to be turned on – and she lifted her head to tell Mary Margaret so, but as she did, the other woman was smiling expectantly down at her and holding out a tab for the dishwasher. Regina offered her a strained smile and put it in, before closing the door and hitting the power button with a curled finger.

“Oh, the kitchen almost looks fine now,” Mary Margaret sighed as she slid herself into one of the old kitchen chairs by the small table. “Thanks for all your help, Regina, you didn’t have to.” She poured herself some coffee from the pot that was still halfway full and motioned for Regina to take a seat on the other chair.

Doing that, Regina folded her hands awkwardly in her lap and looked softly at the other woman; Mary Margaret seemed tired, worn down, and it had probably been a long day for her, preparing and hosting and doing all of this for her daughter and grandson. She seemed like the person who
worried a lot – worried about Emma and Henry, and how her daughter wasn’t really open with her. Regina felt a pang of sadness inside of her chest for this woman; she didn’t know her, and she knew Emma probably had her reasons for staying guarded (abandonment issues will do that to a person), but it really didn’t seem fair that Mary Margaret got the short end of the stick in this arrangement. Perhaps her and Emma had just really never learned to communicate with each other. They were different, that much was evident, both probably stubborn and bullheaded, and that could make mutual understanding difficult.

Regina found herself relaxing her shoulders and asking the other woman softly, “Are you OK?”

Mary Margaret sighed and took a sip of her coffee cup – an outrageous blue thing with birds on it. “It’s just been tough today, I want to do everything nice for Henry because I know how much it means to Emma,” she paused, eyes glazing slightly over, “but I just can’t seem to please her really.”

“I believe Emma is very pleased with everything,” Regina quickly offered, because that had never appeared to be the problem to her. “Perhaps she just doesn’t really know how to tell you.”

Green eyes turned to her and Mary Margaret placed her cup back on the table. “You seem to be growing closer and closer to my daughter and grandson every time I see them,” she commented. It sounded almost innocent, like a thought from the top of her head, but Regina knew there was more to it than that. “That was a very nice gift you gave Henry. A shark. For your bathtub.”

Regina felt her back stiffen. “Well he enjoyed the tub when he stayed with me and I figured a real shark might be to stretch it a little,” she drily replied.

A soft smile edged its way onto Mary Margaret’s face. “Regina, can I be honest with you?”

“I would prefer it if you were,” Regina replied. Her gaze was turned studiously on the other woman, watching her movement and the small mimics of her face. She seemed nervous, and Regina felt it too; not exactly nervousness, more like an itching curiosity, wonderment as to what Mary Margaret really wanted to say to her, because it was evident that there was something on her mind.

“I just,” her soft, melodic voice carried easily across the small table, and it was intimate in a way that Regina was not entirely comfortable with. “I can’t seem to figure out what a woman like you… would want with my Emma.”

Brow furrowed, Regina felt herself get protective as well. She knew Mary Margaret meant well (because why wouldn’t she, Emma was her daughter after all), but she was not comfortable having her motives questioned this way. Sure, it might look odd from the outside; their age difference,
their vastly different backgrounds, their – Regina cringed at the thought, because she heard her mother’s voice vividly with them – social statuses. All those things were true, yes, but there was so much more to it than that. There was their insane chemistry and the way that Emma was not afraid to say her piece. They were both damaged, in very different ways, and it just worked for them. Regina wished there was a way that that could be evident to people watching them, but there wasn’t. To her, to Emma, to Henry, it was enough that they knew – but Mary Margaret wanted to see it too, and Regina understood that need. Perhaps Emma just really needed to speak with her mother.

“Mary Margaret,” Regina softly said, her brown eyes scanning the other woman’s face carefully, “I’m sorry that… my intentions,” she paused at the word with uneasiness, “are not clear, but it’s not your place to question them.” She stared boldly at her, and it was evident that Mary Margaret was taken aback by her defensive response. She’d probably thought Regina was going to start listing her reasons for liking Emma, but she’d never do that. “I like your daughter. In fact, I care about her and Henry so much. I think that should be all you need to concern yourself with.”

Sipping her coffee again, Mary Margaret took her sweet time coming up with a response. She hummed around the porcelain, daintily putting the cup back down on the table. “Excuse me,” she lightly said, and there was a fire burning in her green eyes, “but I just don’t want my daughter and my grandson to get hurt! I have a hard time imagining that you’ll stick around in the long run – why would you, you’re eventually going to want things that Emma can’t give you.”

Jaw clenched, Regina narrowed her eyes. Oh the audacity of that woman. “Pardon me,” she hissed, nostrils flaring and hands fisted tightly in her lap, “but you have no idea what I want in the long run. I’m quite certain that Emma can give me everything that I should ever desire. You don’t know me.” She unfisted her palm with a beating heart. She’d never been questioned on her intentions before, never, and she had to admit that she didn’t like it one bit.

Mary Margaret continued, “Well, I just don’t want them both to get attached if you’re going to leave. You have to see where I’m coming from. Emma – and Henry – has been through so much already.”

Regina told herself to breathe in steadily and relax. She wanted badly to turn the table over, demand Mary Margaret to see reason. Her anger always loomed, especially when she felt like she was being unfairly treated, and Regina from two years ago would have been cool and collected and left this argument thriving, but now – no. She had to stay calm, because anger was not the option. She shouldn’t close herself off, but try to explain. Mary Margaret meant well, she was sure of it, and Mary Margaret was also the closest thing Emma had to a mother, so Regina wanted her to like her. It was important that she did, because this was Emma’s family. “I’m not going to run,” she coolly replied.

Studying her, Mary Margaret’s eyes swept over her features, and Regina let her, knowing that the older woman was looking for a sign, something to prove her wrong or right. “Hm,” she eventually breathed out.

Regina opened her mouth to say more. “Honestly, you needn’t concern yourself with this, Mary Margaret,” she explained, giving the woman a bit of leeway, something she would have never imagined herself doing. “If you talked to your daughter,” she paused, tongue wetting her upper lip, “really talked, without judging her, and just listening…”

Mary Margaret stiffened as Regina trailed off, probably about to disagree with her, to say something in her own defence, to make up excuses, but Regina held a finger up, demanding silence.
“…she’d tell you that we’ve talked about all that.” She looked at the other woman, willing her to understand. “We’ve talked about attachment, feelings, how to proceed with caution,” she offered a vague smile, “We’re taking things very slow. For a long time we agreed to just be friends, but it appears that,” she paused again and couldn’t help the soft smile that came onto her face when she thought about Emma and her stupid, beautiful face. “It appears that your daughter has somehow clawed her way into my heart along with her adorable son, and I… I don’t want to let them go.”

It appeared that her speech, her rare show of emotion to anyone but her closest friends and family, was doing something to Mary Margaret. The older woman had tears gathered in the corners of her eyes – Regina had never been comfortable with such open show of emotion, but she ignored it – and her shoulders sagged. “Okay,” she breathed.

Regina was not done yet though. “You have to understand,” she continued, because it was important that she finished her piece and then hopefully they wouldn’t have to broach this subject ever again, “that for a very long time, I didn’t know how to love, but Emma,” she paused, voice cracking slightly, “Emma – oh God, and Henry, too – they showed me how.”

The tears were falling freely down Mary Margaret’s pale cheeks at this, but she had a smile on her face. Her voice was incredibly soft when she replied to Regina’s speech. “Thank you,” she whispered, “for telling me that.”

Straightening her back, Regina said, “You’re welcome.”

The two women looked at each other for a few seconds, finding some kind of mutual understanding within the conversation and the truth they’d just shared. Regina felt lighter somehow, even if she scarcely knew the woman, she knew that she had done the right thing by opening up to Emma’s foster mother. They were only pulled apart from their silent communication when they were interrupted by someone clearing their throat in the doorway. Mary Margaret looked up, and Regina twisted around in her chair to find Ruby looking at her with an excited smile.

“Get your dancing shoes on, Regina Mills,” she said and her eyes were shining with mischief, “we’re all going out tonight.”

Chapter End Notes

I hope you guys liked this chapter – next up: Regina, Emma and their friends at Gallium & Yttrium for a night out! I hope you’re as excited about this as I am. This story is closing towards the end by the way, but I figured you might expect that – there’s still some chapters to go though and some loose ends to tie! Until next time.
They’re at Gallium & Yttrium; Zelena’s being wicked, Ruby’s trouble, and Emma has a real tough time with the whole thing. Perhaps she just really wants to fuck it all and take Regina home.

Tink and Ursula were working the door when Emma, Ruby and Dorothy arrived at Gallium & Yttrium later that evening. It was only a little past nine, but Tink already looked too tired and bored by her shift. She greeted Emma with a kiss on the cheek and a complaint about their third co-worker tonight – it was someone Emma had yet to meet, a woman named Ella, who liked to wear outrageous furs and drank too much gin for Tink’s liking – so she was a little displeased about that.

Both Emma and Mulan had taken the entire weekend off due to Henry’s birthday party, but Tink wasn’t about to applaud them for ditching her with two other, not as experienced, bouncers, even if she somehow also managed to tell Emma to have a good time.

Emma was excited though – a night out. A night out. It felt like it had really been forever since she had been out to drink and dance with Ruby; they used to do it all the time when they were younger, too young to drink and go places, but Ruby had always had a knack for flirting her way in, and Emma had enjoyed it before Neal and pregnancy and growing up too fast. Tonight was going to be different though. Not only was she there with her best friends, but she was there with Regina too; and Regina was going to have her friends as well.

It was entirely a spur of the moment kind of thing that Dorothy and Mulan had cooked up while they drank beers back in David and Mary Margaret’s backyard. Mulan had been complaining about never going out anymore, because she was always working the door to pay her way through school, and Dorothy had loudly pointed out that tonight she wasn’t. And so Marian had picked up on that, and before Emma knew what had happened, Marian had texted her friends – Kathryn and Zelena, Emma remembered – who didn’t need to be asked twice. Zelena’s husband would be with their kids, and Marian was going to drop Roland off with them on the way back.

Ruby hadn’t needed any convincing either (when had she ever said no to dancing the night away) and David had immediately offered to let Henry stay the night with them, and since her kid was sleeping anyway, Emma had had no reason to say no. Especially when Ruby returned from the house and told her that Regina had not said no to the proposition (Emma somehow doubted Ruby had given her much of a choice, but there you go).

Everyone had departed from the party, promising to see each other very soon, and Emma had gone back with Ruby and Dorothy (“You have to borrow one of my dresses and let me curl your hair, Swannie”), and Ruby had fussed around Emma while Dorothy had laughed from where she was sprawled out on the bed, drinking wine straight out of the bottle. Emma had always envied Dorothy for her casual beauty – the girl never wore make up and her eyebrows were just good – and tonight she was dressed in black skinny jeans, a black dress shirt and hat – matched with the most glittery kind of shoes Emma had ever seen.
Ruby was wearing a short dress and six inch heels but what else was new.

They had all agreed to meet in the lounge, so when they’d checked in their coats, they stopped by the bar to get some drinks – mojitos for everybody, and since Quinn was working, she made them extra strong – before they slipped up the staircase and scouted the room. Thankfully it wasn’t that full yet, and Emma laid eyes on most of their friends immediately. They were sitting in the far corner, having scored two tables with enough chairs for everybody, and actually, they all seemed to be there, all except… the one person Emma really wanted to see.

“So we agree, Swannie,” Dorothy said as she hooked her arm through Emma’s and picked up on a conversation they’d had earlier back at the apartment, “tonight is the night you get your ass together and do something about this Regina-situation.”

Emma rolled her eyes, “Sorry Kansas, there’s no situation,” she replied, jutting her elbow lightly into Dorothy’s ribs. She’d been telling them the same thing all evening, but somehow her friends did not believe her. Maybe it had something to do with the fact that Ruby had caught Emma with Regina’s lipstick all over her face earlier, but it was hard to be sure.

Ruby snorted, “Alright, we can pretend for a little while longer, my scared little friend.” She flipped her hair over her shoulder and staggered closer to the table where she greeted Mulan and Marian with hugs and introduced herself to Kathryn and Zelena.

Emma and Dorothy followed her, and Emma could tell that both Kathryn and Zelena gave her a once-over when she arrived, before sharing a meaningful eye-lock. Regina’s friends were up to something as well, and Emma was starting to fear what lengths they all might go to this evening; Zelena especially. She was wicked, Regina had told her that in no uncertain terms.

“Oh my,” Zelena gushed as she pulled back from hugging Emma and her eyes settled on Dorothy’s feet, “what beautiful silver slippers!” Her eyes practically shone and Dorothy clicked her heels together before sticking out her hand.

“Thank you, I’m Dorothy,” she replied, before she scooted into the spare seat next to Ruby and kissed her cheek.

Ruby was already halfway through her mojito, red lips wrapped around the straw. “Where’s Regina,” she demanded to know, and Emma took a seat on a spare chair next to Mulan.

Kathryn slipped her phone into her pocket. “She’ll be here soon, she just texted,” she explained. She smiled at Emma, turning her head slightly to the side. “So did your kid have a good birthday?”

Emma nodded her head. “Mh! The best,” she said, quickly sipping her straw, “He was conked out on the bed before five. All that excitement.”

“How’s his arm?” Zelena questioned.

“Good, it’s… good,” Emma smiled back. She remembered Henry telling her about his afternoon with Regina at Zelena’s house and how much fun it had been to play with her husband and kids. Zelena probably wasn’t half bad, one just had to get to know her. At least that’s what Regina kept saying. Emma found that she quite wanted to learn more about this sister of hers – perhaps that’d also help solve the mystery that was Regina Mills.

Zelena flipped her hair over her shoulder. “Such a pretty cast,” she whispered, before reaching for her drink.

“So, are we gonna, like, talk about the elephant in the room,” Ruby commented next, downing the
last of her drink until it was only crushed ice slushing around in her glass. Apparently she was aiming for totally hammered tonight with the pace she was setting.

Kathryn frowned. “What elephant?”

Ruby said, “Our friends not fucking yet. I already told Emma, it’s about time they do.”

Spluttering, Emma practically choked on the sip she’d just taken from her drink, and she coughed awkwardly as she slammed the glass back down on the table. She could not believe that Ruby had just said that – in front of Regina’s friends and sister nonetheless. That damn girl and her big mouth. Emma was going to fucking kill her.

So yeah, Emma might actually really quite like to fuck Regina, but it wasn’t just that. There was real feelings and shit, like – I’m in love with this woman – so it wasn’t just about that. It was about so much more than just that.

Mulan reached over and patted her roughly on the back. “There, there,” she murmured quietly into Emma’s ear.

“What the fuck, Ruby,” Emma managed to squeeze out between wheezes.

Rolling her eyes, Ruby continued, “I mean, how can anyone stand the eye-sex between those two. And it’s about time Emma got some. As her best friend, it’s my duty to make sure she does.”

Marian snorted, and Dorothy placed a hand on her girlfriend’s arm. “Rubes, perhaps it’s not about the fucking, yeah?”

Kathryn chipped in, “It’s definitely not, although it is an added bonus.” She wet her lips, eyes shining with mirth as she looked at Emma. “I think the fucking would be good for Regina though.”

Emma almost wanted to slip off her chair and onto the floor. Since when had she and Regina been the chosen topic of conversation? This was so embarrassing. Hopefully they were going to stop when Regina got there, otherwise Emma would have to run home and lock herself in her apartment for the next couple of years.

“Could we not mention my sister and fucking together, please,” Zelena drily commented with an almost bored expression.

“Regina’s your sister?” Ruby questioned, brown eyes turning wide.

Emma slipped off the chair. “I’ll go get us some drinks. Anyone want anything?”

Zelena cackled, and everyone started listing off their desired drinks – they were all ready to get another one, damn her friends drank quickly – so Emma moved across the floor and slipped back down the staircase to order at the bar. She hoisted herself onto a barstool and listed off the seven drinks – plus one for Regina when she got there – and Quinn went to work with an amused smile.

“You good, Emma?” She lined the glasses up first, glancing at Emma with her pierced eyebrow.

Stiffening her back, Emma nodded, “Yeah, just,” she licked her lips, “my friends are assholes sometimes.”

Quinn laughed as she started measuring the rum. “You know, friends are supposed to be, I think,” she bit her lip, concentration evident on her face. “Hey, are you,” she paused, “are you still dating that hot brunette from the other night?”
Emma scrunched up her nose. They weren’t exactly *dating*, but then again… weren’t they kind of dating? She wanted them to be, but it was complicated. Perhaps too complicated to share with her casual co-worker. But she also knew exactly to whom Quinn was referring, so that probably meant something as well. She had to give her an answer despite the turmoil in her mind, so Emma forced a smile. “Uhm… yeah?” She didn’t know what else to say, so that was the safe option.

“Oh good,” Quinn replied with a smirk, “‘cuz she’s over there tapping on her phone, figured you might want to say hi.”

Spinning around on her chair, Emma realised that Quinn was indeed correct. Regina was standing by the top of the stairs, slightly against the wall, looking down at her cell phone with a thoughtful expression on her face. Maybe she was trying to figure out where they were seated or if she should stop by the bar. Emma just stared at her, taking in the entirety of Regina Mills in all her glory: She was still wearing that pencil skirt – damn that skirt, Emma felt her cheeks grow hot – but she’d changed her dress shirt to something more casual for a night out. She was wearing her usual heels too, and her lips were painted a dark purple. *Another lipstick for me to ruin*, Emma couldn’t help but muse to herself as she unconsciously licked her lips. God, she hoped she’d get a chance to ruin it.

Quinn snorted behind her. “Oh man, you’re so far gone,” she joked, before returning to the drinks. Emma ignored her and kept her eyes trained firmly on Regina, mentally ordering her to look up from her phone and see her by the bar; that’d give them five, perhaps ten minutes, before meeting their friends upstairs, and damn, Emma wanted those minutes alone with her. Or maybe they should just ditch their friends all together? The idea was very appealing to her; she did not really feel like going upstairs to get mocked by her friends again, and really, she could imagine a lot of other things to do with Regina when they were alone. *Like maybe in my bed without clothes on*. Emma sighed wistfully, but it broke into a full-blown smile when Regina finally looked up from her phone and stared straight into her eyes. Dumbly, Emma raised her hand in a wave.

“Dork,” Quinn interjected from behind her.

Emma groaned, “Stop with the running commentary, please,” she demanded, and she slipped off the stool to greet Regina in a tight hug – entirely too long to be friendly – and a kiss on the cheek. “Hi,” she lamely started, and she felt like Regina didn’t pull away far enough to be platonic either. Not that Emma minded; she could feel the electricity between their bare arms and the way that her stomach seemed to be a somersaulting mess. “You look beautiful.”

Regina’s lips couldn’t possibly have smiled brighter. “Thank you. So do you,” she gave Emma a quizzical once-over. “Let me guess. Ruby’s dress?”

“You bet ya’,” Emma chuckled, before motioning towards the bar where Quinn appeared to be just about done with their drinks. “Everyone’s upstairs being annoying. I got you a drink, too. Dark and stormy okay?”

“It’s perfect,” Regina replied with a small nod. Her fingers somehow found their way towards Emma’s arm, where they locked warmly around it, grasping her. She leaned in closer. “Perhaps I could persuade you to dance with me later, Miss Swan?”

Her breath was hot on Emma’s ear and it sent an almost unbearable tingle down the blonde’s spine. It had been entirely too long since she had had an orgasm that wasn’t by her own hand, and she was starting to very firmly believe that Regina was supposed to be the next person to give her one. Damned be everything else. The brunette had promised talks and not running and a lot of other things, and the need to be close to her was just about overshadowing all of Emma’s other senses. If
she could wrap herself around Regina and stay there, that would be preferable. Also, the sex would be amazing, she was sure of it.

Screw doubts and talks and seriousness for just one evening. Emma wanted to be irresponsible and push it all onto tomorrow instead. They’d get there, they would talk, she was sure of it. And she was also pretty certain that Regina was going to catch her while she fell, and it didn’t seem so scary anymore. They’d fall together, Regina and Emma, and it’d be grand. Tonight she just wanted to give into herself and let whatever happened just… happen.

Emma tilted her head slightly to the side and let Regina’s lips touch her earlobe. “I don’t dance,” she whispered. It was a total lie – she did dance, not very greatly, but that had never been a problem before. It had been years though, years since she’d danced somewhere that wasn’t with Henry in their living room listening to Radio Disney.

“Liar,” Regina smirked and pulled back from Emma’s body with a devious lilt in her voice.

The blonde reached out and carefully took the tray from the bar. She thanked Quinn and started carrying it carefully – now would be a really bad time to fall flat on her face – towards the staircase. Regina trailed after her, and Emma was pretty sure that she wasn’t imagining the heated gaze on her butt, because that kind of fire could not be made up. She didn’t mind though; Regina could stare all she wanted as long as she decided to do something about it at some point.

Emma liked the back-and-forth; she always had when she was younger too. It had been entirely too long since she was involved in flirty touches, and longing glances, and promises yet to be fulfilled. It was a nice game, it upped the stakes, made it even better when it finally happened, but she was also starting to realise that playing that game with Regina was absolutely torture. Not only was Regina a great opponent – Emma quite felt that she experienced the torture more than Regina, because the other woman was wow – but she really didn’t want to wait any longer. She needed to touch Regina like she’d never needed to touch anyone else, and her fingers were itching, her stomach turning.

“Here you go,” Emma carefully slipped the tray onto one of the tables and moved to reclaim her former seat – which mysteriously enough was now occupied by Kathryn, which left two open seats… next to each other. She glared at the other blonde, letting her know that she knew very well what she was doing, before taking a seat, while Regina greeted everyone else.

Zelena kissed her sister’s cheek. “So I hear congratulations are in order,” she commented, while she absentmindedly swirled her straw around in her drink. Emma was pretty sure that she was trying to get hammered tonight, just like Ruby, but if her husband had the kids, there was no better time. According to Regina, drunk Zelena was quite entertaining, although also slightly more wicked than usual.

Regina took the spare seat and carefully placed her purse in her lap. ”Congratulations?” She looked confused as she reached for the last glass on the tray. “Sure, I’ll bite, dear.”

Taking her good time sipping her drink, while everyone was watching her, Zelena slowly said. “You know,” she paused, placing the glass back on the table, “for getting a kid.”

Blinking at her sister, Emma watched Regina’s confusion set even more into her features. “Zelena, what are you talking about,” she said with a loud sigh.

Kathryn was smirking, and Ruby was grinning wolfishly, and Emma had a bad feeling that Regina was about to walk straight into a cunningly calculated attack. She could do nothing but watch though, and Marian appeared to be entirely too pleased with the turn of events.
“Oh you know,” Zelena replied with an air of indifference, as if what she was going to say was just common knowledge for everybody, “Dorothy here tells me that today Henry officially deemed you his other mother. When’s the adoption going through?”

Regina’s back stiffened and her eyes were practically shooting lightenings at her sister, while Emma managed a glare in Dorothy’s direction. Regina shook her head. “You’re being ridiculous. Henry was just saying that it would be nice to have another parent,” she explained, and Emma couldn’t help but reach a hand out and comfortingly place it on her thigh beneath the table.

“Didn’t sound like it,” Dorothy casually mentioned, before averting her eyes towards the floor.

“He very much wants you,” Ruby added quickly before following her girlfriend’s example.

Emma glared at her friends and reached an arm out to smack Ruby gently on the shoulder. “Stop that, you two,” she demanded, and she was pretty sure that her voice showed that she meant business. It was the voice she used on Henry when he was being difficult – which hardly ever happened actually, because her kid was the greatest and it took a lot to try her patience – and it usually worked on Ruby as well.

Marian placed her drink on the table and slipped off her chair. “Who wants to dance?” She looked around at them all, and it was pretty clear that she was trying to diffuse the tension by breaking up all conversation of kids and relationships and Emma and Regina. She offered the latter a huge smile and shimmied her shoulders. “I know you want to, Ms. Mills.”

Regina’s eyes were practically shining and she let herself be guided off the chair as well. “How can I ever say no to you?” She turned to Emma then, and the blonde was reminded of their earlier conversation. “Are you coming, Em-ma?”

There it was again; that certain way that only Regina said her name. In a way that showed so much promise of things to come, of secrets shared, and hidden desires. Emma never wanted her to stop saying her name like that. She grinned sheepishly at her. “I’ll need a bit more to drink first. Dance with me later?”

Smiling warmly, Regina gave her shoulder a squeeze. “Sure.”

Ruby pushed her chair back and loudly announced, “We’re coming too, I’ma dance with ma gurl,” she cheered, and soon the four of them had left the table, drinks in hands, to go into the basement with all the young gays, and Emma made a promise to herself that she really was going to go down there and dance with Regina before the night was over. She could not miss this opportunity.

Zelena sighed heavily. “I’ll go find the loo then. All these drinks go right through me.”

“I’ll join you,” Kathryn added, and the two of them were off too – leaving Mulan and Emma alone at the table.

Mulan fingered with the label on her soda, staring at a crack in the table as she did so. She hadn’t said much, and Emma figured that pushing her and Regina wasn’t really Mulan’s cup of tea, and the blonde relished in the comfortable silence between her friend and co-worker as she made good noise slurping up the remains of her dark and stormy and pondering the last hour over in her head.

She knew in her heart that she really wasn’t mad at her friends for trying to meddle and push them together – she was just annoyed. They meant well though, and there was a time in her relationship with Regina where it would probably have been necessary, but what they didn’t know was that she and Regina were well on their way to figuring it all out themselves. She didn’t want the pushing,
not anymore; they walked a delicate balance, and even though Regina had promised her that she was done running, Emma couldn’t help but fear that too much teasing and pushing from their friends would ignite that instinct in her once again. Emma didn’t want that. She wanted to tread carefully, not risk it. She didn’t want Regina to be pushed away at this point; they were so close to actually something called dating.

Mulan broke the comfortable silence between them, “Are you OK, Emma?”

It was probably futile to hide her annoyance at this point, so Emma gave a slight shrug and glanced at the other woman. “Our friends are just a bit too much, y’know?”

Nodding, Mulan said, “They mean well.”

“I know they do,” Emma relented with a sigh. It wasn’t the problem that they didn’t mean well, because of course they did. They just also needed to learn boundaries somehow.

Mulan gave her a tightlipped smile. “Can I make an observation?” She didn’t wait for Emma to give her permission, but continued on, determined. “I think they all just really want you guys to be happy, and they see that you could most definitely be it for each other. They just don’t understand that not all relationships are easy to fall in to – I mean, I got lucky with Marian, she wasn’t afraid, even if she’d been burned with Roland’s father, but if she hadn’t had enough faith for both of us, we’d still be doing the same dance you are.”

Emma sipped her drink and arched an eyebrow. “Yeah? You didn’t have faith?”

With wide eyes, Mulan continued, “No! Definitely not. You know what happened with Aurora and Philip. I was ready to stay single for a long time after that, but… Marian had faith.” She wet her lip, and a truly happy smile appeared on her face by the mere thought of her girlfriend. “It’s just not as easy for you and Regina because you’re both guarded,” she added as an afterthought.

Perhaps it was the amount of alcohol she had consumed that day, but Mulan’s words were starting to make sense to Emma. She finished her drink – slurping a bit extra for good measure – before nodding her head. “Yeah, I guess… we’re both guarded.”

“I’m not blaming you,” Mulan quickly reassured her as she downed the rest of her soda, “You have Henry to think about, and you’ve had a tough life, and according to Marian, Regina’s not always had it too easy, either…” she trailed off and carefully placed a hand on Emma’s on top of the small, round table.

“And I have my own issues to deal with,” Emma agreed as she worried her bottom lip with her teeth. “I mean, it just takes longer for some people to start dating, y’know? Dating takes time.” She was suddenly not feeling as worried about the pace that she and Regina had decided to take. They were getting somewhere, and it was on their own time. Who ever decided what was right or wrong? If it worked for them… They could even decide to push the talk and just let things happen. Perhaps she’d been too worried for nothing really? It was kind of hard to tell.

Mulan huffed out air and offered Emma an incredulous look.

Emma mirrored her expression, “What?”

“That’s all very well, Swan, but you do realise that you’ve already been dating for weeks, right?” Mulan sternly commented, before starting back on that label.

Emma had not realised that, but perhaps Mulan was right.
They eventually made their way into the basement as well, when it became apparent that their friends had no desire to return to their table. Zelena and Kathryn were just as excited to go dancing as their friends had been, and at this point, Mulan and Emma had no reason to stall any longer.

Emma wanted to dance with Regina. She really did. She was just nervous about the part where she had to dance with Regina. She was concerned about long legs and arms flailing around her body with no control of her own. She was afraid that Regina was going to take one look at her attempt at dancing and then flee in the other direction. Ruby used to make endless fun of her lack of rhythm, and Emma’s way of scoring ladies was mostly her self-irony coming out to play because she knew she couldn’t really dance.

When they found their way onto the dance floor, Emma awkwardly started to dance next to Ruby and Dorothy, while Mulan swooped in next to Marian and Regina. Emma found herself watching Regina; well more like blatantly staring, if she was being honest – Regina had moves. Like some serious ones in fact. She moved effortlessly to the music, rhythm overtaking her body. She looked so beautiful as she danced, and Emma traced her eyes up her body; starting at those damn heels, up her calves, over that fabulous butt, towards her shoulders, and if Emma wasn’t preoccupied with her blatant ogling, she would have been more concerned about people seeing her vague attempt at dancing.

It was fun though, in a way that Emma hadn’t experienced in a very long time. Ruby and Dorothy had no concerns of looking hot or smooth, they just wanted to have fun with Emma, so that was what they had. She caught Regina’s eyes a few times, as the other woman ground her body into her friend’s, and Mulan was left awkwardly gaping at the two brunettes. Regina had a wicked smile on her face, and her dance was almost effortless, and her eyes were dark as she scanned over Emma’s body, too. The blonde felt her cheeks tinge in embarrassment, thankful that the basement was dark and filled with bodies, so that Regina wasn’t able to tell just how much her dancing and her looks affected her.

As Emma’s eyes met Regina’s once more, the older woman hooked a finger towards her, beckoning her closer – to cross the dance floor and join her – and she was mouthing something to Emma. It left no doubt in Emma’s mind what Regina wanted; she wanted to dance with her, just like Emma had promised her to, and she was getting ready to cash in on that promise.

Biting her lip, Emma mouthed back – two minutes – before she turned her gaze to Ruby and Dorothy again, wanting to explain to them that she was going to dance with Regina. The music changed in that instant; from something electronic to something a bit more pop-y, and Emma told herself that she could do this. She could so totally do this. You can do this, Swan. Ruby gave her thumbs up, urging her to go for it, but before Emma managed to squeeze all the way through other dancing bodies to join Regina, she felt a hand clasp around her wrist. Turning around slightly – with Regina just out of reach – Emma thought that Ruby might have forgotten to tell her something, but it wasn’t Ruby she was faced with. It was… Jasmine.

For a second, Emma almost didn’t recognise the gorgeous woman who was smiling brilliantly at her, but then she remembered. Last week – on the job – a coke – Jasmine giving out her number. Which was still in her pocket. Holy shit, Emma had forgotten all about that.

“Emma,” she cheered, and Emma didn’t miss the way her eyes swept appreciatively down her body, “you’re not working tonight.” She seemed immensely pleased about that fact.

With a shrug, Emma said. “I’m not,” and she awkwardly turned her eyes towards the woman that she really wanted to talk to right now. Regina was still dancing, but Emma could feel the burning
of her gaze on them, watching them from her place on the busy dance floor.

Jasmine arched an eyebrow and slid her hand up Emma’s arm towards her elbow. “You didn’t text me yet,” she stated, and there was a slight pout on her light pink lips. “It’s OK, you told me why. But do you wanna dance? I presume you still have my number.” She wriggled closer, letting her other arm drape over Emma’s waist as she tried to get their bodies to move together.

Emma wanted to say something, tell her that she was really on her way to dance with someone else, and that she wasn’t ever going to write her about that coffee, but somehow the words got stuck in her throat, and she felt her stiff body move awkwardly next to Jasmine’s. “I uh, I don’t really dance,” she lamely apologised as she tried to pull away from the other woman. “And I’m not going to use that number you gave me.”

“Pity,” Jasmine replied, and her eyes scanned Emma’s face carefully, edging over her features and landing on her eyes. “There’s no way I can persuade you to share a dance with me? When my friends saw you here, they rather forced me to come to talk to you again.”

“Imagine that,” Emma sheepishly replied as she bopped her head. “I’m sorry to disappoint them though. I’ve already got plans to dance with someone else.” Perhaps it sounded like a lame excuse, but Emma didn’t really care. It was the truth, and Jasmine could think what she wanted to.

The dark-haired woman arched an eyebrow and stepped back slightly, pulling her hand down Emma’s arm as she went. “Oh yeah? And who’s that?”

“Me.”

Emma had probably, perhaps, almost never been as happy to see Regina as she was right now. While Jasmine had not crossed any boundaries or made Emma uncomfortable in her pursuit for a dance and a coffee-date, Emma seriously had no interest in her. Perhaps she could have been clearer about that, told Jasmine to bugger off right now in more words than she had, but Jasmine had talked, and while she had tried to convince Emma that a dance was a splendid idea, Regina had made her way closer to them and she was now squeezing her way in between their bodies with an absolute seething look in her eyes.

“Regina,” Emma breathed happily at the same time that Jasmine uttered an “Oh,” with a defeated look in her eyes.

Regina’s hand was firm on Emma’s body as it slipped around her waist, fingers leaving a hot trail of desire behind; it seeped effortlessly through the fabric of Emma’s dress and she felt herself shiver with goosebumps from the close proximity.

“Off you go then,” Regina said with a sneer; she towered slightly over Jasmine in her high heels and not for the first time did Emma feel impressed by how someone so tiny managed to appear so intimidating. ”Miss Swan’s only going to dance with me tonight.”

Jasmine faltered slightly. She offered Emma a tentative smile and dropped her hand. “I apologise. You could have just said that you were taken when I gave you my number last weekend,” she trailed her eyes towards Regina and bent her head slightly. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to make a move on your girlfriend.”

Simply arching an eyebrow, Regina didn’t offer Jasmine an answer. She just smiled rigidly at her, and Emma felt the way her body stiffened, preparing for a fight. She could see in Regina’s eyes – which she was watching carefully out of the corners of her own eyes – that she was on fire. Her jaw was set, her brow slightly furrowed, and her nostrils flared just so. If Emma hadn’t seen this look
on her once before – only a few days ago at The Hills – she would have been confused as to what was happening exactly. But tonight she wasn’t. Because – because Regina was jealous, and it was evident to Emma. The older woman was jealous of this other girl who was trying to dance with Emma, and Emma could not phantom why.

Regina was the most beautiful woman she had ever met, and this Jasmine person? She didn’t even hold a candle against her. Emma wished she could make Regina see that, but perhaps now was not the right time for that.

Retreating, Jasmine stepped backwards and disappeared into the dancing crowd of bodies. Emma turned to Regina then, twisting her body over, still tangled in Regina’s arms. And she was surprised, because she’d somehow expected Regina’s face to have softened, that the eyes meeting her own green ones would be shining with mirth, but no. Her pupils were blown, and her jaw was working. She looked absolutely pissed.

“Sorry,” Emma sheepishly shrugged as she wound her own arm over Regina’s shoulder, wanting to pull the other woman closer. She knew that she technically shouldn’t apologise, because she had done nothing wrong, but she thought that perhaps Regina needed to hear it right now. “I was on my way to find you.”

Regina was reeling and her fingers curled into Emma’s hipbone. She stared at Emma with such passion as the words slipped over her lips. “She gave you her number?”

“Yeah,” Emma awkwardly shrugged, not sure what else to say.

Without blinking, Regina demanded more, “When?” Her tone was hard, icy, and it reached Emma’s ears clearly, even through the loud music of the newest pop-number the DJ had just put on. Emma wasn’t put off though, because she so clearly saw the emotion behind Regina’s words, her looks, her actions, and she couldn’t help but feel slightly touched. It was a nice feeling, to be felt for this way, and she knew that it only meant good things for their relationship that Regina had such a reaction. Emma wanted to reached her hand out, tug her closer, and kiss that sneer off her lips, but she kind of also wanted to see what Regina was going to do.

Emma stroked the back of her hand over the older woman’s jaw. “Last weekend when I was working,” she explained, brushing it off, because it was nothing. “I tried to tell her no, but she was rather persistent. So I just left after that.”

With narrowed eyes, Regina stepped closer, her free hand now coming to rest on the other side of Emma’s body as she pulled her to her. “You didn’t take it?”

“God no,” Emma breathed, and she felt her heart thud madly against her ribcage. Regina was so close now, so close, and she could just bend down slightly and their lips would be touching. “I totally forget I even had it.”

A small smile of relief appeared on Regina’s face then. “Good,” she proclaimed, and Emma couldn’t tear her eyes away from the scar across her purple lips.

The blonde grinned. “Yeah?”

Regina gave a faint nod. “Yes. I should have thought that it would be rather obvious that I would like for you not to receive numbers from beautiful women, Miss Swan.”

“One,” Emma retorted, because she couldn’t help it; she loved this. Their playfulness. “One beautiful woman, Regina…” she paused and her fingers tangled in the other woman’s hair.
“Besides,” she added as her eyes sought out Regina’s lips, “There’s kinda already another woman that I want to be with, so…”

“Oh yes, Miss Swan, do tell me about her,” Regina demanded, and there was a playful smirk on her lips as well.

Emma bit her upper lip, eyes still trained on Regina’s mouth. It seemed far too long since she had last kissed it. “Well, actually… I’m not really sure if she cares for me. She hasn’t exactly been so forthright about it. Perhaps I’d have better luck finding someone else.”

Regina’s breath hitched in her throat, and she pulled Emma closer if that was even possible. “Don’t you dare,” she replied in a throaty voice, and the mere sound of it sent shivers up Emma’s arms and a rush of heat towards her core. She suddenly had troubles standing upright. This woman was going to be the death of her, but if that was the case she was pretty sure she’d go willingly.

“What are you going to do about it?” Emma teasingly replied with much more bravado than she actually felt. It was all for show anyway. She was challenging Regina to take that final step, and she so hoped that the other woman wasn’t too scared to do it.

“Don’t you fucking dare,” Regina repeated, and Emma only managed to pause briefly at the sound of a curse coming off of Regina’s beautiful lips – because when had she ever cursed? – before the older woman had bent her head backwards and pulled Emma closer by the neck. Their lips met in a clash of teeth and tongue, and Emma felt the impact immediately.

Everything around them seemed to come into a standstill; she could just sense Regina. Her touch, her scent, her taste. Everything Regina. And God, Emma wanted more of it, she wanted it all. She wanted Regina so damn much, and after that little display of emotion, she was pretty sure that Regina wanted her as well. Her fingers clutched in Regina’s impeccable brown locks, their bodies were flush against each other, and Emma’s legs were nudged apart without much effort, as Regina slipped her own thigh in between. Emma could hear nothing but the sound of their ragged breaths until a moan escaped from the back of her throat.

Regina nibbled at her lips, then the side of her face, until her breath was hot against Emma’s ear. “I think it’s time we get out of here, Emma,” she moaned and the sound turned Emma on even more than she already was, “like we should have done the first time we met.”

Emma bent her head sideways and caught Regina’s lips in another chaste kiss. She felt the anticipation build like a fire in the pit of her stomach, erupting over her skin with promises of what was to come. “Let’s go,” she whimpered and clutched Regina’s hand.

Chapter End Notes

So yeah, I did that… Next chapter can go two ways, I still haven’t decided how much to write yet, so I guess I’m curious to know what you guys think about it, or what you would prefer. I’m good either way. I’d also just like to thank you so much for your support and encouragement with this fic. I know for certain, that it will not be my last Swan Queen and I already have an idea in the works for when this is over.
As cliche as it was – and goodness did Regina despise being a cliche; she was infinitely more classy than that – they stumbled through her front door like in some romantic comedy. Emma kicked the door shut behind them – yes, cliché, cliché, cliché – and Regina was already pushing that god-awful jacket from the blonde’s shoulders, while their mouths were practically fused together.

Emma moaned into her mouth and started unfastening the belt of her jacket, while Regina clutched at the blonde’s dress, fingers raking over smooth fabric on top of lean limbs. She wanted desperately – desperately, and she could not wait any longer. She needed to feel Emma, every part of her, inside and out. And she wanted to mark her, leave imprints behind on her fair skin, in a desperate attempt to ward off potential suitors.


It continued like a mantra inside Regina’s head, had been going on repeat since she saw Emma with that girl at the club. Something vicious had taken hold inside of her at the sight, and she’d wanted the other girl to evaporate, to disappear and leave her Emma alone. Emma, the beautiful, who was supposed to be hers. She knew that she wasn’t though, and that was when she had made her decision. Emma could be hers, Emma was willing. Regina just had to go and grab her.

And so there they were, standing in the middle of her open floor apartment, kissing with ferocity; all teeth and tongue and wetness. Regina felt Emma push her jacket off her shoulders, and the blonde clutched her closer, their bodies practically glued together as hands roamed and her shirt was pulled put of her skirt.

Tilting Regina’s head sideways, Emma’s lips travelled down her throat and Regina felt herself shiver in anticipation of what was to come. She’d imagined this moment, too many times perhaps, in her bed and in the bath, and she felt heat pool in the pit of her stomach as Emma’s lips travelled over her clavicle, teeth scraping against skin. “You’re so beautiful,” Emma breathed, before raising her head back up, forehead coming to rest against Regina’s.
The brunette trailed the pad of her thumb against Emma’s cheekbone, and the blonde met her caress with closed eyes and a sigh. “Bedroom,” Regina heard herself whisper before she stepped out of her heels and lost a good few inches on Emma.

Emma’s eyes shone with so much affection when she looked down at Regina. “You’re so tiny,” she mused, hand trailing over Regina’s bare arm before lacing their fingers.

Regina breathed out a throaty chuckle. “Do shut up, Miss Swan,” she demanded. She stood on her toes, pulling Emma’s lips to hers in another kiss, before determinedly clutching the front of Emma’s dress in her fist and walking backwards down the hallway and towards her bedroom.

Emma chuckled into her mouth, fingers skimming along the line of her skirt as she sought out the zipper on the back. She kicked off her heels as well, but even so she was still the tallest of the two, before they stopped by the foot of the bed, lips still moving in unison. Regina tilted her head back, welcoming Emma’s tongue into her mouth, and she whimpered, desire floating through her body by Emma’s touch and taste. She felt her zipper slip down, and expectation soared through like rapid fire. Emma was undressing her, kissing her, touching her like she was the most precious and beautiful thing in the entire world, and Regina could hardly contain it – it threatened to burst right out of her chest, the realisation, the knowledge that——

It was finally happening.

Her skirt pooled around her feet, and Emma wasted no time pulling the shirt over her head as well. She heard the other woman’s breath hitch, and as Regina met her eyes, they seemed impossibly darker, blown with lust. Emma reached a tentative hand out and gently brushed it up Regina’s abdomen, over one bra-clad breast. Regina’s breath quickened at the touch of Emma’s fingers against her nipple, which was straining inside black lace. Bending her head down, Emma traced her tongue from her ear, down her clavicle, to the valley between her breasts. She felt her heartbeat quicken as Emma rested there for just a second, before her mouth enveloped Regina’s nipple in wet heat through lace.

Regina arched into her, back straining, desperate for more. This was going too slow. She needed more, right this second, or so be damned. Pulling Emma’s head back up by the base of her neck, Regina fidgeted to find the zipper beneath Emma’s armpit. She pulled it down, relishing in the sound of clothes coming undone, and as the dress slipped from the blonde’s body – no longer held in place by the confinement of the zipper – she felt blood pumping and the unmistakable wetness between her thighs. She was not embarrassed to admit that her panties were probably ruined.

Emma was gorgeous. There was no other word for it, literally, painstakingly gorgeous. Regina had been aware of her biceps, of the fact that she appeared to be quite muscular, and she’d had a sneak peak at the abs she was now seeing clearly for the first time. She ran her hands over Emma’s stomach, watched the muscles contract, before she pulled the blonde in for another kiss and pushed her mercilessly onto the bed.

They landed together, Regina on top of Emma, and their heaving chests pressed against each other, as Regina continued her exploration of Emma’s mouth. She tasted faintly of mint and something sweet, and Regina ran a hand along her side, skimming over her hipbone, brushing gently over her panties as she rested on her other elbow. She pulled back then, brown eyes scanning over Emma’s beautiful face; hair mussed and fanned out on the mattress beneath them, lips swollen from kisses and smears of lipstick across her cheek. Ample breasts restrained by a grey bra that in no way matched her hot pink panties, and it was all so very Emma Swan, and Regina loved it.

“You, Emma Swan,” she whispered, breath ghosting over the blonde’s breasts as she snaked her hand around her back – Emma lifting slightly off the mattress to help her – to unclasp her bra, “are
the prettiest woman I have ever seen.”

A blush rose on Emma’s fair skin, colouring her cheeks and neck. How very Emma Swan of her to blush at a moment like this, and Regina responded by dragging her teeth to the strap of her bra and trailing it down her arm, before moving to the other side and repeating the movement. She flung Emma’s bra to the side, and her mouth went dry when she was faced with Emma’s round breasts with stiff, rosy nipples. She wasted no time, wrapping her lips around one of them, as her knee slipped between Emma’s thighs and she felt the dampness of her panties; a strong evidence of her arousal.

Emma moaned into the room, one hand clutching at her shoulder, the other fist in Regina’s hair as Regina lavished her nipple. “Regina,” she whimpered, and Regina glanced up at her, releasing the nipple with a faint pop that echoed soundly through the room.

“Yes?” Regina questioned with a smirk. It was fairly evident what Emma needed her to do, but she would be quite pleased to hear the words come out of her mouth.

“Please just,” she breathed out and rubbed herself against Regina’s knee, “I need you.”

She had positively never seen anything sexier than Emma Swan, wanton with lust, so Regina trailed kisses from Emma’s breasts – first one nipple, then the other – down her abdomen, towards her belly button. She dipped her tongue in, feeling Emma squirm beneath her, and when she saw the faint marks of white against her skin, she trailed her fingers over the lines, following their path across Emma’s body. She admired them for a second, struck with the battle that Emma had been through and the fight she’d fought as the marks had been left. Battle wounds, she mused to herself as she kissed every stretch mark before trailing further down. She hovered by Emma’s panties, darker in the middle, as she thought about how long it had been since she had last done this. It seemed like Mal was forever ago, like she was a different person then, and oh how wonderful it was that she was now doing this with Emma.

Anticipation bubbling in the pit of her stomach, she pressed a kiss to Emma’s panties, before she peeled them off the blonde’s long legs. She smelled her immediately; the sure sign of arousal hidden beneath a patch of blonde curls. She glanced up at Emma – just to make sure that it really was okay that they were doing this – but was only met with an intense look. Desire covered Emma’s every feature, and Regina did not need more than that. She buried her nose in the blonde, wiry hair and carefully stroked her tongue through Emma’s folds.

She was dripping wet, and Regina moaned at the taste – tangy and addicting – and she heard Emma breathe out deeply from above her. Fingers curled at the blonde’s thighs, digging into soft skin, as Emma spread her legs even wider, allowing her better access. Regina licked and sucked, brushing her tongue through Emma’s heat, finding out what worked for her. It was amazing, the sounds that came from the younger woman, and Regina had to fight very hard not to let one of her hands fall between her own legs to relieve some of the rapidly building arousal there.

Emma was not quiet in bed, not that Regina had thought she would be, and when she inserted a finger into her warm, welcoming heat, the blonde cursed loudly as her back arched. She was close, Regina could feel it with the way her walls were contracting, and she curled her finger against the ribbed flesh inside of her as she sucked on her clit, and that was all it took – Emma came undone beneath her, body twisting and legs cramping around Regina’s head as she moaned loudly into the otherwise quiet room.

Regina rode out the orgasm with her, raising her head to watch the blonde as she shuddered and came down from her high. She was so beautiful, and it hit Regina right then and there that she could really get used to this. The sight of Emma in her bed, naked and satisfied, and it was not at all
scary. It was okay.

She pulled her finger out and pressed a kiss to the inside of Emma’s thigh, before she fell onto the mattress next to her, nuzzling her head into her armpit and focusing on the rise and fall of her chest.

“Fuck, you’re really good at that,” Emma cracked a smile, glancing down at her and pressing a kiss to her forehead. “That’s like,” she held two fingers out, making an okay-sign and joked, “A Plus, Regina, A Plus.”

“You’re an idiot,” Regina said, but she couldn’t help but chuckle as she traced her fingers over Emma’s chest. She was painfully aware of the pounding between her legs and the way that she was beyond turned on, but she thought that this moment deserved special attention.

Emma rolled over slightly, trailing her finger down Regina’s side towards the line of her pantyhose which were becoming painstakingly unbearable to wear by the second. “But I’m your idiot,” she paused, green eyes glancing at her through hooded lids, “right?”

Regina felt the swell of fondness in her chest, and she couldn’t have stopped the smile blooming on her face, even if she had wanted to. “Yes,” she confirmed, and she was surprised to realise that there was not a doubt in her mind of the truth of that statement.

Seemingly relieved by that response, Emma pulled her closer for yet another kiss, while her fingers took on the almost impossible task of getting off Regina’s pantyhose. “You’re way overdressed here,” she mused between kisses, and as it became apparent that the pantyhose weren’t going to come off just like that, she got the cutest determined expression on her face. “These pantyhose are stupid,” she murmured, tugging helplessly at the nylon.

Regina chuckled and turned her body slightly over, pulling the offending garment down her legs. Emma watched her as she did so, green eyes focused on her legs, and Regina made the quick decision to rid herself of her black lace thong now that she was doing the motions anyway. Emma’s eyes darkened as she flung them aside, tongue darting out to lick her swollen lips.

“How are you even real,” she mused; she pulled Regina closer, sitting back against the headboard and tucking the brunette onto her lap.

Straddling her, Regina’s naked center pressed onto Emma’s body, and the blonde moaned at the wetness while she leaned forward and managed to push one cup of Regina’s bra down to wrap her lips around the stiff nipple. Groaning at the contact, Regina ground her hips, desperate for some kind of relief. Emma chuckled against her chest and ran a hand down her abdomen, slowly inching closer to where Regina currently wanted her the most.

“What do you need from me?” Emma asked. She tilted her head back, and Regina met her lips for what felt like the hundredth kiss of the night.

The brunette shivered as Emma’s hand snaked over dark curls. “Just fuck me, Emma,” she moaned, and as she ground her hips downwards again, they were met with two of Emma’s fingers as they plunged into her.

It didn’t take long for Regina to fall completely apart on top of the other woman, and by then she was absolutely sure. She wanted Emma Swan by every sense of the word.

She wanted Emma Swan.
That much was painstakingly obvious when she came to it the next morning. The blinds had not been closed, and the sun shining into her bedroom stirred her awake. For a second she couldn’t remember why she felt so contend; her body sated, her mind not reeling – until she heard the light snore coming from behind her, and she was reminded.

Emma Swan was in her bed. Emma Swan was in her bed, because they had had mind-blowing, orgasmic sex the entire night, and now Emma was snoring, curled around herself in a ball, with the sheets tangled between her legs.

Regina turned over, happy to just watch the younger woman sleep for a little while. She looked so serene, hair mussed and make-up smudged, as she snored with her head buried in the pillow. Regina felt that pang of fondness emerge in her chest again; complete, utter happiness. She reached a careful hand out, brushed a tuft of Emma’s blonde locks away from her forehead, before she retreated and dropped her hand back to the mattress.

Last night had been… everything Regina had imagined it would be. On some level she was mad at herself for having fought the inevitable for so long; it appeared to her, now, that she and Emma were always going to end up right where they were now – she’d just pushed it in front of her, too afraid to make a grab for her own happiness, even when it was staring her right in the face. Thankfully, Emma had been more than patient, more than understanding and accommodating, and she had not run. She was still there, right now, next to her in bed.

“Stop it,” Emma groaned, cracking one eye open as she glanced up at Regina.

“Stop what,” Regina mused as her hand found a resting place in the nook of Emma’s waist. The blonde’s fair skin was littered with purple bruises and faint marks from their night, and Regina ran a finger over the love bite she had made on Emma’s stomach just a few hours ago.

Emma sighed, “You’re thinking too much. It’s too early for thinking.”

Regina felt herself smirk, “Perhaps for you,” she teased.

“Get down here, woman,” Emma demanded with a hand behind Regina’s neck. She guided their faces together, lips meeting instantly, and Regina enjoyed the feeling of familiarity that she was already experiencing with Emma. Not only her kiss – and goodness, was she a good kisser – but also the small sounds she made in the back of her throat and the way her fingers tended to tangle themselves in the small hairs near the nape of Regina’s neck.

They kissed for a little while. Naked, wrapped in the sheets together, just small kisses, no hint from either of them to turn it into anything more. They were contend just laying there, skin on skin, soft kisses and sighs of enjoyment.

“What time is it?” Emma asked after a little while.

Regina glanced to the watch on her nightstand. “It’s a quarter to ten,” she replied, resting her hands on Emma’s chest, and her chin on top of her hands. Her eyelashes fluttered.

Emma sighed. “I should probably get going to pick up Henry soon,” she softly said, while she reached a hand out to gently stroke her fingers through Regina’s mess of hair. “I really wish I could stay though. I think we have a lot to talk about.”

Wetting her lips, Regina tried to tell herself that just because Emma said that they needed to talk, didn’t mean that she was now going to retreat and back out of this. It could simply just mean that they needed to talk; talk like Regina had also promised Emma they would, talk about what this
new change in their relationship meant, talk about what was going to happen now. “Yes… I suppose,” she managed to say with a small smile.

“Hey,” Emma pinched her ear slightly, “no bad thoughts. Talking now is good, okay? We need to discuss last night and your fears, and my fears, and…” she forced a small smile onto her lips. “It’s all gonna be okay, I promise.”

“I trust you,” Regina whispered, and with a startling thought, she realised that she actually did. Stretching forward, she placed a chaste kiss to Emma’s lips before pulling back and slipping off the bed. “Why don’t I make us some coffee and you can get going?” She picked her silk robe from the hook near the door to the bathroom and slipped it on, unashamedly showing her naked form to the other woman. She had a feeling that her own skin was just as covered in marks as Emma’s.

Green eyes swept over her without shame. “Coffee sounds awesome,” Emma replied. She stretched her arms above her head, arching her back like a kitten, and the sheets fell to the floor around her feet. Her hair was a mess, but Regina only found it cute.

“You can use my bathroom for anything you like, and pick some clothes from the closet if you prefer,” Regina motioned towards the discarded dress. Emma probably didn’t want to wear that all the way to pick Henry up, and her other clothes were most likely at Ruby’s.

“You rock,” Emma winked at her, before padding pass her and into the ensuite bathroom and closing the door.

Regina ran her fingers through her hair and beneath her eyes to catch smeared make up, before she went down the hallway and into the kitchen. She went through the motions of turning on the coffee maker, and when she looked into her fridge for milk – she knew Emma preferred her coffee with that – she decided to toss together a quick breakfast as well. She had everything she needed for a green omelette; eggs, bell peppers, tomato. She got out the ingredients and turned on the radio as she found her mixing bowl.

Once the omelette was stirred and ready to go, she backtracked into the living room, trying to find her purse from last night. She found it discarded haphazardly on the floor along with her coat, and she rummaged through it, before sliding the phone out. It still had some power left, and she went into the kitchen again as she scanned the screen. Three missed calls from Mother (she’d prefer not to have her morning with Emma ruined so she’d deal with them later), and several messages from her friends – both in the group chat and from Zelena.

She clicked on the group one first.

Kathryn: Regina, you can’t just leave without saying goodbye!
Zelena: One minute Kat and I are dancing and the next you’ve gone off somewhere, you fool.
Marian: Relax, she took Emma home to get some.
Marian: Like really.
Marian: They were making out on the dance floor. Sad you missed it.
Kathryn: …are you for real right now?
Zelena: MARIAN
Zelena: Marian, you better not be kidding.
Marian: Not kidding. Come find us. Mulan and I are at the bar.
Zelena: DAMN LITTLE SIS IS GETTING SOME
Kathryn: You GO Regina!!!!!
Zelena: Also don’t leave without saying goodbye to me again.
Zelena: Very disappointed in you.
Marian: Guys, she’s not gonna see this right now, she’s busy having sex
Zelena: Muhahahaha
Kathryn: Nope, but she’s gonna see it tomorrow.
Zelena: M, order me some alcohol, we’ll be right there.

Despite herself, Regina couldn’t help but laugh at her friends, as she poured in the omelette and set
the table. She might have been ready to kill them, had she not been in such a wonderful mood this
morning. Emma was here, there was fresh coffee in the pot, and the sun was beaming down
outside. How had life turned into something wonderful so quickly? She poured both herself and
Emma some coffee, adding sugar and milk into the other woman’s, before flipping the omelette.

She turned her attention back to her phone and clicked on the message from her sister. She was
surprised to see that it was not from last night, but rather from an hour ago.

Zelena: Sis, you need to shove your pretty lady love out of your apartment, because Mother is
coming to see you!
Zelena: Seriously Regina, she called me and asked why you weren’t picking up the phone and now
she’s dropping by.
Zelena: She knows a bit about Emma, yeah? She knows her name, yeah? You think she’s going to
be happy that you’re cahooting with a 23-year-old, uneducated mother?

Regina felt it immediately, that unmistakable sense of dread creeping up her back. Not because she
was scared that her mother was going to catch her with a woman – no, they’d been over this too
long ago, and Cora Mills was fine with her youngest daughter being a lesbian – but genuinely
scared how her mother was going to react to Emma. To Regina, Emma was perfect. She didn’t
want to change a single thing about her, and goodness, Regina cared so much about Henry, too.
But Mother wasn’t going to understand that, she was only going to see Emma’s past stint in juvie,
having Henry at seventeen and being way too young for Regina.

It shouldn’t matter what Mother thought, and ultimately it really didn’t. Regina wasn’t going to
stop being with Emma – and they were together now, were they not? – just because Mother said
so. But she was afraid how Cora was going to treat Emma, what she was going to say to her. She
knew Emma could defend herself, but she just wished that she wouldn’t have to.

“Damn, something smells good in here.” Emma announced her presence in the kitchen and
snapped Regina out of her thoughts. She’d tamed her hair back with a scrunchie and scrubbed her
face clean, and she’d also helped herself to a pair of yoga-shorts and a loose sweater from Regina’s
closet. “Are you making eggs?”

“An omelette,” Regina replied, just as she slipped it off the pan and onto a plate. “Sit. I poured
coffee for you.”

Emma did as she was told and picked up the coffee immediately, taking a long appreciative drag of
it. Regina knew she ought to probably encourage Emma to leave before her mother got there, but
she didn’t want her to leave – she wanted to have a quiet morning with her, drinking coffee and
eating omelette. But Mother was going to come, she was probably on her way, and then what was
going to happen? Mother shouldn’t dictate my life like this. With that thought, Regina sat down in
front of Emma and cut the omelette in half.

“I’m going to have to swing by Ruby’s to get my car and my sneakers,” Emma said as she dug into
the omelette with gusto.

Regina took a sip of her coffee. “And then you’ll pick up Henry right away?”

Nodding, Emma chewed and swallowed. “Yeah, I wanna spend some time with the kid today.
Maybe go to the park or something.” She paused, stabbing awkwardly with her fork at the food, before adding. “Perhaps you’d… like to come? Henry can play, and we can… talk.”

Her heart swelled with the thought of that, and Regina cut a slice of omelette. “I’d like that,” she confirmed, before popping the food into her mouth and chewing.

“So uhm…” Emma trailed off, eyes trained on a crack in the wood as she ran her finger over it. “No regrets from…you know,” she looked up then, meeting Regina’s eyes, “us having sex?”

She felt the way her eyes shone at the cuteness of Emma, and Regina shook her head, fond. “No,” she said with a throaty chuckle, “not one.” What she didn’t say was that it was quite honestly the best sex she had ever had, but she figured that might be a bit too much for Emma’s ego this early on.

Emma nodded, “No running off either?”

“No running off,” Regina softly promised as she dropped her knife to the table and reached across the table to clasp Emma’s hand. She ran her thumb over the soft skin there and smiled reassuringly at the younger woman. Oh, she could get so used to this, mornings like these. They just needed Henry, and the picture would be perfect.

They were interrupted by a knock on the door. Firm and steady – just like Mother’s, and Regina pushed her chair back with a sigh. She was still not convinced that this wasn’t going to end in disaster, but unless she wanted to hide Emma in a closet, she was going to have to face this.

“Who’s that?” Emma sounded so confused, it was endearing.

“I apologise in advance for what might occur next,” Regina told her, as she moved around the table to get to the door, “It’s my mother.” She threw over her shoulder, frowning slightly at the scattered clothes on the living room floor.

Emma practically spluttered. “Oh shit.”

Swinging the door open, Regina offered a strained smile to the woman on the other side. “Mother,” she greeted, hand clutching the doorknob. “What a surprise.”

Cora’s eyes trailed over her daughter’s form, face immediately critical at Regina’s appearance. “Regina dear, I’ve been trying to call you, don’t you answer your phone anymore?” She brushed pass Regina into the apartment, high heels clicking on the hardwood floor. “And honestly, it’s ten o’clock, why are you not dressed yet?”

“Hello to you too, Mother,” Regina replied with a sigh as she closed the door behind her. She watched as her mother took in the scattered clothing on the floor, a disapproving sneer coming onto her face.

Cora’s back stiffened, “You have company, I suppose,” she frowned as she poked at Emma’s discarded dress with the toe of her heel.

Regina crossed the floor as she replied, moving towards the kitchen where Emma was hiding slightly behind the half-wall. “Emma is here, but I suspect Zelena already told you that.” She motioned for her to follow and offered Emma a supportive smile. “Emma, this is my mother, Cora Mills. Mother, this is Emma Swan.”

Emma immediately slipped off her chair, wiped her hand off on the sweater and stuck it out for Cora to shake. “Nice to meet you, Cora.”
Ignoring the offered hand, Cora said, “Mrs. Mills is just fine, thank you.”

“Mrs. Mills,” Emma confirmed and dropped her hand.

A silence erupted between the three women in the kitchen, and Regina shifted awkwardly on her feet. She wasn’t sure what to say to break the tension, but she tried to convey to Emma that everything was going to be just fine. “Did you finish your breakfast, Emma?” she eventually ended up saying, glancing at the empty plate Emma had left behind, before turning to Mother, “Emma was just about to leave to pick up her son,” she explained.

“Yes,” Cora stiffly said, “the six-year-old Henry. Zelena told me about him.”

Emma eyed Regina cautiously out of the corner of her eye and said, “He loves Regina. It was such a help when he was able to stay here when I worked last weekend.”

Cora raised an unamused eyebrow. “Your… bar-job, I suppose?” But her question left no room for an answer, just as the way she said the word ‘bar’ left no doubts in Regina’s mind about what her mother thought of Emma’s occupations. How much had Zelena told her anyway? Her sister, the gossip. “I gather it’s his artwork on the fridge? He needs to learn his proportions,” Cora added, as her eyes landed on Emma’s drawing which was still hanging on the fridge by three magnets.

Regina’s eyes met Emma’s and she had to bite her lip to keep herself from laughing. Of course Emma wasn’t the greatest at drawing, but it wasn’t that bad. At least Regina didn’t think so. Emma turned to her coffee again, cheeks flushing pink, and she finished it in a long drag.

Regina cleared her throat. “Emma,” she suggested softly, as the other woman placed the cup back on the table, “why don’t you grab your things and get going? I’ll meet you and Henry at the park later,” she finished. It was important to her that Emma knew she wanted to spend the day with them, still, and that she didn’t regret a single thing – even if her mother had showed up and sort of put a damper on things.

“Right,” Emma said, snapping her fingers, “I’ll just get my shit from your bedroom.” She brushed pass Regina and down the hall, and Regina watched her go, before she turned to look at her mother, who was watching her, unamused.

“Really, Regina,” she said with a sigh, as she sat down on a chair by the table and folded her hands neatly in front of her, “that’s the best you can do? I worry about your future, I really do.”

Turning to get a clean cup out of the cupboard, Regina moved to pour her mother some coffee as she spoke. “There’s nothing to worry about, Mother,” she breathed, “My future is looking better than ever.”

Cora stared at her critically, even as she placed the hot coffee in front of her. “If this is the sort of person you’re spending your free time with, how will I ever get a daughter-in-law and grandchildren? You should be spending your time at functionings, meeting a more,” she paused, searching for a word, “appropriate partner.”

“Mother…”

“What was wrong with Tamara?” Cora demanded to know, as she raised the cup to her lips, “She’s a CEO, Regina – a CEO!”

Regina sighed and took a seat in front of her, straining her ears for when Emma made her way down the hallway again. “She was also really boring, Mother,” she replied with a shrug, reaching for her own, now lukewarm, coffee.
Cora shook her head to herself. “You are just too keen on disobeying me. Why can’t you just do as I say for once?” Her eyes shone fiercely, and it was evident that she felt strongly about what she was saying; that she didn’t believe that there was anything wrong with what she demanded of her youngest daughter.

Regina stared right back, and she didn’t say anything, which was just as well, because Emma loudly announced her presence by stomping on the floor. “My Uber’s downstairs,” she said as she poked her head into the kitchen. There was this certain look of distress in her eyes, but she might also just be tired; after all, they hadn’t really slept much. “I grabbed a bag from your closet, I’ll have it back to you later.”

“Kiss Henry from me,” Regina heard herself reply, not even caring that her mother was sitting right there. “And call me.”

Emma saluted her, and she was out the door, high heels hanging by her fingers and feet bare, without saying another word. The door smacked close behind her, and Cora visibly jumped in her seat.

“See what I mean,” she said with a pointed look, “barbaric behaviour.”

Rolling her eyes inwardly – because she would never dare actually do so in front of her mother – Regina said, “Emma’s not barbaric, she’s really very sweet, which you would find out, if you decided to give her a chance.” She finished the last of her coffee and moved to pour herself a new cup. Her omelette was barely touched and it was probably cold now, but she couldn’t get herself to eat it when her mother was sitting right in front of her.

Cora’s jaw worked beneath her skin. “Be that as it may, why don’t you try giving Tamara another call? I’m sure she’d love to see you again. Then you can let Miss Swan and her son handle their own problems.” She flicked an invisible piece of fluff off her black blazer. “Honestly, Regina, you can’t save everybody, and some people are just beneath you.”

Regina placed her cup so harshly onto the table that a bit of coffee slushed over the sides. “Mother,” she hoarsely said. She did not have the patience for this right now; she wanted a shower, she wanted to eat her omelette, and she definitely wanted to call Kathryn or Marian or Zelena or somebody with whom she could share the amazingness of last night – and the realisation that had come following her newfound intimacy with Emma. “Emma is not beneath me,” she said, trying to calm herself down by taking steady breaths, “actually, she’s so far above me. She’s so good and so pure – something people like you and I will never even come close to being.”

“Is that so?” Cora arched an eyebrow.

“Yes,” Regina firmly replied with a clenched jaw, “and I’ll continue to be with Emma, with Henry, no matter what you say or might wish for me. I hope you’ll try to understand, because this is all I want for my life. To be happy. Henry and Emma can give me that,” she explained with her heart thudding so madly inside of her chest.

Cora huffed and swallowed loudly. “Oh please tell me you haven’t been so foolish.”

Regina paused. “What do you mean, Mother?”

“You’ve fallen in love with her.”

Staring at her mother, Regina had no idea what to say to her. Six words, and Cora had turned her world upside-down, stating emotions and feeling that Regina herself had not even dared to think of
or voice. Sure, she’d been aware of the fact that she was very fond of Emma, cared immensely about her and was very attracted to her, but… to be in love? That was on an entirely different level and such a word was so strong. It wasn’t a word, nor an emotion, that Regina just threw around for whomever. Was she really in love with Emma? She fell onto her seat with a sigh and a blush rising up her cheeks.

Cora pushed her chair back with a sigh. “Regina, you’ve always been too emotional,” she said as she stood up, “Cared too much about other people and too little about what they can do for you. It’s always been your problem.”

With a defiant look, Regina turned to her mother, “Emotions aren’t bad, Mother. They’re wonderful. I don’t expect you to understand that.”

“And I don’t expect you to understand what I’ve always wanted for you and why that is the most important thing, Regina,” she said, and her voice turned unusually soft. “I just expect you to see that I want what’s best for you.”

Pushing her chair back so she was on level with her mother, Regina stood straight and regal. “Emma’s what’s best for me.” She was certain of this, not too scared to say it aloud, because she wasn’t going to run anymore. “Take some time and do try to see that,” she added and then motioned towards the door, “Please see yourself out. I’m going to have a bath.”

And with those words, she left her mother alone in the kitchen and went down the hallway. She had some things to share with Emma later – no matter how scary they might be – and she needed a long hot bath before she could do that.

Chapter End Notes

I took all your thoughts into consideration when writing this chapter, and I do hope you liked it! It’s been a long time since I wrote smut, but it was fun. Also, Cora is still Cora, even if she’s not an idiot about Regina’s sexuality in this fic... She’s still going to have expectations for her daughter. Thus her reaction to Emma.

Please leave me your thoughts, they are always appreciated!
Emma

Chapter Summary

Cora’s words are ruminating in Emma’s head which results in not only one - but two serious conversations. Henry takes a bath.

Chapter Notes

For some reason this chapter kicked my butt – no matter how much I re-wrote and edited, I couldn’t seem to get it just right. Perhaps it’s those very serious conversations that made up the entirety of this chapter. Regardless, I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Emma spent the entire time – first in an Uber with a too chatty driver to get the Bug at Ruby’s (who was thankfully still snoring in the bedroom; Dorothy too) and then in her own car, finally wearing her sneakers and glasses instead of day-old contacts – being torn between two different emotions, as she drove to pick up Henry.

One of the emotions was pretty easy to pinpoint; she was happy. She was purely, undoubtedly happy. She was sore in parts of her body that hadn’t seen any action in years, and she had a bite mark on her thigh, and she smelled so unmistakably of Regina that she couldn’t stop herself from grinning goofily at no one when she sat in her car. Last night with Regina had been everything she’d pictured it would be – damn, that woman was the sexiest person Emma had ever been with, and God, she was talented beneath the sheets, just as she was everything else she did. She’d made Emma come so many times that she’d lost count, and when they had eventually fallen asleep, they’d cuddled up together, bodies sleek with sweat, and Emma had felt utter bliss settling over her. Now she was feeling tired, yes, from lack of sleep, but also just extremely grateful and happy.

Out of all the people that Regina could – without a doubt – get into bed with her, she’d chosen Emma. And it wasn’t just some one-time thing either, because it sure didn’t feel that way; not with the way Regina had been so open and honest with her, the way she’d smiled at Emma as she’d kissed her breasts, and there was just something so incredibly natural and relaxed about it all.

But then this morning… then this morning. Regina’s mother – Cora, nay, Mrs. Mills – had shown up and that really threw Emma for a loop. She’d known from Regina that her mother could be quite the hard-ass and that she had expectations for Regina to live up to, but Emma hadn’t had half a mind to imagine what she was really like. Emma had been with her fair share of horrible foster parents that should have never been allowed around kids, but Cora Mills was just frightening. Thankfully, Emma had not experienced that much of her foul mood, but it was enough to put her on edge.

Especially because it appeared that Cora Mills did not find her suitable for her daughter. That much had been evident when she’d not even wanted to shake her hand, and her condescending tone regarding everything in Emma’s life. Even Henry! Her kid, whom everyone loved. That really
made her blood boil, because no one was allowed to insinuate anything regarding Henry. And then she’d went into the bedroom, and even though she hadn’t wanted to listen in, she hadn’t been able not to.

Cora had talked about Regina finding someone appropriate for herself, someone up to Cora’s standards and the lives they led. Someone like that woman Regina had been on a date with – and it made sense to Emma now, the date, because of course Cora had been the one to orchestrate that – and damnit if it didn’t speak right to all of Emma’s own fears and doubts.

It was only a few weeks ago that she’d firmly believed that she’d never be good enough for Regina; that she was too young, too rough around the edges with her criminal past and her kid and her no-future jobs. She’d convinced herself of all these things, and she’d been somewhat okay with that, because to her it made sense. She wasn’t going to blame Regina for wanting something better when she could so easily have it, but now… Now Regina had convinced her that she didn’t want someone else, and that she didn’t really think there was someone ‘better’ and that Emma was good the way she was.

It just hurt to hear all of those things said aloud by someone else – all of her own worst fears and self-doubts and her most degrading thoughts. That was also why the second emotion was much harder to pinpoint. Was it hurt? Was it anger? Was it… sadness? Emma felt all of it simmer around inside of her head, and her heart and her stomach, and now she was supposed to pick up Henry and get him to the park, and then she was supposed to call Regina and they had to talk.

They had to talk.

Emma bit her lip as she parked the Bug outside of David and Mary Margaret’s house. She clutched the steering wheel and took a moment to calm herself. She could do all of those things, even if Cora’s words kept echoing on inside of her head. Henry – park – Regina – talk. Go, go, go.

She slipped out of the Bug and smacked the door close, before she made her way down the small path to the front door. Pressing her finger against the doorbell, she wished she’d showered maybe, even changed into her own clothes, but she’d had to leave Regina’s very suddenly, and her teeth tasted awful, but her clothes smelled wonderfully of Regina, so it was kind of hard to be too displeased about it.

She drew in a shaky breath and forced a smile onto her face. She couldn’t let it show what was going on inside of her head. Happy smiles, happy times. Henry was not to know any of this.

Mary Margaret was the one who opened the door, and Emma could tell that her foster mother was immediately aware that something was not quite right. Her bright smile – always that bright smile whenever she laid eyes on Emma – faltered and she ran her eyes over Emma’s body. “Sweetie?” Mary Margaret’s voice was soft and low, “What’s wrong, Emma?”

Emma wasn’t sure what did it; perhaps it was the fact that she was so fucking tired, or perhaps meeting Cora Mills had just really done a number on her, but she slipped into Mary Margaret’s arms and wrapped herself around the older woman. She was taller than her, but even so she felt small, and Mary Margaret patted her back and coddled her, and as Emma stood there, she was beginning to realise that perhaps it wasn’t hurt or anger or sadness. Perhaps it was fear. Perhaps Emma was just really fucking scared about all of the things she was feeling; things she’d never felt before, ever, and what if they were never reciprocated? She was in love with Regina, and was beginning to wonder if she’d ever get around to telling her.

“Emma,” Mary Margaret softly queried after a while – maybe it was thirty seconds, maybe it was five minutes, Emma wasn’t sure – and she pulled back and smiled gently up at Emma. “Do you
Something inside of Emma wanted to flee, wanted to grab Henry and run back to their own apartment and avoid whatever it was that Mary Margaret was offering her, because she could not handle it. She’d never been able to, and today was no different. But what if… what if she gave it a shot? Mary Margaret looked so concerned and like a parent, and Emma felt so small in her arms, and maybe what she really needed right now was exactly what her foster mother could give her.

Emma gave a meek nod and Mary Margaret smiled encouragingly before she closed the front door behind them and guided Emma down the hallway and into the living room. Henry and David were playing video games; the old PlayStation was hooked up to the TV and they were racing cars. They barely looked up as Mary Margaret pushed Emma onto to couch – the only reaction she got was when she stepped in front of the screen and they couldn’t see their game.

“Grams!” Henry breathed, his little fingers tugging wildly at the controller, “I can’t see. Gramps can’t win!”

David’s laughter roared, “I’ll beat you, kiddo, just you wait,” he nudged him with his elbow, “But seriously Mary Margaret, go away.”

Mary Margaret crossed her arms in front of her chest and tapped her foot. “David, take Henry to the playground down the street.”

It looked like David was going to object for a second there; his mouth fell open, and his confusion was evident, but the look in Mary Margaret’s eyes made him think twice. She gave a slight nod in Emma’s direction – and Emma was too tired and confused to even acknowledge it – and something seemed to dawn on her foster father. He dropped his controller to the floor and stood up. “Alright Henry, my man, we’re going to the playground!” He bent down and picked Henry off the floor, easily lifting the six-year-old scrawny kid, who dropped his controller as well. “Shoes, jacket, go,” he said as he put Henry back down and the two of them raced into the hallway.

Mary Margaret busied herself in the kitchen while they got ready to go. Emma watched the game over flash across the screen absentmindedly as she kicked off her sneakers and tucked her feet beneath herself in the sofa. When the door finally smacked close behind her foster father and her kid, Mary Margaret placed two big cups of steaming coffee in front of her and – uncommonly – took a seat in David’s chair so she could look straight at Emma.

“So,” the older woman said, and the wrinkles in the corners of her eyes crinkled, “you want to share with me what’s going on? I thought you were all supposed to go out and dance. Did that not go as it was supposed to?” She was so wonderfully naïve sometimes, and it was something Emma had always disliked about her, because it made the distance between them seem even bigger. If there was anything Emma was not, it was naïve. Even as a thirteen-year-old it had seemed like she was much more real about life than Mary Margaret would ever be. But it also had to be wonderful, to view life like that. It was kind of hard not to envy the older woman a little bit.

“Dancing was fine,” Emma commented, as petulant as always. She fidgeted with a loose hem on Regina’s sweater, twisting it around her finger until the limb whited, before reluctantly letting it go again.

Mary Margaret sighed. “Then what’s going on? You come here, looking all sad, and wearing something that’s most definitely not your clothes,” she paused, “You can tell me, you know.”

Falling backwards into the couch, Emma rested her head against the back of the couch and squeezed her eyes shut. Sure, Mary Margaret might say that she could tell her, but could she really?
Emma doubted that she’d even understand, because in Mary Margaret’s naïve and bubbly brain, things didn’t just go wrong, they always worked out. And Emma knew that if she told her, she’d have to deal with sighs and disappointment. Judgey, judgey, judgey. Mary Margaret had always been so easy to judge. Yet Emma had this urge, an urge to tell her, even though she wasn’t sure what would come of it. Taking in a deep breath, she acquiesced, “I went home with Regina last night.” There, she’d said it. Now she just had to wait for the inevitable reaction.

But nothing happened. Mary Margaret didn’t say a thing, and silence erupted between them; the only sound audible was the grandfather clock ticking in the hallway. Emma held her breath, waiting. Perhaps she should have been clearer about what she meant – in Mary Margaret’s innocent mind, going home with someone probably just meant crashing on the couch. Squeezing one eye open, Emma twisted her head to the side. Mary Margaret was sitting in her chair, one leg crossed over the other, and with her cup of coffee nestled in her hands, simply just watching her. There was not a flicker of disappointment or anger on her face, and honestly – it threw Emma for a loop.

“I went home with Regina, and we had magical, mind-blowing, crazy, orgasmic sex all night,” Emma offered next, staring straight at her foster mother, daring her to a reaction.

Mary Margaret took a long sip of her coffee, gulping down the hot liquid loudly, before saying, “Okay,” she nodded, “and was it not everything you expected it to be? It sounds like it was.”

Pulling herself into a sitting position, Emma stared at her foster mother. This was seriously not a conversation she’d ever wished to have with a parental figure, but there was just something about Mary Margaret’s reaction – or perhaps lack thereof – which caused her to throttle on. “That’s it? That’s all you have to say?”

Humming, the older woman said. “Well, I can’t say I’m surprised, although it baffles me that it seems like you only just slept together last night. I had thought it would have already happened, you seem to…” she paused, probably searching for the right word, “care a lot about each other.”

Emma was really not sure how this conversation ended up going in this direction, but she decided to just go with it. Reaching for her cup of coffee, she said, “I do… care a lot about her.”

“Then what happened?” Mary Margaret softly questioned, and there was something so earnest in her eyes, Emma just couldn’t keep this to herself.

The blonde fidgeted with the cup in her hand for a few seconds, watching the liquid swirl around as she searched for the right words. “I… I went home with her,” she eventually settled with, deciding to start over, to make sense of it, “and uh, we were together-”

“The crazy, orgasmic sex, right?” Mary Margaret teased her, and there was a glimmer in her eyes.

Emma moaned, “Yes, it was great, but…” she trailed off and raised the cup to her lips, taking a drag of coffee and relinquishing to the taste of it on her tongue. “It was like, more, y’know? Like… unlike anything I’ve ever tried before. It was so intimate and just intense, but then in a really comforting way…” Her finger found the loose hem again and started twirling it around. “I mean, I just felt so… safe.”

Nodding, Mary Margaret seemed to ponder her words over before saying anything. Emma didn’t mind the silence, and actually she was finding that she didn’t quite mind talking like this with the other woman. She wasn’t sure what had happened, but Mary Margaret didn’t judge her for this; she didn’t tell her to act differently or scold her like a child. She was looking at her like an adult, having a real adult conversation, and it was so different that Emma wasn’t even sure how to feel about it – except. Except, pleased.
“But that’s good, right?” Mary Margaret eventually said, “I mean, safe is good? So why are you upset?”

“Because her mother showed up,” Emma whispered, and suddenly that hem on the sweater was much more interesting than anything else. “This morning, and... she uh, she didn’t seem like she really cared for me as mhh, what do you say? A *partner* for her daughter.” She paused, finally raising her eyes to look at Mary Margaret, “She has really high expectations of Regina, and she’s not a very nice person, I think.”

Mary Margaret nodded her head softly, sipping her coffee. “So now what? You’re worried that she’ll convince Regina not to see you again, or what? I’m not sure I’m following, sweetie.”

Emma groaned and placed her cup back on the table. She wished she could just open her brain and let her Mary Margaret look into it; that would be much easier than trying to explain that jumbled mess of thoughts and emotions she was currently trying to weave through. “No!”

“You gotta talk to me, Emma,” Mary Margaret said as she placed her own coffee cup on the table as well. She leaned forward and reached for both of Emma’s hands, cradling them inside of her own. “I really want to help you, but you have to explain it to me first.”

Emma whined, “What if Regina realises that all of those things that had mother said about me are true? What if she realises that I’m not good enough for her, and that she can do much better, huh? I *just* let my guard down, I *just* let her in, and what if I lose her now, I can’t…” she trailed off, suddenly aware that tears were pooling in her eyes, close to brimming over, “I can’t…”

Mary Margaret’s features softened and she stroked Emma’s hands carefully. “Sweetie,” she whispered, “I don’t think you need to worry about *any* of that.” She slipped off the chair and squeezed her way in between Emma and the arm of the couch, so she could wrap an arm around Emma’s back and pull her close. Emma fell into the older woman, forehead resting on her chest, and suddenly it wasn’t so bad to feel like a child again. “Any fool can see how much Regina cares about you. I didn’t understand it at first, but what does it matter if anyone else gets it? As long as it’s right for you, and Emma... I think it is so right for you.”

Tears were streaming down her face now, but Emma’s head remained buried in Mary Margaret’s clothes. She found comfort in the other woman, in a way she had hardly ever experienced, and the arm around her shoulders was warm and protective. “I just feel so inadequate. All those things that I dislike most about myself... that woman just said them, you know? And if she can see them, then what mustn’t Regina think?”

“Hey,” Mary Margaret breathed, and she tugged Emma’s head back, so their eyes could meet, “you’re not inadequate, okay? You’re *Emma*. And you’re *wonderful*.”

“But-”

Mary Margaret shook her head, “No buts. I can’t say I know Regina very well, but I got to spend some time with her yesterday,” she begun. Her eyelashes fluttered against her pale cheeks, and there was a tentative smile on her face. “Is she who I imagined you with? Gosh, no, but Emma – she cares so much about you. It was so easy for me to tell. And you know…” she shook her head to herself, “I might have imagined all sorts of things for you, but really, what I want for you is to be happy.”

Licking her lips, Emma whispered. “Really?”

“Emma,” Mary Margaret mumbled and pressed a kiss to her forehead, “you’re my *daughter*. Oh
goodness, I know it hasn’t been easy, but I remember so clearly the day that you came to live with us. Henry, your social worker, brought you here, and you were so tiny and angry and cold.” She sighed heavily, a finger sweeping across Emma’s cheek to catch a tear, “I went to wrap a blanket around you, and you resisted. You were so stiff, but I just knew…” she trailed off, “I just knew, right then and there, that David and I had found our daughter.”

Emma stared at the older woman in silence, watched as she, too, had a few tears gather in her eyes. She wasn’t sure what to say, she just watched her. Mary Margaret. Her foster parent. Her… mother.

Mary Margaret forced a watery smile. “So Emma, all I want is for you to be happy, you understand? And Regina, she… she makes you happy, right? I mean, it’s clear she adores Henry and you, so what more could a mother possibly ask for?”

Reaching a finger up, Emma brushed it beneath her glasses to rub both of her eyes. “Yeah,” she breathed, still kind of shaken up by this entire conversation; a conversation that had turned out so differently than what she had thought it would. “I… I’m in love with her, you know.”

“Oh Emma!” Mary Margaret raised a hand to cover her mouth. “That’s wonderful,” she laughed.

“Yeah,” Emma chuckled too. She wasn’t entirely sure that it was, but perhaps it would do her some good to try out Mary Margaret’s naïve positivity for once.

Mary Margaret continued, “So have you told her yet?”

Shaking her head, Emma pulled back slightly and said, “No, I… I haven’t, actually.”

“Then perhaps you should?” Mary Margaret softly wondered. Her hand somehow found Emma’s again, and it was warm and comforting, and everything that Emma needed at the moment.

“Perhaps,” Emma whispered as she stared in wonderment at their intertwined fingers in her lap. “Thank you,” she breathed next, raising her eyes to look at Mary Margaret who had such a soft blush to her cheeks, her greying hair framing her face, and her eyes shining happily. “Mom.”

Mary Margaret’s eyes watered again and she gasped and enveloped Emma in another hug, pulling her close. “You’re welcome,” she whispered into her neck, and perhaps it made Emma feel a bit uncomfortable, because there were so many emotions at play, but she also knew that it was because she’d used that word. The M-word. She’d never once used it before, so she figured she should give the other woman some leeway. She let herself be wrapped in caring arms as she wrapped her own ones around her mother, too.

She was going to need all the love and care she could get, because she was pretty certain that she was going to have another impossible heart-to-heart later, and she was hoping against all odds, that it’d turn out just as good as this one had.

Henry was a bouncing ball of excitement next to her as he knocked on the door, his little backpack hanging from his shoulders. Emma clutched his hand tightly, nervously tripping on her feet as she waited for the door to open. She was kind of worried that perhaps Regina wouldn’t answer it, that perhaps she wasn’t home, because they hadn’t agreed to this – they’d agreed she’d call and they’d meet at the park, but Emma hadn’t called, and this was definitely not the park.

Footsteps could be heard on the other side of the door, and when it swung open, Henry wasted no time bouncing forward to wrap his arms around Regina’s legs. “R’gina,” he cheered, staring
lovingly up at her, as her hand came down to caress his head, “I missed you.”

“Henry,” she breathed; she looked surprised, but there was also a fond look in her eyes, “Emma. What are you doing here?”

“Change of plans,” Emma brusquely answered as she brushed into the apartment and closed the door behind her. “No park today,” she added as she crossed her arms in front of her chest, “That okay?”

Regina’s brow was furrowed, but she didn’t look angry to see Emma there, she didn’t look like she’d rather not have her there, which was probably a good thing. “Sure, I…” she paused, “It’s good to see you,” she settled for, her lips – naked today – curling into a smile.

For a second, Emma almost got lost in the shimmer of her brown eyes, in the wish to crash her lips against hers again. She’d missed her lips. God, how had she missed her lips already? “Uhm, Kid,” she said, tearing herself away and reaching for Henry’s backpack, “why don’t you go take a bath in Regina’s tub, hm? You’re all dirty from the playground and you can try your new shark.”

Henry’s eyes lit up immediately and he looked to Regina, his lips already pulling into a pout, even though it was probably not necessary at all. Emma had a strong feeling that Regina would have a tough time denying him anything. “Can I?”

“Sure,” Regina said and she kneeled down in front of him. “Do you remember where everything is? The plug, and the special bubbles that I showed you?”

Nodding, Henry said, “It’s in the cupboard, the lowest shelf. The plug goes in and only one scoop of bubbles,” he proudly rattled off, puffing out his chest.

Regina’s smile grew bigger, “Good boy,” she told him, before giving him a small pat on the butt to guide him down the hallway.

“Call if you need anything,” Emma hollered after him, but he didn’t reply – he swept right into the bedroom and it didn’t take more than a minute before they heard the distinct sound of the tub being filled with water.

Turning to Emma, Regina’s hand found its usual place on her stomach; her nervous gesture, the palm pressing against her belly. “Now he’s occupied,” she arched an eyebrow, having clearly guessed Emma’s intentions with the bath, “you want to sit?”

They sat down on the couch together, not entirely apart, but not entirely close together either, and Emma stroked her sweaty palms against her bare knees. She couldn’t help her nerves; after her talk with Mary Margaret she was determined to have this conversation with Regina. She wasn’t sure where to start though… they’d sort of left things at a weird place this morning, and how exactly did one pick up on that? It wasn’t that things between them had been weird per say, but it was more the presence of Regina’s mother that had made things take an awkward turn. Before Cora had showed up, she hadn’t really felt that weirdness. She should probably attempt to get back to that feeling, how she felt when she woke up with Regina wrapped around her.

Thankfully, Regina appeared to want to avoid that weird and awkward place as well, and she went right into business. “So it appears everything went smoothly picking Henry up?” She licked her lips. “I apologise if Mother upset you this morning. She has a tendency to put her nose in places where it doesn’t belong.”

Emma couldn’t help the small smile that crept onto her face at that comment. “No, it’s…” she
begun to say, but then she caught herself. It wasn’t okay, what Cora had said. It had upset Emma, to the point where she cried in her mother’s arms, and Mary Margaret had made her promise not to swipe it off out of fear of losing Regina. So she told herself that she could be honest with the other woman, that she didn’t have to hide, and moreover – she didn’t want to. If they were truly going to attempt to be together, honesty had to come first, even if it was scary. “…actually,” she softly begun again, heart thudding madly in her chest, “it’s not really okay. I got kinda upset.”

Regina’s brown eyes widened slightly, her lips parting to form a small ‘o’. “I see…” she straightened her back. “Do you… want to tell me what made you upset?”

She’d really rather not bring it up again, but Emma knew that she had to. “It’s kinda tough,” she begun, raising her eyes to meet Regina’s, “to hear someone point out all the things you’re insecure about. Especially in front of the one person you really don’t want to, I don’t know, change your mind about you…” she trailed off, hoping against all odds that some of those words even made vaguely sense to Regina. “Do you feel me?”

“I’m not…” Regina paused, brow furrowed and tongue darting out to wet her lips. “Well, actually. I guess. She said things about you in regards to me?” There was that strange sense of wonder in her eyes at this point, the thing that Emma could never really place, but that felt so enthralling and comforting. And the woman who was usually so eloquent and well-spoken was making half-sentences, not knowing where to go. Emma always seemed to forget that there were so many things going on beneath the surface and that Regina was a master at hiding her emotions. Except Emma was starting to figure out how to find them.

The blonde nodded, fingers curling around the wool of her sweater. “Well. Yeah,” she shrugged sheepishly. “She said all those things about me, like, I have no future, and perhaps I’m too young for you, and I have a kid, and you could do much better, and I just kept thinking about that woman you were on a date with, and it made me realise that she’s right, you know? There is probably someone out there much better suited for you.” She licked her lips, eyes moving from her curled fingers, to the cotton of the couch, to a spot right next to Regina’s ear, before finally meeting her eyes once more. It was kind of scary to look at her; it was too frightening what might be found when she did.

Regina was about to open her mouth to reply to that – even if she appeared slightly shaken after Emma’s rambled confession – but the patting of bare feet coming down the hallway tore the two of them out of their conversation, and they turned in unison to find Henry trodding into the living room. He’d wrapped a giant white towel around his little body – it was trailing slightly after him as he walked – and it appeared he’d already been halfway buried in the bubbles, because he was trailing water and soap everywhere.

Emma snorted. “Uhm Kid? You know you’re supposed to keep the water in the tub, right?”

Henry kneeled down in front of his backpack on the floor and offered her a truly tired expression. If he’d known how to roll his eyes properly, he’d probably have done that, too. It was clear that he thought she was being ridiculous. “I forgot my shark,” he sassily commented as he rummaged through his backpack to find his new favourite toy that Emma had packed in there as a part of her plan – the rest of his stuff was still packed in the trunk of the Bug. He stood up, clutching the shark in his fingers. “I’ll be in my bath,” he informed them next, before he turned around with a huff and walked down the hallway with his head held high.

Biting her lip, Emma watched him go with laughter bubbling in his chest. It was odd, but there was something so Regina about his expression and the way he’d looked at her, and it was kind of frightening. She turned to Regina instead, and found that the other woman appeared to be holding
back a laugh as well. “He’s been spending way too much time with you,” Emma offered before she broke into a deep belly laugh.

“Hey,” Regina looked offended, but it was all for show; there was probably not a doubt in the other woman’s mind that Emma was right. She laughed too, fondly smiling at the kid and his ways. “There’s nothing wrong with a relaxing bath, you know.”

Emma wiggled her eyebrows. “No, I know. You let me have one, remember?”

Regina was still smiling when the atmosphere flipped again, “Em-ma,” she breathed, and her hand was clutching Emma’s before the blonde even had time to process the action. “You might be right,” she whispered, her fingers interlocking with Emma’s, “and there might be someone out there who – on paper – appears to be a much more suitable partner for me. My mother certainly seems to think so,” she added, and Emma felt her heart sink to the pit of her stomach.

Had Regina realised this while Emma had been away? Had her mother convinced her that a CEO-woman was much better than a bail bonds person-slash-bouncer-slash-outreach person? Emma certainly wouldn’t blame her if that was the case.

“But,” Regina added, and her fingers squeezed tightly around Emma’s, “what does it matter if I only want you? On paper we might look entirely wrong for each other, but when it fits together in the real world… that’s kind of the point, isn’t it?”

Emma couldn’t help the swell of hope that erupted in her chest at those words. Perhaps Regina wasn’t blowing her off, perhaps Regina didn’t care what her mother thought. Maybe she just wanted Emma. Maybe… maybe. Emma blinked. “Do you really think so? Do you actually think that we fit together? On paper we might look entirely wrong for each other, but when it fits together in the real world… that’s kind of the point, isn’t it?”

Regina’s hand was still clutching hers, warm and tight, but also so comforting, “We need to work on that, yes,” she nodded, her brown eyes big and open and honest. “Like we’re doing right now? Otherwise it’ll never work out, but that goes for every relationship, Emma. And… I do want to do this with you. Nothing has ever made more sense to me.”

Watching her, Emma was not the least bit unsure that Regina really meant what she was saying. It was so clear to her, because her eyes were portraying her deepest emotions; Emma could see it. The seriousness, the desire to really do this. It was scary, but it was real. “But what… what about your mother?” She heard herself question, because that was truly one of the reasons for this conversation, “How can we ever be together if she doesn’t approve?”

“Let me worry about Mother,” Regina firmly said, “She doesn’t get to decide who I enter into a relationship with. And I’m sure she’ll like you fine when she gets to know you. It was the same with Walsh. She wasn’t exactly fond of him in the beginning either.”

Emma nodded. It wasn’t ideal by any means – but did she really want Regina’s mother to be the deciding factor in all of this? If Regina didn’t care about those things – she just said that she wanted Emma – then why would Emma let them come between them? She damn well wanted Regina, to the point where last night had been some kind of perfection, and now Regina was telling her that they could be together, have that – and the trips to the park, the dinners, the cozy family time, the kisses, the tucking in Henry – all the time. Why would Emma question that?

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But what if she runs again. Yes, that was why. She had to make absolutely certain – there was just no other way.

“And you’re not going to run off again, are you?” Emma whispered, staring fiercely at the older
woman through her black rimmed glasses. “I mean, if we do this – and damn, I really fucking wanna do this, Regina – then I have to know you won’t leave me hanging. Not only for Henry, but also…” she trailed off, shrugging her shoulders and offering the brunette a soft smile, “for me.”

Regina swallowed and her fingers crept closer around Emma’s wrist, tugging her nearer on the couch. “I promise. I don’t want to run,” she whispered. Her free hand came up to cup Emma’s cheek gently, her brown eyes darting between Emma’s green ones and her lips and even down to her fingers on her wrist.

Emma breathed. “Okay.”

“Yes?” Regina’s eyes shone with hopefulness.

“Yeah,” Emma confirmed, nodding her head and letting her lips curl upwards into a smile on their own accord. She couldn’t help it, not when Regina sat in front of her and said those utterly perfect words. She slipped her own hand up and nestled it around Regina’s shoulder, fingers finding strays of brown hair. She grinned.

Regina brushed her thumb across Emma’s cheekbone. “And no more accepting numbers from strange women at work, Miss Swan,” she said. Her tone was light, it was meant to be a joke, but Emma could hear the fear and the worry behind the statement. “I don’t share very well.”

Somehow that didn’t surprise Emma at all. “I don’t want numbers from strange women at work, Regina,” she honestly breathed – she hadn’t wanted Jasmine’s number the last time, but she’d somehow ended up with it (she should probably make sure that didn’t happen again). “Not when I… well, not when I have you, I guess.”

“You have me,” Regina confirmed, eyes fluttering shut.

Emma felt her heartbeat speed up again, knowing that she had to say the words that had been ruminating in the back of her mind for a few days now. She might as well, in the name of true honesty and all. Plus, it was going to feel good, she was sure of it. “You’re like,” she begun, mentally cursing her own way with words which was practically a dead-end road. “…the most beautiful woman I have ever met, and ever since I met you, I have wanted you. Not just because your body is banging, because duh, it is,” she made a show of trailing her gaze down Regina’s torso before meeting her eyes again, “but like… your entire person is beautiful, and I can’t think of anyone I’d rather spend my time with.”

Regina’s breath hitched, “Emma…”

“Schuss,” Emma whispered, breath spilling across her lips as she tried to get her bearings, “You’re amazing to Henry, and you take care of him, and you take care of me, and I’m not interested in anyone else.” She underlined that part, mostly because she knew that it was important to Regina, because the other woman had insecurities, but also because of the next thing she had to add. “I’m in love with you, your person, and that’s incredible, and I know we have stuff to figure out, but damnit… I want to figure them out with you.”

Finished, Emma smiled at the other woman, her hand still in Regina’s hair, and their faces still mere inches apart. The air between them had tensed, and Regina just stared at her, stiff, with her hand still on Emma’s cheek, immovably resting there. Emma could feel how her heart had slowed down now that she had gotten everything off her chest; she felt lighter somehow, better, and now it was beating steadily inside her body, and everything appeared much easier.

Regina finally moved; her eyes fell shut, for just a second, before they opened again, and they were
shining with tears. “You’re…” she paused, breath ragged, “you’re in love with me?”

“What?” Emma cheekily responded. She felt like she was going to burst with excitement.

“You just said that… you’re in love with me.” Regina clarified, and her brown eyes were so serious, even shiny with tears, that Emma wanted to wrap her arms around her and hug her close – and never let her go.

Emma nodded as she withdrew her hand from Regina’s hair. She placed it upon Regina’s on her own cheek and gently moved it to the side to press a kiss on the inside of her palm. “That’s because I am,” she whispered, letting their joined hands fall to her lap.

Regina’s brow was furrowed. “You haven’t said…”

Resisting the urge to break into a laugh because Regina was truly cute when she was so baffled, Emma replied, “Well, I kind of thought that that was obvious.”

“It’s not,” Regina quickly replied, her head jerking upwards to stare firmly at Emma.

The blonde shrugged. “Well, now you then. I’m in love with you.” She couldn’t stop smiling at Regina, and she was aware that she probably looked like a complete fool, but the look on the other woman’s face was worth it all. Regina looked so stunned, so incredibly baffled, yet utterly happy, to hear those words coming from Emma’s mouth and directed at her. Emma was certain that this – this moment right here – was the most beautiful she had ever seen Regina.

Closing the distance between them, Regina bent her head and pulled Emma’s face towards her own. Their lips met, and Emma smiled into the kiss as Regina’s arms came up to wound themselves around her neck. Her glasses were practically squished against her face, but the only thing she felt was Regina’s warm tongue slipping into her mouth as the brunette kept her close. There was a low hum in her throat, and Emma was right back to the night before. Except right now she was only intoxicated by Regina and the conversation they’d just had – as well as all of the possibilities that their future – god their future – held. Together.

She felt Regina’s fingers rake through her hair and they broke apart, noses pressed together, and breaths mingling in the small space between them. “I’m in love with you also, you idiot,” Regina breathlessly murmured, before her lips were on Emma’s again, and the younger woman had no time to react. All she could do was kiss Regina back with all she was worth and let the words rest between them. She was in love with Regina. Regina was in love with her. They were in love with each other.

They broke apart when an enormous splash followed by Henry’s loud yelp was heard throughout the otherwise pretty silent apartment. Regina pulled back, eyes wide, though slightly dazed, and Emma shot off the couch.

“I uuuh,” she motioned vaguely towards the bathroom, mentally trying to put out the fire roaring in her belly, “I better check your entire bathroom hasn’t been turned into a pool.”

Regina smiled – even at the threat of a bathroom renovation – and said, “How about I make us some tea and we pop in a movie once Henry’s all dry and clothed?”

“That sounds awesome,” Emma grinned goofily.

And just like that, another loud splash was heard from the bathroom and Emma took off running.
Chapter End Notes

Not much left of this story now, so if you have any thoughts, suggestions, things you need/want to see etc. please let me know!
Emma and Regina have one last hurdle to overcome. Henry is a charmer.

So they were together now. Emma called them girlfriends, even if that phrase was a bit too juvenile in Regina’s opinion. It didn’t really matter much though; what mattered was that they were a couple. A couple with all of the things that such a label entailed. Regina had thought that she’d feel… more different. That things would be different. She was happier, that was for certain; there was this light bubbly feeling inside of her chest that she couldn’t quell, not that she really wanted to. Things were different in that aspect that she didn’t have to dream of being with Emma, she didn’t have to pretend not to want it, and she didn’t have to contemplate whether or not Emma felt the same as she did.

Because Emma did feel the same as she did. I’m in love with you, she’d said. That idiot. She’d made it seem like it was something Regina should have figured out a long time ago, as if it had been obvious. It hadn’t been. It hadn’t. Even if Kathryn groaned out a finally when Regina called her on Sunday.

What didn’t change was the way that they acted. Perhaps that should have been their first clue that they’d behaved like a couple for quite sometime – Emma said something about Mulan and calling them out or something – but it was just so wonderful that she didn’t have time to think too much about it. They still texted each other the same amount, they still acted the same way around each other, everything still felt natural and wonderful.

They hadn’t told Henry yet – it was too quickly, and Emma was still uncertain about how to tell him – so of course Regina couldn’t get away with touching Emma quite as much as she wanted to; and her fingers were really itching for the other woman every time she was even close to her. They hadn’t even spent that much more time together yet, and it was only because Regina knew that Emma was busy at The Hills, settling into her new job, meeting all of the kids, that she didn’t feel too worried about it.

It was a new feeling, this kind of trust in another person. She’d had that with Mal before the other woman had stomped all over it and ruined Regina for years to come, but with Emma – now – it was natural, because she knew that Emma would never trample her.

“Oh Regina, can I pull this one off?” Kathryn pulled her out of her thoughts, holding out a dress from Regina’s closet and looking at her hopefully.

Regina pushed her reading glasses onto her nose – she’d been immersed in a case for work, all the while looking up recipes that Zelena’s picky kids wouldn’t scrunch their fair noses at. “It’s a bit too bold for you,” she commented, eyes quickly scanning the lines of dresses in the open closet behind her friend, “try that dark blue one to the left. And do hurry up? I thought you were meant to be meeting Frederick at six.”
Kathryn’s eyes skittered to the clock on the wall, and realising the time she gave out a low yelp and grabbed the dress in question from the rack. “You’re the best,” she blew a kiss and hurried into Regina’s bathroom – leaving the door open to keep their conversation – to change.

With a sigh, Regina pushed the case away from her on the bed and gabbed her iPad again. “Do you think Anniston and Montgomery will eat spinach?”

There was a humming sound from the bathroom as Kathryn contemplated that. “I wouldn’t count on it. One time, when I babysat, I made them spaghetti and meatballs and they flat-out refused to eat it.” She paused as there was the sound of a zipper. “They uh, they ended up eating plain spaghetti with ketchup.”

Regina wrinkled her nose. “Thankfully Henry is not such a terror. He’s liked everything I’ve cooked him so far,” she commented, before putting her iPad down to rake her brain for a meal that would both be acceptable to her mother and to her niece and nephew.

“Henry’s a good kid, huh,” Kathryn stuck her head into the bedroom again, hands raised to braid her hair behind her back. “You could have done a lot worse for a future step-kid, you know.” She stepped back into the bathroom.

She couldn’t ignore the way her chest fluttered by the mere sound of that word – step-kid – in regards to her relationship with Henry, but she couldn’t afford to get ahead of herself. “Do calm down, Kat, we’ve just officially started dating this weekend,” Regina mused, but she was glad Kathryn wasn’t in the room to see the smile on her face.

Kathryn was silent for a little while, but Regina could imagine the eye roll that she was sure Kathryn was giving her. “Whatever Regina, you guys are like, meant to be together. She’s the only one who stands up to your impossible moods.” She entered the bedroom again, holding out two lipsticks. “Nude or red?”

Regina regarded them both. “Nude.”

“Thanks,” Kathryn offered as she slipped into the bathroom again, “I don’t care what you say. I saw it the second you guys met. She was wearing that faux leather jacket—”

“-atrocious-” Regina interjected.

“-and she was like,” Kathryn changed her voice, making it deeper as she mimicked Emma, “hey lady, a thank you would be nice,” she laughed, her laughter bubbling with excitement and happiness, “and that Robin dude never saw it coming.”

Regina slipped off the bed, leaning herself against the doorway as she eyed Kathryn critically through the mirror. “His name wasn’t Robin,” she mused, swiping her glasses off her nose to get a better look at her oldest friend.

Kathryn capped the lipstick and turned around, smacking her lips. “What do you say?” She held out her arms, raising to her toes as she offered Regina a smile.

“You look gorgeous,” Regina replied. Her dress was a tight fit on Kathryn, but it did wonders for her figure. “He’s gonna love it.”

Smirking, Kathryn said, “I really so hope that this can be it, y’know?” She slipped past Regina into the bedroom and stuck her feet into the black heels she’d been wearing at work all day. “Who would have thought? All of us with someone at the same time.” She sighed happily. “For so long it’s just been Zelena and her trained monkey.”
“Trust me,” Regina said as she perched down on the side of the bed, “if my sister can find a man, so can you.” She furrowed her brow, “Although now that you mention it, I’m still uncertain that she didn’t put a spell on him or something.”

Kathryn laughed; mocking Zelena had always been a favourite pastime of hers, especially because Zelena was always so ready to lay it on everybody else. “He loves her,” she smiled. She reached for her jacket, thrown carelessly on the bed, and her purse, before turning to gaze at herself in the mirror. “I do look hot, don’t I?”

Regina didn’t even bother looking up from her iPad, once more searching for a proper meal to serve her guests this weekend. “Smouldering.” She turned to her phone next, when it started ringing, and couldn’t stop her lips from curling into a smile when she saw Emma written so clearly there. She pulled it to her. “It’s Emma. Have fun on your date, Kat,” she said dismissively, before swiping her finger across the screen and leaning back against the headboard. “Emma.”

Kathryn stuck her tongue out at her and left the room, undoubtedly making her own way out of the apartment.

Emma was breathless as she answered, “Hi babe. I’m not disturbing you, am I?”

“No,” Regina sighed happily; too engrossed in the other woman to scold her for the pet name. “I’m just trying to figure out what to make on Saturday. Henry eats everything, doesn’t he?”

“Yeah, I’m pretty sure,” Emma replied, and it sounded like she was busy on the other end. There was some banging and the sound of running water. “I’m actually making dinner right now. The kid’s all consumed in cartoons.”

Regina could just picture her; stumbling around in her small kitchen, clumsily trying to cook them a meal with her phone tucked between her shoulder and ear. “And what’s on the menu tonight?”

Emma laughed. “For Henry? Mac and cheese.”

Regina rolled her eyes. “Do remember to feed him vegetables, Emma. He’s a growing boy.” She couldn’t help herself; she knew Emma was more than capable of taking care of Henry, after all she had been doing it successfully for six years. But she couldn’t help but worry. “Vegetables are good for you too actually,” she added as an afterthought.

“So I’ve been told,” Emma teased and there was a certain lilt to her voice that made Regina warm in all the right places. “But actually…” she trailed off on the other end, and it appeared that she had stopped cooking for a second, “I was hoping that there might be something else on the menu for me tonight?”

Snorting at Emma’s attempt at flirting, Regina said, “Oh yeah? And what might that be, Miss Swan?” She could feel the anticipation in her fingertips though, and that familiar tingle between her legs.

Emma breathed heavily into the phone. “I don’t know? Call me Miss Swan again.”

Once more, Regina couldn’t hold back her chuckle. “What time do you want you dinner delivered,” she throatily replied, before adding, “Miss Swan?”

“Around nine? The kid’ll be out like a light then.” Emma replied.

Regina felt like her face was going to be sore from all the smiling she’d been doing these past few days. “I can’t wait to see you,” she honestly revealed while she was already mentally going through
her underwear drawer, contemplating what she should wear, and also – perhaps more importantly –
contemplating what she wanted to do to Emma the second she had her in bed again.

Emma’s smile could be heard through the phone. “I miss you.”

“I miss you too, Emma.”

———-

*Emma*: Do you think we should tell Henry this weekend? After dinner with your family? I’m pretty
sure he’s gonna be over the moon.

*Regina*: That is entirely up to you, *Emma*. I would love to tell your son about the new changes in
our relationship. I don’t want to pressure you though.

*Emma*: I think we should do it.

*Emma*: Tell him I mean.

*Emma*: Although we should probably also do it.

*Regina*: Get your head out of the gutter, *Miss Swan*.

*Emma*: God, I miss you.

*Regina*: I’ll see you tomorrow.

———-

Family dinner was… interesting. That was the word Regina would use to describe it. Zelena’s kids
were terrors from the second they arrived, and they used every opportunity to get the better of
Henry, who was just smaller and sweeter than them. Walsh tried to man the kids by drinking his
beer on the couch, and he was doing well, all things considered.

Emma had been a nervous wreck since she and Henry arrived a few hours earlier. She tried not to
let it show just how much the impending meeting worried her, but Regina could easily tell. She
was getting quite familiar with the many mannerisms of *Emma Swan*.

Regina was worried too, but not for all the same reasons that Emma was. Of course it would be
nice if Cora decided she liked Emma and thus laid off her, but Regina really couldn’t be bothered
to let her mother’s opinion influence this part of her life anymore. Emma wasn’t worth the risk.
Instead this dinner was meant to show her mother that she and Emma were serious and there was
nothing she could do about it.

Her mother and sister were busy before-dinner drinking rosé, and she and Emma were in the
kitchen. There wasn’t really anything left to do; she’d prepared everything before *Emma* and Henry
arrived earlier, but it was somehow safer to play busy, half-shielded behind the half-wall, and get a
few peaceful moments to themselves.

*Emma* pushed Regina softly against the far left counter, pressing their lips together in a chaste kiss.
“Tell me it’s gonna be okay,” the blonde whispered, their noses barely brushing.

Regina fondly reached her arms out and wound them around *Emma’s* neck. It was clear to her that
Emma had made a real effort with her looks today, dressing in something she probably thought
Cora would approve of – and it warmed Regina’s heart that the blonde would think to do such a
thing, even if she would have never expected it of her. She liked *Emma* just the way she was, and
that was also one of the things that she wanted to shove in her mother’s face. “It’s going to be okay,” she promised, eyes locked firmly on Emma’s, “And remember, Miss Swan, that no matter how today goes – I’m not about to let go of you.”

A faint blush rose on Emma’s cheeks and her eyes fell to the floor.

“I realise I’ve been hard to read until now,” Regina continued in a whisper, reaching her finger out to gently pry Emma’s face up, so she could look her in the eyes. “And if you ever feel doubts again, just tell me. I promise you, it has had nothing to do with you or any of the things you dislike about yourself,” she paused, trying to convey via her eyes just how much she meant these words, and Emma drew in a sharp breath, “it has had all to do with me and my own insecurities.”

Emma gave a meek nod, bending her head slightly to press a kiss to Regina’s palm. “I guess I’m just really scared because you seem so out of my league.”

Regina couldn’t help the small chuckle that escaped her lips, “I promise you, Emma, if anyone’s out of anyone’s league,” she pressed a kiss to her lips, “you’re out of mine.”

Pulling back, Emma reached for the watermelon salad and said, “Dinner’s good to go?”

Regina checked the timer on the oven and smiled, “Yes. You can get everyone to the table, please.”

Emma gave her a thumbs up and a huge smile, and was off with the salad bowl in a hurry. Regina made sure that everything else was settled while her guests took their seats, and Regina finally took her dish out of the oven. There was moussaka for the adults – and Henry probably; he was never too shy to taste anything new – and she’d made tomato soup and grilled cheeses (that had been Emma’s brilliant idea) to make sure that Anniston and Montgomery also had something to eat. Hopefully their taste buds wouldn’t object too much to that. Then there was the salad, the bread and tzatziki. She hoped at least the moussaka would be good enough for her mother.

“Dinner’s served,” she happily announced as she entered the living room at last, and she was pleased to see that there was a seat left for her between Emma and Zelena. Henry was on Emma’s other side, and Anniston was on his other side. Hopefully, everyone would be comfortable throughout the night. She’d also made dessert, so they were going to be there awhile.

They ate and small-talked; most of the sounds in the room were the knives and forks scraping against the plate. Emma was a quick eater, as always, and Regina noticed how her mother seemed to wrinkle her nose at that, but thankfully Emma didn’t see, and Regina just glared at Cora. Henry seemed to enjoy everything she’d made, and Anniston and Montgomery dipped their grilled cheeses in the soup and ate as well. All in all, so far the evening was a success food-wise.

Cora only ate one serving, but both Walsh and Emma went back for seconds.

“This is awesome, Regina,” Emma smiled, and she made a show of scooping up a huge pile of the salad as well, “and see, vegetables too, hm?”

“What is this, R’gina?” Henry piped up from Emma’s other side. It was the first time he’d spoken this evening, in the presence of all of them, and Emma had warned Regina that he might react that way with too many vaguely unfamiliar people. He was poking his fork into the last piece of moussaka; he’d already cleared his plate of everything else.

Regina leaned over slightly and smiled at him, “It’s called moussaka, Henry,” she explained, “It’s a greek dish with eggplants and other vegetables. And the white thing you ate is greek too, with
cucumbers and yoghurt. That’s called *tzatziki*.”

Henry’s eyes were wide as he tried out the word, pronouncing it entirely wrong, “Taaaztiki?” He grinned at her, “It’s all really good, R’gina. You cook so good.”

“Cook well, Kid,” Emma corrected him as she forked a piece of feta and popped it into her mouth. “And you really do, babe, your cooking is awesome.”

Cora placed her wine glass on the table and turned to Henry with a slightly surprised look on her face. “You like all this food, Henry?” Her eyes scanned over the various dishes before settling on Montgomery and Anniston’s plate of grilled cheeses. She wrinkled her nose again. “You don’t think it’s for grown-ups?”

Shaking his head, Henry puffed out his chest and said, “No, Mrs. Cora, I like all of R’gina’s food!”

“Interesting,” Cora commented as she reached for her wine again.

Regina looked pointedly at her sister. “Yes, well, not all children are such picky eaters as your grandchildren,” she commented, before reaching for her own glass of white. “Therefore I made special food for them, lest all of us were succumbed to eating tomato soup and grilled cheeses.”

Emma interjected, “Not that that would have been bad *at all*. I have from reliable sources that your grilled cheeses are, quote unquote *awesome*.” She nudged Henry with her elbow and grinned down at him.

Zelena glared at Regina. “Booohoo sis, they’re not such picky eaters.”

“Zelena honestly, they really are,” Cora shook her head and looked disapprovingly at her two grandchildren, who were all too consumed in their iPhones beneath the table. Regina had not even had the energy to reprimand them on behalf of Zelena, because she usually didn’t allow phones at the table. However, her sister and Walsh did things slightly different, and thus Anniston and Montgomery were too caught up in their games to even notice that they were the subject of conversation.

Henry scooped the last moussaka into his mouth and chewed slowly, before swallowing and saying, “I *like* R’gina’s cooking! Everything she cooks.”

Cora raised an eyebrow and turned to him with a stiff smile. “You do?”

“Hmmm,” Henry nodded as he reached for his juice. “Her lasagna is my favourite.”

Regina couldn’t help the surge of warmth that spread through her chest at that statement. She’d always enjoyed cooking, but having someone to cook for – and someone who loved her cooking at that – was quite a fantastic feeling. She hadn’t had that for so long, unless she had guests over. And Henry and Emma were such a responsive audience to her cooking; they never ceased to tell her how much they enjoyed it, and Emma always went in for seconds, sometimes thirds.

Cora’s smile turned slightly bigger, and Regina bit her lip in thought. Was Cora perhaps… enjoying this? “The lasagna? Really?” Cora eyed Regina carefully before turning back to look at Henry. “That’s an old family recipe, you know?”

Emma ran a hand through Henry’s mop of brown hair. “Did you hear that kid? A *family recipe*. How cool is *that*?”

Henry stared up at Cora with wide eyes. “Is it older mister Henry’s?”
As Cora offered her youngest daughter a slightly wide-eyed look – so vague that only Regina who knew her mother better than anyone noticed it – she replied to Henry. “No actually,” she leaned slightly forward, hovering over the table to be more on eye level with Henry, “my family.” She paused, and Regina recognised the proud twinkle in her eye. “Regina adds chilli flakes for that extra kick of course, but I reckon it’s still my recipe?” She turned to Regina once more, questions written across her face.

Regina jutted out her chin, “Of course it is, Mother.” She saw the look on Cora’s face – pleased with Regina’s answer – and she couldn’t ignore the pang in her chest; proud of her mother for actually acting like a decent human being towards Henry right now, and happy for herself and her relationship with Emma that things were actually going okay. She felt certain that this could work, that her mother might not entirely understand her relationship with Emma, but that she might just respect and accept it.

Henry grinned widely at Cora before proudly announcing, “Then I love your lasagna, too!”

Emma laughed, patting his head and caressing his face with care. “Alright Kid, enough with the flattering for now,” she pushed her chair back with a sheepish grin, “Who wants dessert?”

“God yes,” Zelena moaned, patting her flat stomach and brushing her hair behind her shoulder, “I only ate one serving to make room for Regina’s dessert. What are we having?”

Regina and Emma cleared the table – and Henry helped, blessed his little heart – and they had dessert and the rest of the evening was almost okay. Her mother didn’t say much else, mostly just watched from her seat on the couch, continuously sipping her wine, while the kids played and the rest of them talked. Eventually Henry was trying to stay awake, tucked between Regina and Emma on the couch. His head was resting on Emma’s shoulder, but his little hand had sought Regina’s in her lap, and she was brushing her thumb soothingly across the back of his hand. She was very aware that her mother’s eyes were trained on them, on their little entity, and Regina herself was warmed at the feeling of these two people so close to her; the two people who’d flipped her world around and were becoming the two people in the world whom Regina cared most about.

Anniston and Montgomery were yawning too, so Zelena and Walsh announced their departure. There were goodbyes and Zelena promising to call her tomorrow, and once they had left, Regina offered her mother one last glass of wine and Emma a scotch.

“I uh, I think I better get Henry home too,” Emma whispered, her fingers treading through his brown hair as he half-way slept against her.

Regina felt disappointment settle in her chest. It had probably been presumptuous, but she’d kind of just figured that Henry and Emma would stay – it had been a couple of days since they last saw each other. “Yes,” she answered, trying to hide her disappointment, “of course.” But then she paused, not able to let go of that feeling in her chest; that she really wanted them there. And then she thought of her and Emma’s promises to each other, especially the promise of honesty, and why didn’t she just ask Emma to stay? It wasn’t like she was going to lose face, goodness, it was Emma. If she wanted to go home tonight, she’d have a good reason. So Regina drew in a breath and gathered all her courage. “Unless… you want to stay?” She offered a smile. “If that’s the case, you can put Henry to sleep in the guest room and we can do breakfast tomorrow, and… you know. Tell him.”

A truly beautiful smile lit up Emma’s face at that, and she slipped off the couch and scooped Henry into her arms. “Awesome,” she pressed a kiss to his forehead. “I already packed a bag, but I didn’t wanna assume.”
Regina warmed at that, and she watched Emma stride off towards the bathroom with Henry in her arms. She was pretty sure she had a smile on her face, but she didn’t even bother to wipe it off her face when she turned back to look at her mother and the door closed behind Emma and Henry. Cora was watching her, lips thin in a smile, and legs crossed daintily in front of her.

“Regina,” she started.

With a sigh, Regina placed her scotch on the table in front of her. “Mother. If you have nothing nice to say, I’d really rather you didn’t say anything.”

With a raised eyebrow, Cora leaned slightly forward. “I was actually going to say,” she paused, the words lingering in the air between them, and the lines near her eyes more visible than ever. “That I better understand the appeal you see in Miss Swan. I’m not going to say that you couldn’t do better, but she has a … certain charm, doesn’t she?”

Regina hummed in agreement, heart thudding in her chest. “That she does.”

“And Henry,” Cora continued, and Regina swore she saw fondness in her eyes at that, “he really is a wonderful kid.”

“Mother,” Regina begun, because she recognised this for what it was; her mother had given her a window to speak as well as the only blessing she was going to get. But it was also clear to her that this was the last they were going to speak of it; they were having this conversation now and then Cora was going to accept it. “I want this. There’s not a doubt in my mind. This is not just a way to pass time for me, and I realise that Emma comes with Henry as well, but I don’t mind that. In fact, I love it, because he’s a great kid. I couldn’t imagine someone out there better suited for me. Do you understand that?”

Cora gave a curt nod. “Very well,” she said as she brushed her palms off in her slacks. “I think I’ll be heading home now then, to let you spend the evening with your girlfriend. Do you mind terribly to call me a cab?”

“Of course not, Mother.” Regina replied and was quick to find her phone while Cora slipped into her jacket and gathered her purse. Their goodbye was said with kisses on the cheek, and when Cora left the apartment, Regina locked the door behind her and leaned her back against it with a sigh. That went well. Dare she even say good? It was better than expected. As long as Cora kept her thoughts to herself from now on – unless they were good thoughts – Regina could see her and Emma and Henry being happy.

Whatever the future had in store for them, it was going to be a wonderful journey. Right now though – that journey started with her cleaning up the rest of the mess in the kitchen.

Regina took the last of the glasses, leaving only her own and Emma’s and the tumbler of scotch, and ventured into the kitchen. She rinsed everything off and stacked the dishwasher, lost in her own thoughts, and suddenly feeling the events of the evening settling around her limbs. She was tired; she’d been on edge all day, even if she hadn’t noticed it, and now she just wanted to curl up next to Emma and breathe her in.

She felt a pair of strong arms wrap around her from behind, and she leaned back, dropping the glass back on the counter and settling herself against Emma with a contented hum. Her arms came up to rest upon Emma’s on her stomach, and she felt the blonde woman bend her head to press kisses to her neck.

“Did your mother leave?” Emma murmured against her neck, breath tingly and pleasant on her
Regina hummed and turned her head to the side, meeting Emma’s lips in a brief kiss. “She did. Not before letting me know in her own way that we’re going to be just fine,” she said, nuzzling her nose to Emma’s and kissing her yet again. Goodness, she’d missed her.

Emma grinned against her lips. “I charmed her? Score for me!”

Chuckling against her mouth, Regina turned around in her arms. “She’s charmed, I’m sure,” she whispered, and Emma pushed her even further against the kitchen counter, their fronts pressed together and Emma’s arms snaked possessively around her midsection. Regina cupped her jaw, pulling her face even closer and kissing her languidly, and not at all chaste. She felt her body hum in agreement, pleased to have Emma so close, and her nipples were already straining against her bra, her skin growing hotter as Emma’s lips trailed off her mouth, down her neck and dipping towards her cleavage.

“Come to bed with me,” Emma suggested, her mouth hot on Regina’s skin as she used her teeth to undo the first button on Regina’s dress shirt. “We can clean up tomorrow. Live a little dangerously,” she teased, green eyes darting up to meet Regina’s.

The brunette chuckled, breath already growing shallower, and she pressed a hand to the back of Emma’s neck to keep up the other woman’s ministrations against her body, “Do shut up, Miss Swan,” she snarled, fingers curling in her hair.

Emma chuckled against her breasts. “If you don’t want me to talk, what else do you want me to do?” She nudged the cup of Regina’s bra to the side with her nose, and a nipple popped out. Emma wasted no time wrapping her hot mouth around it and Regina moaned.

She pulled her head back and forced their eyes to meet. “Take me into the bedroom,” she demanded, and before she knew what had happened, Emma had cupped her ass and hoisted her into the air. She wrapped her legs around the blonde woman, momentarily distracted by the display of strong biceps right in front of her, but then Emma was bending her neck backwards as she walked them down the hallway, and Regina leaned forward, fusing their mouths together in a deep kiss.

Teeth and tongue and lips. Goodness, Regina could get used to this.

Chapter End Notes

Tada! Only the epilogue left. Please let me know what you thought of this – I do love to read your comments. Nothing fuels my writing like that. I’m still not entirely sure whose perspective the epilogue should be from (I know what’s going to happen); if it should follow the rhythm of the story and end with Emma again (thus giving her a chapter more than Regina), or if I should do Regina’s point of view. I even toyed with making it from Henry’s point of view, although that would present some other challenges in regards to what has to happen. So I guess I’m just curious to know what you all think? Thank you!
Epilogue

Chapter Summary

Henry finally gets his waterpark vacation.

Chapter Notes

This chapter contains a very small mentioning of sex with a strap-on, but none of it is explicit, and there’s nothing graphic otherwise. Just thought I would mention it, as it can upset some people. Without further ado – please enjoy the epilogue of Gallium & Yttrium!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

EMMA

“Ma, Ma, look over there! There’s a shark, look!”

Henry trotted off in front of her, his little hand letting go of hers as his eyes settled on the huge plastic shark above the kiddie pool. He was wearing his big boy trunks – the ones she gave him for his birthday, what felt like just weeks ago, but at the same time felt like years ago – and he was wearing his Frozen arm floats and flip flops as he tried to take in everything around them.

Emma had her eyes set on a nice set of lounge chairs not far from the kiddie pool, and she changed course, determined to get there before anyone else. “Kid come on, you need sunscreen before you go in,” she called after him and Henry turned to her with a huge smile.

He’d been talking nonstop about their waterpark vacation for two weeks, and he’d had his bag packed the last five days. He’d been adamant that he didn’t need more than just his trunks and his arms floats, so Emma had had to be the responsible adult and pack clothes and sunscreen and other essentials like that. They’d arrived last evening after driving for the entire day, and Henry had been up around five this morning, determined to get them to the pool before the sun was even up.

Emma had convinced him to have breakfast first and she’d spent the better part of her morning blowing air into all his different floats – he also had one that went around his waist – and now she really just needed to find a lounge chair, throw down their stuff and get into the water with her kid.

“Mamma, hurry up,” Henry pouted as she took a seat on one of the chairs and set her bag down on the chair next to hers. He dutifully took a seat in front of her and was expectantly waiting for her to get a move on.

Chuckling, Emma slipped out of her white t-shirt and used the elastic band around her wrist to tie her hair into a bun on top of her head. “You gotta wait, Kid, we need sunscreen first,” she told him as she slipped on her sunglasses and took a look around the place.

There were families and kids everywhere, and even if the clock was barely ten there was already a
heavy activity in the kiddie pool – Emma planned to teach Henry very quickly just the basics of being in the water – and she glanced longingly towards some of the water slides and the heated tubs, and she just couldn’t wait to try out some of those, too. Hopefully Henry would feel secure enough in the water to go on some of the slides with her.

“Can I get ice cream later?” Henry questioned next, his eyes solely focused on the pool where all of the other kids seemed to be having so much fun. Emma could tell that other parents were also trying to teach their kids how to swim in the shallow end, and she sincerely hoped that Henry was better than some of those other kids. But of course he would be, he was her kid after all. Mary Margaret had been nothing but firm in her beliefs that Henry would be swimming wonderfully by the end of the first day. David had been a bit more realistic of Henry’s achievements and packed a frisbee and a ball for them to play with.

They were going to be here for a week, so hopefully he’d be swimming like a fish once they were ready to go back to Boston and their every-day life; at least that was a goal that Emma was confident was actually achievable. Henry started back in school in two weeks, and Emma was back at work at The Hills next week, and she couldn’t believe that the summer was almost over. It felt like it had just begun. She really couldn’t quite phantom that this was their life right now; so much had changed in the last six months, and Emma had a hard time understanding that it wasn’t just going to slip through her fingers and disappear again like all other good things in her life had always done.

Sometimes it still felt like she didn’t deserve any of it, and that she wasn’t good enough for it, but thankfully those self-doubts were appearing less and less, until Emma almost couldn’t remember the last time she’d thought them, let alone voiced them. Old habits die hard after all, but she was starting to see that life could offer her wonderful things as well; that it didn’t just have to be about surviving and making ends meet, but that it could be about living too. She had faith in her own happiness – and most importantly her deserving of happiness – a lot more these days.

“Daydreaming again, are we?”

Emma couldn’t hide her smile when her girlfriend placed her bag on the ground next to them and took a seat on the spare lounge chair. “Just appreciating life,” Emma replied as she leaned forward and pressed a kiss to Regina’s lips.

Regina chuckled throatily and reached into the bag she’d just arrived with. “Found the sunscreen, can’t have Henry burning already on the first day because we’re too lazy to go back for it,” she smiled and opened the lid. She squeezed a good dollop into her hand and started warming it between her palms. “Henry come here,” she told him, and he followed orders immediately; switched from Emma’s lounge chair to Regina’s and let her rub his back with sunscreen.

“Remember to put a good amount on his nose,” Emma said as she watched the two people she cared most about in the world – and her heart swelled just by the thought of that – interact on the chair next to hers. To her, there was something so wonderful about watching how comfortable Regina and Henry had grown with each other these past three months. There really had been no doubt in her mind when Henry told her that he wanted Regina to tag along on their waterpark vacation and if they could ask her to join them. She hadn’t wanted to leave Regina for a week – because she was not good at not seeing her girlfriend for an extended period of time, she’d come to learn – and she was happy when Regina accepted Henry’s proposal immediately. Her adorable son had been the one to ask her to join them; adamant that it was his present, and therefore his duty to invite Regina along.

Henry stuck his tongue out at her, “Will you come in with me, Ma?”
Emma’s eyes trailed to Regina and the brunette gave a small, encouraging smile. “Sure thing Kid, gotta see if those floats hold you up. Maybe you’re too heavy, huh?” She wriggled her eyebrows at him and stood up to slip out of her shorts as well.

Regina handed her the bottle of lotion, her dark eyes sweeping appreciatively over Emma’s body in the white bikini, as she said. “Don’t think you’re going in without sunscreen either, Emma,” she warned, and Emma dutifully started rubbing her own arms and stomach with sunscreen too.

Soon after, both she and Henry were ready to get in the pool, and Regina pressed a kiss to Emma’s lips, swiping the sunglasses off her face. “Have fun,” she whispered, brown eyes shining with mirth as she leaned back in her lounge chair and slipped a book out of her giant bag. “I’ll be in with you later. Right now I just want to find out what happens with my murder mystery.”

Emma poked her thigh with her toe. “No rush. We’ll be right here whenever you want,” she promised, and then she was grabbing Henry’s hand and helping him into the pool.

The water was nice – cooling and refreshing in the warm heat with the sun beaming hotly down on them – and Henry took to this new challenge like he did everything else: With bravery and vigour. He was able to reach the bottom in the most shallow end, and Emma had originally wanted to take her time with him, letting him slowly adjust to what was going to be happening this day, but he went for the deeper end and she could do nothing but follow.

As soon as his legs couldn’t touch the bottom anymore, he started waddling his feet, swinging his arms back and forth, even as his arm floats held his head steadily above the water. He laughed and held onto Emma’s shoulder with one hand, and Emma couldn’t help but glance towards Regina – who was very much not reading her murder mystery but watching the two of them instead with a happy smile on her face and brown eyes hidden beneath designer sunglasses.

“You’re doing real good, Kid,” Emma said to him, teeth digging into her lower lip as she held back a laugh. “What do you say we try really learning, huh? You’re gonna be on your stomach and I’ll show you how to do the motions.”

Henry nodded eagerly, and Emma reached a hand under his stomach and helped guide him through the motions of learning how to swim.

REGINA

“He went out like a light, yeah?” Emma piped up, as Regina made her way out of Henry’s room, tucking the door carefully closed behind her. Her girlfriend was just finishing up cleaning the kitchen after their dinner, and Regina could make out two wine glasses and a bottle of red placed on the small table outside on their balcony. The wind swept coolly in from the outside, and the sun was still up, although not burning as brightly as it had been all day when they’d been in the water.

Regina swept across the small floor of their rented room and wrapped her arms around Emma from behind, burying her head in the dent between her shoulder blades. “He’s had an eventful day,” she murmured into the soft cotton of Emma’s tank top. “We only managed two pages of Cinderella before he was snoring.”

Emma dropped the dishtowel to the counter top and settled against Regina’s body with a sigh. “I can’t believe he’s almost swimming already. Mary Margaret will be so grandmotherly proud when I show her pictures.”
Chuckling into Emma’s back, Regina said, “And you cleaned up everything. What did I ever do to deserve you?”

“Hey,” Emma whispered, turning her head to the side to rest her forehead against Regina’s temple, “you and the kid made me burgers for dinner, the least I could do was clean up while you took care of toothbrushing and bedtime.”

Regina felt her eyes flutter shut and she breathed in the scent she had come to find the most comforting in the world; the scent of Emma Swan. She pulled back. “Join me on the balcony?” Her fingers lingered on Emma’s waist, and if someone had told her a year ago that she’d have this feeling at this point in her life, she’d have laughed at them and told them to bugger off.

“I just need to freshen up a bit,” Emma said, and her eyes held so many promises when she pulled back and turned to their small bathroom.

Picking up her cell phone from the counter, Regina grabbed a light sweater from the couch and made her way onto the balcony. There was light chatter from other balconies as she settled into one of the chairs there, pouring herself and Emma a glass of wine, before checking her phone. There were messages from her mother and from Marian – with a picture attached of Roland and Mulan enjoying ice creams in the park – and even a message from Mary Margaret, reminding her to make sure that Emma remembered to put sunscreen on herself and not just Henry.

She typed back a reply to her mother-in-law, because goodness, that was how she thought of Mary Margaret these days, before typing back a reply to her mother as well, confirming that all three of them would be over for dinner once they were back in Boston. She took a sip of her wine, savouring the bitterness on her tongue, just as a text came through from Zelena.

*Have you asked her yet?*

Regina put her phone away, determined to reply her sister later. She kind of regretted voicing her thoughts to Zelena; letting her in on her plans and dreams for the future, because not only was Zelena supportive – which was truly wonderful – but she was also a pester who would not leave Regina alone for long to get the courage to actually do it.

It wasn’t even that big of a deal, because it felt right for them, it felt like a good fit. And she was pretty sure that Emma was going to agree, as long as Henry was okay with it, which Regina was certain that he would be. Henry spent much time alone with her, so it wasn’t weird. They knew her at the school, that she was allowed to pick up Henry, and Emma hardly ever needed anyone to watch Henry when she worked anymore, because he’d just spend the night with Regina. Their friends only needed to babysit whenever she and Emma had a date night, and that was more than okay with them.

Regina still sometimes felt like her happiness was going to be ripped away from her, now that she finally had it; that it was too good to be true, and that she’d do something to push Emma away. That Emma would discover there was a wall she couldn’t break down, or that they’d disagree on something they wouldn’t be able to put behind them. But then she looked at Emma – sometimes looked at Henry, too – and realised that there was nothing they couldn’t work through together. This was it, it was the right fit for them, which was why Regina just needed the right moment to ask Emma a question that would make their relationship move forward.

Emma fell into the other seat with a happy sigh, immediately reaching for her glass of wine. “Ah, that’s the stuff,” she smiled, taking a long gulp of the red liquid. Her face was scrubbed clean, her hair had been combed and she’d changed into a loose pyjama shirt and fluffy socks, which clearly showed Regina that she was only wearing a pair of black lace panties. “It really takes a lot out of a
person, being with a kid in a waterpark, huh.”

With a chuckle, Regina said, “Yes, especially your kid, I’d imagine. You could slow down and let him splash around with the other kids from time to time. We’re right there next to the pool if anything happens.”

Offering her a sheepish grin, Emma replied, “Yeah, but I kinda want to hang out with him. Soon school will start back up, and this year it’s for real school, and he’ll be so busy growing up, and soon he’ll be taking people on dates and going off to college and getting married, and what am I going to think then?” There was a smile on her face, but her eyes shone with real worry, and Regina couldn’t help but reach a hand across to gently pat her naked thigh.

“Hopefully it’s not going to go that quickly, and who knows, maybe you’ll have other kids to annoy at that point,” she heard herself murmur, dark eyes locking to Emma’s beautiful green ones. She retreated her hand, returning it to her own lap and stared into the evening with a wistful sigh. It wasn’t a conversation they’d attempted to have before, but Regina was pretty sure they were on the same page about their future – especially the part about it being their future, a future where they’d without a doubt be together.

Emma’s lips curled into a smile around her wine glass. “Hopefully so, life’s only good when you have kids to annoy and scar for life.”

Tsk-ing, Regina shook her head at her girlfriend, “I don’t doubt you believe so, dear.”

There was a small stretch of silence next; Regina contemplated how to bridge off of this conversation and into the one she really wanted to have right now, while she side-eyed Emma, who was looking towards the horizon, where the sun was slowly starting to set for the day. There was something so unbelievably beautiful about Emma like this; tired from a long day, face clean and with gentle features, and Regina wanted to experience it every evening until the end of her life.

“Is that something you want though?” Emma suddenly asked her, head turning to the side and eyes wide with questions. “More kids to annoy and stuff? Because…” she paused, brow furrowing, “it’s something I want for sure.”

Slipping her hand towards Emma’s lap, Regina’s fingers found hers and they intertwined. “Yes, darling,” she whispered, face glowing with warmth, “it’s definitely something I want. With you.” She let the words slip past her lips so easily, like it had never been a problem for her to share her thoughts and feelings before, and it was something they’d tried to get better at, really worked for, and now it almost came as easy to them as breathing. Regina found, their relationship was even better because of all that honesty.

Emma squeezed her hand. “Good.”

Drawing in a deep breath, Regina told herself that now was the right time to get on with it. She could hear her sister in the back of her mind, breathing down her neck about grabbing her happy ending and her not getting any younger, and Regina told herself that Zelena was right. What better time was there than the present? “Actually…” she begun, teeth digging out to bite her bottom lip as she discarded her glass on the table. “There was something I wanted to talk to you about.”

It spoke wonders about how far they had come that Emma didn’t immediately flinch and think it was going to be something bad. It spoke wonders of their relationship and Emma’s thoughts about herself, and it made Regina so happy to know that the other woman had finally started to realise what Regina saw when she looked at her. “Yeah?” Emma discarded her glass as well and turned over in the chair, bending her knee and propping a foot up on the seat. “What’s up?”
Regina fidgeted with the hem on her dress for a second, trying to gather her thoughts inside her mind; Emma silently just watched her, giving her a moment, just as the other woman had come to realise that Regina often needed when she wanted to talk about something. Clearing her throat, Regina finally met Emma’s eyes. “Well, it’s because, I was thinking of making a few changes in my apartment actually, all those rooms just sitting there, and Henry has his room that he always stays in, it’s the same one as Zelena’s kids, but I just thought that if I were to…” she swallowed, aware that she was getting off track and spiralling just a bit, and Emma was just looking at her with worry and slight amusement.

“Yeah?” Emma murmured and reached a hand over to stop Regina’s fidgeting fingers.

Regina breathed in through her nose, jaw set. “Well if I were to make some changes, what do you think Henry would say to have his own room with his own things and his name on the door.” She paused, eyes wide as she looked at Emma, “It can be decorated any way he wants it to be, I’ll do it, and he already has his toothbrush there, and and I mean, so do you, with a bunch of stuff in my drawers. And I really wouldn’t mind if… if there were to be,” she paused, flinching at herself and how incoherent she sounded, “more… stuff… in my drawers.”

Emma looked at her for a few seconds, as Regina waited with baited breath, and her eyes trailed over Regina’s features carefully as the wheels turned inside her mind. Regina could tell that she was thinking, trying to make sense of everything she, herself, had just put on her, and it was clear to her that Emma was trying to… something. A sly grin broke out on the blonde’s face and she started laughing. Regina stared at her in confusion and went back to twisting the fabric of her dress around her fingers. Emma laughed for a little while longer; it wasn’t malicious, of course it wasn’t, but she was thoroughly amused, and Regina could do nothing but wait it out. As Emma lifted a finger and exaggeratedly wiped it beneath her eyes, Regina was done waiting.

She huffed, “Are you quite done yet?”

Mirth shone in Emma’s eyes as she reached a hand over and cupped Regina’s cheek, thus forcing their eyes to meet. ‘I’m sorry,” she whispered, her tongue darting out to wet her lips in the most distracting manner, “but is this your way of asking us if we want to move in with you?”

Her heart was having a blast inside of her chest, beating wildly as she tried to stay calm and not let her nerves – the nerves she knew were stupid and pointless, because this was just Emma – grow out of control. “Yes,” she forced herself to answer as she stared into Emma’s eyes without blinking.

A beautiful smile broke out on Emma’s face at that. “You don’t need to dangle a bunch of sweet sticks with treats in front of us,” Emma whispered, her fingers stroking gently alongside Regina’s jaw, thumb darting up to brush briefly against her slightly parted lips. “You can just ask, you know.”

Regina huffed again and conceded. “Fine,” she said, “Emma, will you and Henry move in with me?”

“Yes,” Emma breathed without a second thought, and she pulled Regina’s face closer, leaning forward to brush their lips together in a sweet kiss. “I mean, I’ll have to check with the kid for sure, but I think we can safely assume that it’s gonna be a fucking yes.”

Chuckling against Emma’s lips, Regina let her hands travel from the other woman’s hands up her arms as she smiled against her lips. “More time with his R’gina,” she grinned, “I believe he’ll be okay with that.”

Emma pulled back, fondly brushing her nose against Regina’s briefly, before retreating to her own
seat and picking up her wine again. Regina felt a sense of calm settle over her, a calm she hadn’t felt since two days ago when Zelena made her promise to talk to Emma while they were away. She had been so silly with her nervousness, because while she had been fairly certain that Emma was going to say yes, she still felt those doubts in the back of her mind, those doubts that she would probably never be able to quell fully; the what ifs, the feeling that perhaps things were going too fast for Emma, and perhaps Regina was reading things all wrong. But no. Emma and Henry were moving in, and that felt pretty great.

She picked up her own wine glass as well and took a long, calming sip of it. “Perhaps you’ll be able to cut back some of your hours working,” she suggested next, happiness bubbling in her stomach, threatening to spill out, “Either at the club or at the firm. Not The Hills of course.”

“Never The Hills,” Emma smiled, tracing a finger around the rim of her glass, “But I do want to pay my share. Half of the expenses, Regina, we don’t want to mooch off of you.”

“I wouldn’t have it any other way,” Regina promised, even though she’d gladly pay for everything if she knew that Emma would accept it. Of course she understood why Emma wanted to pay half – it was only natural – but she really just hoped that Emma would be able to have more weekends without work for them to enjoy together.

Emma took a drag of her wine. “But you know,” she begun, resting the glass on her thigh and leaning back happily in her seat, “this vacation was the reason that I even started working at GaY.” She scrunched her nose up, brow furrowed, “and I’d sort of been thinking that… even though the money is certainly nice, maybe it’s time to quit and spend my weekends with the kid and you.”

Regina raised an eyebrow, “Quit Gallium & Yttrium? Are you sure? I know you quite enjoy working there.”

Licking her lips, Emma said. “Yeah but… the weekends are precious, y’know? And with uh, moving… finances should be better regardless.”

Placing her glass on the table, Regina removed Emma’s glass from her fingers as well and wrapped the blonde’s hands in her own. She could tell that the idea of quitting Gallium & Yttrium was making Emma sad, but it was also evident that it was something she’d thought a lot about. And, Regina realised, it had only been so she could take Henry on the vacation that they were currently enjoying. A vacation that Emma had managed to save up for without accepting Regina’s help at all; Regina had only paid for herself when Henry had asked her if she’d like to come.

“I certainly wouldn’t complain to have you more energised and awake during the weekends,” Regina breathed as she pulled her closer, fingers soothingly stroking the back of Emma’s hands. “But it’s entirely up to you. We’ll make do regardless.”

Emma bit her lip in thought, “I think it’s the right thing to do,” she settled for, nodding her head as she shuffled even closer to Regina, “I mean, time with you and the kid… that’s everything. And it’s not necessary. I shouldn’t wear myself out.”

Regina shook her head, “Certainly not for me and Henry’s sakes. We’d rather have you home with us.” She smiled at the thought of that. Home. It was going to be a home for all three of them, together. She was really quite giddy at the idea, although she’d never say that aloud. She bit her lip to keep herself from grinning too widely.

Slipping off her chair, Emma made her way onto Regina’s, her legs going through the space between the armrests and the seat, straddling her as she pressed her lips to Regina’s. “I’d rather be home too,” she whispered, the term not having gone unnoticed by her. Her hands were warm on
Regina’s shoulders, seeping through the sweater she’d thrown on earlier, and her breath was tickling her lips.

“It seems rather fitting, doesn’t it?” Regina whispered next, trying to ignore the wonderful heat against her body; the heat of Emma through her thin lace panties. It was quite distracting and Regina thought of taking her into the bedroom to enjoy their first night vacationing.

“Mh,” Emma murmured as she nudged Regina’s head to the side and placed open-mouthed kisses on her neck. Quite distracting, too. “What does, baby?”

Regina let out a breathy sigh, trying to remember the point she was going to make about Emma quitting her job. Those kisses were really making it difficult though, along with Emma’s traveling hands, which had now, somehow, found their way up beneath the sweater and was palming her breasts. “Uh,” she closed her eyes, “you quitting GaY, because…” she moaned as Emma pinched her nipple through the fabric of her dress, “because… we uh, we met there. And now we’re here, so…”

Emma pulled back slightly, resting her forehead against Regina’s with a sheepish grin. “It’s served its purpose, huh?” She squeezed Regina’s breasts and ground her hips gently, “Givin’ me some sugar.”

With a chuckle, Regina tilted her head and sought out Emma’s lips for a kiss. Her arms wound around her neck, fingers tangling in the already messy bun of her hair, and she breathed in the smell of her girlfriend on vacation; Emma Swan mixed with chlorine, sunscreen and sunlight, tasting slightly of ice cream and Regina’s own salsa mixed with red wine. She opened her mouth and invited Emma’s tongue into it, feeling it scrape across the roof of her mouth as her skin rose with goosebumps and Emma’s hips started rocking into her even more. She could feel heat coil in her own belly; eager and anticipating what they could get up to next.

“Did you buy that thing we talked about?” Emma breathlessly whispered into her ear as she retracted her mouth from Regina’s and nuzzled her nose against her skin.

Nodding, Regina hummed in reply, thinking about that thing she’d packed in the bottom of her suitcase, afraid that a snooping Henry would find it and make an uncomfortable situation. It was purple, glittery and ridiculous, but it was the one Emma had wanted, and honestly, Regina didn’t mind as long as Emma was the one person wearing it to use on her.

Emma’s breath hitched too, and Regina could feel her excitement. “Did you bring it?” was her next question, and as if Regina needed more encouragement, she ground her hips down even further, as if to demonstrate what she could do with a strap-on.

Regina moaned and used a hand to unbutton the top button on Emma’s pyjamas. “In my suitcase,” she murmured, leaning over to trace her tongue over the top of Emma’s breasts; she was wearing nothing underneath, dangerously underdressed and teasing Regina in all her sexy and attractive ways.

A small moan escaped Emma’s throat as Regina’s tongue dipped lower to taste a nipple. “Bedroom,” she commandeered, and she was off Regina’s lap and pulling the older woman with her towards the other room in a flash. Regina laughed and went willingly, wine and phone forgotten on the balcony as the door closed behind them.

HENRY

He was pretty sure that this was the happiest he’d ever been. He was in the waterpark with his Ma
and R’gina, and they’d just told him that they were all going to be living all the time in R’gina’s apartment. Together. Like when they had their weekends there, but except it was all the time. His Ma had told him that that meant he was going to have to change schools and make new friends, but he thought that that didn’t matter much as long as he had his Mamma and his R’gina.

He was learning how to swim, too, like really learning, and his Ma had said that perhaps he’d be able to do it without the arm floats before they went home. He thought that that would be a pretty cool thing to tell Aunt Ruby, but then again, the arm floats were Frozen ones, so he’d also be really sad to not wear them. He’d tried a water slide too, with his Mamma, yesterday, and now they were both trying to convince R’gina to go on one with them, too. She was more in her chair instead, reading her book, but Henry didn’t mind. His Ma was in the water with him, teaching him how to dive and stand on his hands like a big boy, so that was pretty cool, too. Also something to tell Aunt Ruby.

Right now he was in the pool on his own though, trying to get better at swimming, and Ma had left the water to go get ice cream, but for some reason she hadn’t gotten much further than back to the chairs, and now she was sitting real close with R’gina and kissing her on the lips. A lot. He wasn’t really sure why they liked kissing so much because one kiss was fine, even two, but he thought that perhaps that was a grown-up thing, too. Like so many other things his Ma told him that he wouldn’t understand before he was older and more of a smart-ass and but you’ll never grow up, right kid? She’d said that last part and tickled him on the couch until he almost peed his pants.

He was really happy that she was kissing R’gina though, he didn’t mind. R’gina was awesome and she read him bedtime and cuddled him, and she understood things about fairytales and was pretty much the best grown-up he had ever met who wasn’t in his family. Except now she was kind of his family, too, at least that’s what his Mamma said a lot, and Henry liked that, too. R’gina was great, and she called him her little prince, and she even said I love you to him sometimes, just like she did with Mamma when they thought he wasn’t listening so much.

Henry had never seen his Mamma more happy though. For so long, it was just them and no one else except his family, but now they had R’gina too, and it really made his Mamma happy. It made him happy as well, because she smiled a lot more and she laughed a lot more, and R’gina cooked the best food, so really, everything was better now. Maybe it was R’gina’s food that made Ma so happy, because Gramps had once said that the way to your mother’s heart is through her stomach, so he thought that that made a lot of sense.

“Kid,” Ma called, and he looked up from where he was practising his kicks and saw her grinning down at him from the side of the pool. “What ice cream do you want?”

He thought about it for a second with his real thinking face as he swam towards the edge of the pool. “Hmm, chocolate! No, strawberry! No, vanilla or banana or liquorice or marshmallow or!”

Ma laughed, and he could hear R’gina chuckle too as she made her way to the edge of the pool as well, slipping her arm around Ma’s waist and resting her head on Ma’s shoulder. She was smaller than Ma, when she wasn’t wearing her very high shoes, that Henry didn’t understand how she could walk in, and he thought that they looked sweet together, standing there, like two Mammas at the edge of the pool.

“Why don’t you accompany me to get the ice cream, Henry?” R’gina suggested and she reached a hand out, wanting him to join her.

He felt his chest fill with all kinds of warm and fuzzy feelings, and he thought that being in R’gina’s apartment all the time was going to be really nice if it felt like that a lot. He grabbed her hand and she pulled him out of the water, Ma grabbing his other hand as he joined them on the
ground, somehow ending up being squeezed in between the two of them in a nice and feel-good hug. *A Henry sandwich*, Ma always called them. He thought that it was all going to be pretty nice, even when they got back from the waterpark and he had to start at a new school, because he’d get a new room and new friends, along with his whole new family. It’d be nice and good, warm and fuzzy.

*Like a Henry sandwich. All the time.*

Henry smiled, and then they went and bought ice cream.

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**Chapter End Notes**

Gahhhh I can’t believe this. It’s like…over? It feels so weird. I’ve really loved writing this story, because these versions of Emma and Regina and Henry hardly gave me any troubles; their story just wanted to be told. I hope you enjoyed the way I ended up doing this epilogue – it was my compromise, because there were quite a few things that I wanted to touch upon, so I hope it read okay. I already have at least one one-shot lined up in this universe, which I will be posting at some point, so be on the look out for that. And moreover, I have a three part story and a new multi chaptered fic in the works as well, so hopefully that’ll be of interest to some of you – it won’t be too long before I post the first of that, I reckon. I’ll start with thee three part fic. They are both slightly different though, as they take place in the canon universe, so that will also be challenging and fun for me!

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**End Notes**

Thanks for reading, commenting and leaving kudos! It’s very much appreciated.

Hit me up if you wanna talk SQ, fic or anything else, yeah? I’m on tumblr as: stefania-holubko, and twitter: @stefaniaholubko

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