Promises Something For Everyone

by Fangirlinit

Summary

Two idiots, a Dark One, a pirate, and two gay witches step onto a boat…

Notes

Here there be lots of Swan Queen and later some Mary Margaret/David, Gold/Belle, and Hook/floor. Although this story is labeled a humor/romance it’s kind of a jumble of humor, romance, angst, crack, etc. Don’t ask me why, it just wants what it wants.
Emma stands on the shores of Neverland more confident than before she embarked on this journey. She is so far from home and in the company of people who bring the right hook out of her. She traveled a whole month on the high seas with family, less than pleasant individuals, and a few surprise guests. They went through a special kind of hell to get to this beach (some more than others). But only one person made all that worth it – two if you count the 11-year-old boy that is the reason for this adventure.

It wasn't a total bomb. There is much to be thankful for when Emma thought on it. The trip brought about good times, memories that would be stored away for later, and revelation induced feelings that still need to be sifted through.

But Emma never was good at telling stories. Maybe that's why this one is starting ass backwards. Damn spoilers.

And so her story opens... as it should... at the beginning...

It only took 24 hours into the voyage until Hook took matters into his own hands. Literally, he navigated, hoisted anchor, steered, the whole nine yards all on his own. The pirate was a regular old renaissance man (emphasis on old because the guy was well into his 70s or so).

It all started when David decided to go all heroic by climbing the lookout. When at the top he attempted to raise the nice embroidered flag his wife made. Now if he had any sense he would have had a spotter monitoring his safety. Exactly 45 minutes later (Gold had synced his pocket watch) David was found swinging upside down several terrifying feet in the air like a human pendulum. Mary Margaret screamed bloody murder, causing more panic to her already terrified husband. Emma tried to lend a hand but ended up getting tangled in the line and bound hip to hip with a prickly brunette.

With all their talk of doing good the only impression the Charmings made was their ability to look like first class fools. From then on Hook put a ban on all idiots with Charming blood. To his disappointment David couldn't get within a foot of the crow's nest.

That left Emma to stand at the helm looking out to sea and trying not to touch anything that would break or cause injury. She was also fighting the urge to puke her guts out.

The rocking. Someone should really stop the rocking.

"And here I thought swans liked the water."

Regina appeared from the shadows. She still wore that coat, the one cinched at the waist and accented with buttons. The thing hugged every wonderful curve. Her eyes shined in the moonlight, her mouth forming a smile.

"Haven't adjusted to the rocking I see," the brunette noted. "Would have thought with your record you would have caved under pressure and thrown yourself overboard by now."

"You're hilarious, Regina." There was a small chortle. Only one person had the pleasure of hearing it lately and Emma was damn protective of that right. She made room for the brunette inching next to her. "No," Emma said definitively, "I don't run anymore, not unless it's in the general direction of my kid."
"Well, wait till we're ashore before you go heroically diving into peril. Henry's no good without some reckless blonde of a mother to save him."

If they didn't share a son Emma could have sworn the woman cared about her well-being. That or the fact that Regina would just as much throw herself under the boat before getting left with the other idiot companions. It was wholly by Regina's choice in keeping distance from the others. She had nothing to say to Gold or Hook, and now that Mary Margaret's heart was darkened enough to her liking she didn't see fit to become any more than cabin neighbors with her and her hubby. That left Emma who was fast becoming a suitable person to stand silently next to, and if it came to it, exchange words with.

Suddenly Emma doubled over, hands still gripped firmly to the railing. She blew out a long breath, swaying more than necessary considering the rocking ship. She still felt the lingering effects reaped by their combined magical efforts in the mine. The senses (or was it hormones?) were heightened in each other's presence – it's why standing above deck Emma suddenly couldn't bear the smell of the ocean when Regina made her presence known. Add to that a ship jiving like John Travolta in Saturday Night Fever and PRESTO! you've got a blonde savior in need of saving (or of some ginger candy).

"My presence is needed below deck," Emma moaned not at all discreetly.

"That or you can't take a little sea nausea."

"I'm gonna pretend I didn't hear that from the woman who threw up all over my boots the other day."

With a hand Regina steadied the woman. She pointed out to sea. "Just stare at the horizon and maybe both our boots will get out unscathed."

Dipping unhurriedly into the water the dimming sun served as a point for Emma to stare. Side by side they stood, drinking in the shimmering ocean. It was a comfortable silence, yet they were in constant worry, about their kidnapped son, the dangerous storm Gold had prophesized was headed their way, whether David would break a five day peace negotiation and make a second attempt at the lookout, and why on earth their brushing shoulders instilled a pleasing sort of trepidation.

"I know you're mad. I know you miss him. But we can be mad and miss our son together, you know?"

"Because we're…" Regina smirked, "stronger together?"

"Come on, who's a poet in desperate situations?"

Regina gave a grand expression of surprise. "I didn't know you considered yourself a poet in any situation, Miss Swan."

They both shared a smile. Emma's shoulder accidentally bumped into Regina's. The brunette not only allowed the invasion but rubbed up to it. It was chilly on the quarterdeck, so why wouldn't she?

"Really though," Emma sighed and picked at the wooden rail with a fingernail, "if you want to talk about it… Henry I mean, and… I don't know…"

"You want me to cry on your shoulder?"

"No!" cried the blonde. Regina's brows scrunched further together. "I… not unless you want to, of course. I can just see that you have a lot on your mind. Holding it in won't help. I have my parents, but you don't have anyone."
"Well it's good that I have you to remind me of that."

"Regina –"

"No, I think you made yourself perfectly clear. For once you can actually articulate a state of fact." Regina turned on Emma. It was getting dark amidst the sunset, but if one looked hard enough, if they were astute enough as Emma was when it came to Regina, they would have seen a tear crawl down a cheek. "I am alone. I have nobody, not on this boat and sure as hell not in Storybrooke. So thank you for recapping for me." Her face fell tragically. Brown eyes held Emma's green for an insurmountable amount of time, almost pleading for someone (Emma) to put her out of her misery. Her whisper carried the last traces of hope, however small they were. "For a minute there I almost forgot."

If you gave her a simple tap on the shoulder Emma would have shattered into a million guilty pieces. She was utterly shamefaced and in need of a time machine to slap 'two-minutes-ago-Emma' across the face.

She was already gone, the last vestiges of wispy brown locks dancing behind her.

"Ugh," the blonde groaned and shoved a hand through her hair, "really Swan?!!"

She ran, but unlike the scared, insecure Emma of the past she ran towards the mess she created.

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Emma chased Regina to their shared quarters (assigned but to neither of their dismay). It was cramped, stuffy and lacked the décor a former mayor sought necessary to stand in. Mary Margaret offered to spruce up the room but got vetoed by a death glare and some comment about destroying happiness.

"Regina…"

The brunette whirled to reveal eyes of Satan. "Stop following me! This damn boat is small enough already I don't need you chasing after me like a golden retriever." Regina automatically thought of how Henry used to chase her heels excitedly when he learned to walk. Her heart broke and she almost couldn't breath.

"Hey," the roommate barked, "you aren't queen or mayor anymore, so stop telling me what to do! Anyway, I live here too and I can't leave because all the other cabins are full. Just my luck," she finished with a mumble.

Regina had the ears of Superman.

"If you don't like it here I can arrange for more spacious living quarters." Regina brightened a nice tomato red. To Emma, her angry badger face was getting far less cute and more Stephen King level terrifying. "How about the goddamned sea?!!"

Emma's eyes practically rolled out of there sockets. "Just relax, Regina."

"No, you relax!"

"You misinterpreted what I said. Jesus, you always do this. Just when it seems like we're making peace – for Henry – your insecurities get in the way and cause a huge fucking road block."

"It's always my fault isn't it? Curse the town, destroy happiness… and let's not forget when Ruby
spilled coffee all over Belle or that one time Pongo went missing. That has to be my fault as well. I can never do anything right."

"No, this is on both of us. I make mistakes, too. Big ones like not believing your innocence in 'Archie's murder,'" she air quoted. Her eyes panned down as hands were shoved into her backpockets. "I also could be more supportive of your redemption process. You had a lot to deal with when Cora died. You must have felt abandoned and... well, lonely."

"I was," Regina's voice grew deep with resentment, "and yet you still kept my son from me. When I needed him most, Miss Swan. I needed his support, his love. Ample confusion might have been avoided if I just had my family. You took that option away when you had no right."

Emma's hands went out pleadingly, her pretty features sagging in shame. "I know. That's why this is an all-inclusive apology," A bottom lip protruded slightly into a pout, showing that no matter how many steps were taken to make amends this woman may not give an inch. "I'm sorry," she murmured, "and I'm a total jerk."

"That dig just a while ago, about me not having anyone? That was low even for you."

"That's not... What I meant was..." Emma licked her lips hurried like her son and grew bashful as a result. "I thought the past few days have been good. We haven't argued, I don't have a black eye..." Her head bobbed in some kind of Emma Swan style of punctuation (a language Regina herself would never admit to understanding). "So you're not completely alone. You, ah, you have me. Eh, ya know?"

The innocent expression harkened back to the first time they met. Regina remembered the childlike nervousness, the meager "Hi," and subsequent shoulder slump. It was the most adorable and infuriating introduction Regina had ever beheld. But that was a year ago and those traits held a different meaning now. Adorable was no longer taken as 'she looks like my son,' and infuriating not in the 'I want to punch your lights out' way. Rather adorable in the 'huggable dopey golden retriever' way, and infuriating in the 'I want to kiss your face off' way.

It was a realization Regina Mills was just experiencing when Emma's mouth ran into her. She would have bit that pouty bottom edge in anger but her lips had a different plan entirely. The betraying flesh of her mouth pressed against Emma's, pressed with fervor. That was when Regina realized kissing Emma Swan was far more satisfying than fighting her.

They separated. Regina wide-eyed and open-mouthed and Emma trying to remember what two plus two equals. Just as the blonde squeezed her eyes shut to form that solution she was pulled by the neck. At first Emma thought she was being choked, which was probable considering how much of a bitch she had been. Then lips laid siege to her mouth. Regina was kissing her like it was her winning ticket for the million dollar lottery. Oooh, Emma thought as a tongue slipped in, how about the billion dollar lottery?

Arms enveloped each other, closing the space. Though their limited quarters had nothing to do with it, very little distance remained between them. Hips and thighs met in the middle, and heaving chests strained against one another. They grabbed and they kissed all the while thinking if only they could get closer. If only they could melt into something beautiful as their magic did twice before.

Regina stumbled back from Emma's need to get that much closer. Her feet faltered, but her lips hung on selfless, brave and true. She gripped Emma's hair and gasped. Regina was finally able to test the fortitude of those gold spun locks. She liked the feel of it. She especially liked how a bitty squeak came out of Emma when it was tugged hard enough.
Before Emma joined the water as a melted puddle on the floor (there was a persistent leakage issue in barco de Hook) she slipped them into the bottom bunk. It was no great feat as Regina was small enough to handle. Regina continued to kiss and suck the sanity from Emma's lips while the blonde maneuvered overttop. It was awkward, the mechanics of it all. They were in a confined space of a ship that with every wave cast them against a thin wall separating Emma from her dear parents. Not to mention Emma was used to a Posturepedic and not this peasant, feather bed nonsense.

No, not awkward at all. Hot, that was for sure, but not a lovely bedtime story to tell your children of how I met your mother – or, rather, how it took a leaky boat, cabin fever, and lame sexual euphemisms from a pirate to get your mom to feel something for your other mom. And let us not mention the never ending game shows that are Charming-Mills Family Feud and How to Get the Savior to Taste Her Tainted Fruit: Poisoned Edition. Nope, no signs of awkward down here, Scotty.

The brunette moaned when Emma put her back into it, tasting every inch of that mouth and grabbing handfuls that may have included a full breast. Regina curled obscenely into the pressing body she magically threw from her porch that one time in a fit of repressed sexual rage. Good times, good times.

"I hate… myself… for n… not doing this sooner," Emma muttered in quick heated breaths.

"What, for not pinning me down and… and exerting some of that – aaaah, authority you've been lacking?" Regina fought back the teases to her neck by taking that absurd bottom lip between her teeth, finally. She bit down with that sentimental ruthlessness ever present in their confrontations as mayor and sheriff. Emma's pained cry was muffled by her torturer's mouth.

Something major (and by major she means M-A-J-O-R) was escaping Emma in that moment. Her brain fogged and began to feel the effects of vertigo (which were not at all a result of sea nausea). It was not the time to be forgetting the step-by-steps of getting into a woman's pants and neither were her shaking hands. Her breath was coming in shallow, Regina was doing a sexy moan thing, and Emma Swan forgot how to have sex. Do I take her clothes off? Do I take my clothes off? What does she think about me on top? Can't we just get off before I do something embarrassing?

Honestly, it didn't matter much. Emma was A-OK as long as she got to willingly touch the former mayor and coax inhuman sounds from her. Indefinitely. And really, it hadn't been that long for Emma. What was it, 15 months since she slept with that one guy in that obscure hotel room after a meaningless night on the town? If there was anything that put Emma at ease it was that her current lover could be put in that category as well. She hadn't been counting the days, but Regina had to have gone a while, ever since… Graham? Oh. OH.

"What is it? Why are you stopping?"

Emma blinked over her.

Regina wanted to change. She had changed. That was the mantra running through Emma's mind. It was the trust in her eyes and the faith she had in Regina that convinced her of the transformation. It was the tousled hair splayed on the pillow, the smell of her expensive perfume (still lingering after five days on a ship for christsake), and the way her just-kissed-by-Emma lips puckered that dispelled any further doubts.

She took the woman's chin between thumb and forefinger, examining the bruised target with a predator's eye. "I was just... thinking."

"Hm, one of your more admirable qualities."
"Oh, shut up." Emma turned away from the hand tucking a strand back. "I just, need to take a breath."

"Don't be long. I'm an impatient woman."

"Don't I know it." Emma pressed their grins together in a kiss. But like all hot and heavy first rendezvous it had to be rudely interrupted.

Just as Emma felt fingers fluttering above her waistband a loud banging on their door startled them out of pre-coitus. Without preamble Regina shoved Emma who expertly landed on the floor like a rejected, dead fish (bulging eyes and agape mouth). They froze in fear like teenagers who had been caught necking. They also grimly hoped the intruder wouldn't hear the sounds of their libido screaming.

It was Gold rapping his cane.

"It appears I am the designated steward in this establishment," came the resentful voice. "Dinner is served. Hop to or no soup for you!"

Leaking water seeped into Emma's jeans, making her feel grungier than her return from the Enchanted Forest. It also didn't help that she just got twat swatted by Rumplestiltskin himself.
"I thought we were having soup?"

The pawnbroker bit back a sneer. "It is an expression, Miss Swan."

"I'm just saying. If one declares there's gonna be soup it's sort of implied that soup is what's for dinner."

David interceded, "I thought it was beef that was for dinner."

Gold rolled his eyes.

There was a banging of hook to table. Everyone jumped at the sloshing mugs.

"I call this crew to order!"

The crew zipped their lips and quickly folded their hands under the table.

They were in the bowels of the ship and it was dark save for a few dripping candles on the table and some lanterns swinging from the ceiling. Captain Hook, skipper of the Jolly Roger for who knows how many decades, sat at the head of the long table. To his right was a wide eyed Mary Margaret, her starving husband, and their equally ravenous (though not for food) daughter. On Hook's left were Regina and Gold. Clearly, this crew was not taking sides.

"I am bloody sick and tired of doing everything myself! This ship cannot sail under a one man show. I do only have one hand, you know. In case you haven't forgotten." He raised the limb, wiggled his fingers, and gazed on it with pride. "Ah, still a beauty. Anyway, while I'm manning the deck the rest of you have been sitting on your arses! That is not how this establishment is run!"

"I thought there was a ban on all Charmings," David pointed out helpfully.

"The ban is on stupidity. Climb that mast again, farm boy, and you'll find yourself herding sharks."

The shepherd closed his mouth and leaned back into the careful stroking of Mary Margaret's hand to his ego.

"Every crew member will have a duty to perform. Once your job is done the rest of the day is yours," he glared at David, "just so it isn't getting yourselves killed for a bloody scrap of embroidery." He cleared his throat and leaned back. "You will do your chores without complaint, help the captain when he asks, and please for the love of Davy Jones be on time for supper."

"That's right," Mary Margaret recalled out loud. She looked to Regina and then her daughter with a concerned frown. "Where were you? We couldn't start dinner without you two. What happened?"

It was like the interrogation after your girlfriend brought you home after hours. Girlfriend or not, Regina had been locking lips with Emma and not too gingerly rounding second base just minutes ago. Self-consciously Emma looked down to make sure all of her assets were covered, a movement which thoroughly confused her waiting mother.

Emma opened her mouth and would have spoken up if it weren't for the magic kick in the shin. Mouth still agape and grimacing in pain she caught the glimmer of 'shut your mouth, Swan' in the brunette's fiery eyes. But before Regina could smooth things over Gold was the one to speak up.
"Why don't we cut the bitching and... moaning and proceed to business?" He looked over to Regina, flashing a loaded smile. "Shall we?"

Regina held the imps eyes with a hodgepodge of shock, fear, and fury.

"Thank you, Rump."

He bowed his head. "I have been watching every one of you since you stepped on board. I've -"

"You've been watching us?" Emma's face scrunched in horror. "That's disgusting."

"Not surprising," Regina sang. Mary Margaret shivered visibly.

"Creepo," muttered Gold.

"As I was saying," the pirate grated out. "I have been observing, making notes on possible skill sets, and making myself aware of various strengths and weaknesses. I will be drawing up a list of every crew member and their assigned duty. When you receive your orders you will agree without question. Don't like it? you can find another ship to mooch off. Agreed?"

There were several nods and a few shrugs.

"Now," Hook slapped his thighs, "let's sup. We all have an early call time, so I suggest we consume some drink and... oh well fine, yes, food and get to beddy-bye."

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After supper and when most had hit the hay Regina trapped Gold into a corner. "That was very ill-advised."

Gold looked at the hand planted against the wall, blocking his path. "I know. It is absurd serving salted fish on a ship. There was no presentation."

Regina explained with a dangerous tone, "You know something."

"Oh-hoho, I wish I didn't."

"A simple memory spell can be in order."

"I'd like to see you try."

The brunette raised a fist and pointed her finger. "If you so much as let out a whisper..."

"Don't bother with the threats, dearie, I know all of them." He tapped his chin and stared off. "What are they... you shall destroy my happiness. Hmm, you could try but I have none left. And the other one, I think it was... you shall destroy me -" Gold shook his head confused, "again, with the destroy - you shall destroy me if it is the last thing you do. " Oh, and my personal favorite: 'imp.' Just the one word, sends shivers down my spine."

"What I am capable of can cause more than a few goosebumps."

"Oh, I forgot that one!" Gold snapped his finger at her suggested capabilities.

"Know this, Rump: I am done with the Charming family. Those idiots have done nothing but ruin my life and I have no intention of giving them another reason to."
"You want nothing to do with these people, yet they gave you the one thing that fills that empty place in your heart. Henry is as much a Charming as he is a Mills. You cannot deny that and neither can they. If you ever want to be a better mother – a better anything – you have to make nice with idiots." Gold tipped his head and closed his eyes briefly. "Speaking of family. I would like you to do me a favor – in exchange for my silence, of course."

"Here it comes. What curse do you want me to enact now? I'm all out of hearts from the ones I love the most – " Regina paused and grabbed his lapels, growling, "and Henry is off limits in any of your deals."

"No need for a scuffle. This isn't about crushing hearts. On the contrary, it's about bringing them back. One in particular. My son's."

"He was killed. What makes you think I could? Believe me I've tried. There is no bringing back the dead. You yourself admitted to it being a foolish notion."

"I didn't say anything about you bringing him back."

"Then why ask me?"

"Because you and Miss Swan have become quite close. If what I heard tonight rang true it would seem someone has Emma wrapped around her little…"

"Do not finish that sentence if you value your life."

"All you have to do is teach her a few magic tricks, build up her confidence, and convince her that my son can be saved."

"Miss Swan is an amateur. The only reason why we were able to deactivate the trigger…" she shook her head unable to find that one reason if it existed at all. "It is a waste of time. She doesn't have the patience and I don't have the time to play teacher. If you haven't forgotten, Henry – your grandson as much as I don't like admitting it – has been kidnapped. My focus is on getting him home safe."

"Ah, saving Henry. Yes, isn't that why we are all on this cramped boat, anyway? It will be weeks before we get to Neverland. It's time to stop moping about and do something constructive. I hardly think Emma mastering her powers would hinder your son's rescue. In fact, with her by your side I imagine it will be about as successful as your joint efforts in saving Storybrooke. There's no harm in trying, as they say. We both want our sons back, so this bargain is mutually beneficial."

"Why place so much faith in her now? She already broke the curse and saved the whole town from you and I. What makes you think she can do the impossible?"

"What makes you think she can't? True love can surpass realms. Emma and Baelfire were in love once, probably still were. You of course wouldn't know, you never saw them together. You didn't see Emma's face when she found him or the unbridled joy on his face when he was reunited with his family."

Regina could feel the knife twisting. "Henry is my family. None of you raised him, saw his first steps, or sent him off to school every day. Why the hell would I agree to this? Why would I willingly allow her to bring back that lowlife sperm donor?"

"Because, Regina, if you don't your secret will slip," Gold said with extra bite. "It doesn't matter if you end it with Miss Swan. It happened, therefore, it constitutes as superb leverage. If the deal is broken war will resume – or at least a war of domesticity. The parents will have your head for what you did with their daughter… however many times in however many positions…"
Teeth were bared, claws came out. She made a grab for the man.

"It's a shame you're not good enough for the Savior." Gold twirled his finger and Regina stumbled softly into the wall, leaving the hallway open for passage. Before he hobbled far he threw over a shoulder, "Would have made for an epic love story."

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Mary Margaret had been looking worriedly at her husband ever since they came in from dinner. Depression set in quickly, more quickly than the woman anticipated. She had thought up a number of ways to ask what was wrong, but looking at David sulking on the bed all those questions seemed about as pitiful as his current state. She bit her lip and decided to dive right in.

"Hook again?"

Without looking up he nodded.

"I saw you pull him aside after dinner tonight. He must have said something awful if you are this upset."

He shook his head.

"Honey, use your words."

There was a five ton sigh. "Nothing. He didn't say a word to me."

"Did you explain to Hook how important it was to you?"

"It wouldn't make a difference. I'm not going anywhere near that nest. Not if he can help it."

"Then why do it? I only suggested raising my homemade flag because the skull one was inappropriate. But why risk your safety? I swear, when I saw you dangling from that death trap I wanted to cut the other hand off that pirate."

"I did it to impress him," he sighed, head hung low. "The pirate life always sounded so thrilling to me as a kid. It's what I've always dreamed of doing. I thought maybe if I tested my bravery and faced my fear of heights..."

"Well sweetheart, why don't you just tell him?"

"Because he already thinks I'm a fool!" David cried throwing up his hands. "The ban was said to be placed on all crew with Charming blood. Not true. The ban was meant to be placed on this Charming," he admitted, pointing to himself. He nodded sadly as the truth sunk in.

"No!" Mary Margaret cried in horror. She sat beside him and took a strong, calloused hand in hers. "David, I'm sure that's not what Hook implied."

"You try so hard. Maybe you need to show him in other ways," Mary Margaret offered with a cheery smile. "The assignments are tomorrow, how about you put on some nautical spirit, accept your orders, and thank him with a sharp 'Aye-aye, Captain!'"

He sighed heavily.

Mary Margaret rubbed his back as if to soothe a petulant child. "I'm sure you'll do well wherever
Hook places you."

"With my on deck record he'll put me as far from that look out as possible." With a shake of the head David closed his eyes and stated morosely, "Far, far away."

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"Have you ever made a deal with Gold?"

A tank top was folded haphazardly and tossed on a pile of similar shirts. She was in no mood for an argument or even friendly conversation. It was close to midnight, supper had been an indigestion induced event courtesy of Big Brother, and Emma was about as sexually frustrated as a celibate sex addict. No mood.

Still wrangling her semi-clean wardrobe Emma sniped, "Possibly. What's it to you?"

There was no reply. Emma looked up. With arms loosely wrapped around her middle Regina was leaning against the door. She was staring at the floor carefully, pensively.

"Regina? What is it?"

"Have you made deals with Gold before?" Regina asked more firmly.

Emma shrugged and crossed her arms across her chest. "Yeah, that's what the whole trip to New York was about. Gold needed me to find his son." She bit her lip hard causing a dull pain. "If I hadn't he would have carried out his threat." It wasn't worth Emma's safety to reveal the details of that threat. Regina already seemed to be in a fragile state of mind. Emma absently brushed a hand to her own throat.

It could have been fear that rolled within brown eyes, but it was gone in a flash.

"So you know how serious he is about these contracts. You know what would happen if your end isn't held up."

"Is this leading somewhere? Wait," Emma's eyes narrowed as she asked deliberately, "you made a deal with him didn't you?"

"Yes," Regina answered. She lifted her chin.

"Oh, great! It's okay to berate me for making deals with that snake, but when you do it you get a free pass."

"Stop being a child," scoffed the brunette. She mirrored the blonde's stance, arms crossed. "You forget, I have been doing this longer. I had a valid reason."

"Why is it alright for you to make deals with the enemy? What makes you so special?"

"Miss Swan," she let out an exasperated sigh, "if you can stop acting like the ostracized classmate who wants to be noticed for two seconds I will gladly explain."

"Why? So you can make up lies about how superior you are to the rest of us? How it is perfectly fine to strike deals with someone who put our son in danger? Why should I need to know, anyway? It's not like you care about what I think."

Regina promptly got in Emma's face, close enough to clock her or kiss her. "Because he knows about us!" she hissed breathlessly, her eyes vulnerable and dancing wildly. "He knows we were
together tonight and if I don't do as he says he will take that information and sell it to the highest bidder. Your parents being first in line."

"Well, why didn't you just say that?"

"I was trying to, but someone was whining like a little girl."

Emma's face went sour. "Was not." She received a pointed look. "Whatever." Emma stuffed her hands in her pockets and pulled her shoulders back confidently. "Now, what exactly do you mean when you say 'he knows about us'? If he just heard us fooling around there's not much there to bargain with. It happened one time. It's not like we're having an affair."

Something about that statement felt like a deliberate jab. It was more like a blunt stab (those wounds hurt the most). Regina started to wonder if Gold knew more than he was letting on.

Emma searched the surprisingly timid eyes. Her radar came up with zilch. Using a gentler tone she asked, "So what is the weasel asking for?"

"His son. Gold has placed undue faith in your ability to pump life into dead hearts. He wants you to bring Neal back. That's the favor."

Emma's head reared back in surprise. She had expected quite a few possibilities, one of which was the assassination of his pirate nemesis, but sure as hell not bringing back his dead son. She didn't want to think about giving weight to such a challenge. It was too soon.

Turning away Emma gathered some composure from the range of emotions she was experiencing.

"Just how am I supposed to do that?" The blonde's hand combed through her hair and clutched at her back neck. "And don't tell me there's a prophecy about me having the power to revive the dead. I've had enough of that pawnbroker meddling in my future."

"I am to instruct you in the magical arts," Regina replied simply.

"Oh," Emma cackled, "lucky you. And how does Regina feel about this?"

"I'm not thrilled about it, thank you for asking."

"That's fine and all, but where was my say in all this? It's kind of convenient that you signed on to something that has you and me trying to save the world again."

"Not the whole world, just one person. Stop being dramatic." Regina put her hands on her hips and gave the woman a once over with clear offense. "And since when do I have to consult you whenever I make decisions?"

"You do when the deal involves me!"

"Will you keep your voice down?"

"Why would I want to save him? He was an asshole."

Regina was bound to agree. Sperm donor dad was an asshole of the worst kind. Not only did he impregnate and abandon his underage girlfriend, but he invited himself into Emma's life ten years later like all was forgiven. If he wanted to see Henry he should have hired a lawyer. And if he wanted to see Emma… well, that wasn't Regina's business. The tears hiding behind stormy green eyes and the small step taken towards Regina told her differently. Regina's voice was tender and
warm when she said, "You don't mean that."

"I really don't want to do this right now." Emma sniffed. Not a tear had been shed. "Is that all?"

It wasn't, but Regina thought it was enough for one night.

Emma nodded back. "Whatever we decide we'll do it together. This deal involves both of us."

"Agreed," Regina sighed. "It's been a long day. I'm going to bed."

Emma watched as Regina pulled back the blanket of the single, lonely, bottom bunk, fully prepared to sleep unaccompanied.

"Okay."

***

"Alright you scurvy scallywags, form a line!"

The crew bustled into a haphazard row. The bright light of sunrise was blinding causing them all to blink furiously. They all cursed themselves for not packing shades. Their sour faces turned serious when a clipboard was procured.

"I hope you all got your beauty sleep because today will be the most back breaking day of your lives. By the end of the day each and every one of you should know what is expected of you. Sailing is not some wine cruise in the Maldives. It's hard, it's wet, and it's long. Stop snickering Rumple or you'll find out just how wet that ocean is! Now, for the roll call." Hook flipped up the page and read from the list. "Snow White."

"Actually, it's Mary Margaret."

"Rump-" the pirate halted the roll. He shot the petite woman a confused look. "Since when?"

"Well, you see ever since the curse was cast we people of Storybrooke had been living under assumed identities…"

"Shut up," he held up a hand, "you've already lost me."

Mary Margaret gasped at the gall of this pirate.

"Continuing on… Rumplestiltskin."

"Here, unfortunately."

Hook didn't bother confirming. He grumbled a reply, "Yes, so it is." The next name on the list was probably reason for his current migraine. "… Farm boy."

"Present and ready for duty, CAPTAIN!"

Hook looked up regretfully to see a ram rod straight salute and a stony expression of incompetence. He shook his head and panned down to his clip board muttering, "Tragic."

The line shifted uncomfortably as David withdrew hand to forehead and shuffled his feet. His stare out to sea was unflinching, but a stout chin trembled.

"Swan."
"Swan!"

Additional silence.

"Did the lass jump ship already? Bloody hell how difficult is it to arrive on time?"

The missing woman's mother bit her lip nervously, thinking up a thousand and one dangers that had befallen her.

Hook let out a heavy sigh. "Moving on. Regina."

A ship never sounded so stagnant. Four heads turned to the end of the line.

"Well, I think we all know who our problem crew is. First rule of today: don't take the two missing idiots for model citizens. Arrive on time for duty. Speaking of, I shall now hand out assignments."

Stepping up to the pawnbroker Hook whipped out a slip of paper.

"Head chef," Gold read after a sharp intake of breath. He continued to stare in wonder at the shockingly flourishing script, a hint of a smile tugging at his lips.

"Aye," Hook shifted uncomfortably before the cripple's welling eyes, "don't think much of it."

Unlike David, Gold's chin quivered with joy.

Mary Margaret snatched her slip with a glare. When she read it her mouth dropped open. "I can't do this."

"Aw, you'll learn to like it, love."

"But this is a job for someone much stronger than I. Perhaps I could swap with one of the men?"

"There will be no swapping on this ship unless I say so," Hook countered with slight giddiness. "You can take what I give you and you can like it."

"Hey, there's no need to –"

"Yes," Hook sneered at David, "there's no need to butt in where one is not needed."

"Hook, there is no way I can properly man the rigs and sails by myself. Have you seen how tall I am?"

"Just cut back on the coffee, love."

Eyes still holding the water David said through his teeth, "She drinks tea."

Mary Margaret pacified him with a pat on the arm. She tilted her head at the captain, saying slowly, "I know you value hard work and integrity." There was a slap as Gold clamped a hand over his chuckling mouth. "That's something I can understand because you care for this ship like I care for my family. If anyone were to step into my household I would want them to treat it like I would, with love and respect. Now if you want me to do a good job there has to be some give and take here."

"I'm sure we can make certain accommodations." Hook leaned forward flashing his winning smile. "Maybe some… one on one tutorials between captain and sailor. Eh?" His guy liner winked.

Mary Margaret saw that she wasn't going to win with this pirate. She gave a noncommittal shrug and
stepped back into line.

"Mr. Farm Boy, step right up, step right up to claim your orders."

David's eyes lit up at his superior's enthusiasm. Perhaps Hook had awarded him with the great honor of quartermaster, or boatswain. David would accept anything as long as he was beside a famous pirate like Killian Jones himself. In the flesh.

The crewman took his slip and read. The childlike smile grew inch by inch and then… crumbled. "Wh-why?" David choked out. "I... I thought..." He covered his mouth to stifle the overwhelming emotion boiling up from within. Not much could be subdued. It was the sob heard round the world.

"Oh, please."

Mary Margaret elbowed the pawnbroker. She peeked over a flannel shoulder and read the rum stained slip of parchment. Laundry. Oh, David.

"Great fit, right?" Hook said as he polished his already gleaming hook. "It occurred to me last night why you were climbing that lookout. You were trying to get so far away from what scared you that you got as far up as that nifty little birds nest!" Hook cried with a laugh and clapped his thigh as if the epiphany was just too much. "You see, farm boy, there's nothing about that dingy, decrepit laundry cabin that should strike fear into… well, anyone's heart really. You gotta face your fears sometime, mate. Am I right?"

David didn't feel that clap on his shoulder. He was already experiencing heaping amounts of grief and disappointment to sense outside stimuli. He wasn't frightened of the stuffy laundry room and Hook knew it.

"Alright class," Hook slapped his thigh, "the easy part is finished. We shall now start with ship etiquette and how not to act like a bloody ape aboard a priceless vessel. Lesson one…"

***

Well-rested eyes opened to a creaking ceiling. To Emma it seemed like five inches from her face, but the girl was exaggerating. It was seven inches.

Sleeping was not an ideal activity when on a rocking ship in the sea. The sleeping quarters were cold, hard, and unpromising in promoting the z's. Typically, Emma spent her nights awake formulating a plan on what to do when they got to Neverland. The other half of her sleepless night was spent worrying about the lack of a safety bar. One crashing wave was all it took to send the blonde form rolling off her bunk and dropping a good few feet to a leaky floor.

There was no reason to worry this morning because Emma was protected by a wall to her left and a solid form to her right. Actually, the form was half sprawled on her, its brown hair tickling her neck. If it weren't for this crushing weight Emma would have chalked up the morning to fantastic. She even got a good night's rest to boot.

Emma craned her neck to get a better look. The sheet was down her knees (possibly kicked down during her heavy slumber). Her middle was being clutched like a life preserver. The survivor, in this case, was a limp Regina Mills.

"How did you get up here?" Emma asked, not sure if the dead weight was awake.

"Mm," muffled against a pale neck, "levitated…"
"Right."

Regina pulled Emma closer and brought her legs around the one below. The breath in Emma hitched at the brief rubbing on her thigh. Regina groaned. Her lids fluttered open to take in the frozen and flushed blonde.

"G'morning," she husked.

"Right," Emma replied again. She looked down to their tied and twisted legs and back up to the woman. "I never figured you for the cuddling type."

"I'm not."

"And yet you're hugging me like a koala would her baby."

"You are kind of a baby," Regina noted with a chortle. She explained, "The complaining and that absurd pout."

Emma pouted. "Yeah, well, koalas don't hump."

"Don't like it? I can leave."

"No!" Emma grabbed the retreating arm. "You don't have to…"

Regina smiled wryly, laying her head back on Emma's shoulder.

"You were the Evil Queen of fairy tales – unfair as that was for you. Now that the persona is gone you're… all cuddly and nice in the morning. I wouldn't have expected that."

"And what wouldn't surprise you? Me setting your mattress on fire? Perhaps slipping you enough alcohol so you… accidentally tumble off the bed in your sleep?"

"Sounds like you thought this through. I'd think the cuddling is more cause for worry, though."

Silence was deafening. After what felt like a millennium Emma felt a thumb caress over her bare shoulder.

"Please don't," Regina whispered. The advice was aimed more so to herself than Emma.

The sheriff liked to think 'worry' wasn't in her vocabulary, but maybe it was now that her son was missing and her former nemesis was finding solace in her arms. They both needed this, so Emma took a deep breath and cuddled with the Evil Queen.

It was the brushing of soft fingers to her cheek and a meager voice that tore Emma from impending slumber.

"Last night you mentioned something about me having a lot on my mind. You offered to talk with me."

This was progress, Emma thought. But what topic of discussion was on this morning's docket? It could be anything from something as deep as Regina's insecurities to the sensitive subject of Henry. Or she might want to shed light on their recent need to feel each other up. Emma wasn't sure she was ready to put those feelings into words necessarily. At least not words audible at a normal decibel of conversation. Damn these peasant beds and thin cabin walls.

"You feel like you're ready? You really want to talk?"
Regina bit her lip. Emma suddenly noticed her hooded 'I'm irresistible enough to fuck' eyes and her heart immediately began to race at the prospect of such an activity.

"I really don't."

Regina didn't wait for Emma as she slipped a hand around a neck. She didn't offer Emma time to take in a breath before she was kissing that mouth. She didn't wait for Emma to say no, or yes, or some other stupid word that had no place being between them. Because the only thing she wanted between them were their lips connecting and their magic flowing around, about, and inside them.

"I need you," Regina murmured between fervent pecks. Her lips ran along a jaw and careened down to lay upon vulnerable flesh. It was a frenzy. She could feel the gulp under her sweeping tongue. "Don't ask me why. Don't make me beg."

Another audible gulp. "I would never –"

"Yes," Regina said, allowing her steely gaze to bore into defenseless, naïve green, "you would."

"Then don't give me a reason."

Regina's hands sure didn't. Tank top number five rippled up over searching hands and a heaving belly. While nipping at her collarbone Regina appreciated the muscles and tender flesh below. She loved the shudders and whimpers her touches elicited. Regina was drawn to them in unspeakable ways; and not just her body – her magic as well. That could possibly explain their knack for opening portals and disabling nuclear gems. It was a bond that both excited her, and frightened her.

The fears were kissed away while the anticipation was drunk in, electrifying every nerve not already ahum. Her movements were soft at first, running up Emma's sides and then down for thumbs to tuck tantalizingly under the lip of cotton and back up over toned abs. She was rougher when her palms reached breasts.

Emma hissed in pleasure and brought Regina into a hard kiss. While her breasts were being kneaded from here to the moon the blonde was equally rough in using tongue and teeth. She sucked, bit, and stroked the sexy moans from Regina's mouth. The sound made Emma ache all over, especially in the region between her thighs. Emma shifted, rubbing her legs together. Oh, yeah. Aching and wet in all the right places. She whimpered in anticipation.

Regina took the collar of the top between her teeth and tugged impatiently. Her growl was met with a pushing of breasts as Emma gripped Regina's head to meet the pair. Her tongued dipped further, following the trail of sweat to Salvation Valley.

The former mayor was nose deep in cleavage when Emma gasped. It was not the kind of gasp she was expecting. Regina pushed up from the still form and glanced down with a frown.

"What's wrong?" she croaked. Her voice was that of a young girl who was notorious for displeasing high-handed mothers and enraged husbands. "Did I do something bad?"

"God, no." Emma cupped the woman's cheek in reassurance. "You could never be bad."

Regina sank into the hand and the iron clad words that were spoken. She smiled shyly in return.

"But it would be really bad if we were late to Hook's meeting thing."

Brown hair flew with a turning head. Daylight was shining through their porthole. "Oh, shit!"
"My sentiments exactly."

***

Eye through a telescope pointed out to sea, Hook could hear the stampede of two women behind him. Clamoring up the stairway they halted on the bridge. From the corner of his eye he saw a blonde bent over and huffing, and a brunette leaning against a mast and failing to look reposed.

"Fancy seeing you two up so early. It's a shame you couldn't come to the meeting that was mandatory for all crew members!" He withdrew the spyglass and collapsed its length with a sharp clank. Tapping a boot he refused to face them. He waited for the string of useless excuses.

Emma didn't disappoint.

"Sorry we're late," she said, still catching her breath. "We had a, uhh, incident. You see…” Emma glanced hesitantly to the other woman who already knew it would be a disaster of epic proportion, "I fell from my bunk this morning and I landed in a huge puddle of leaking water – by the way, you really need to get that checked out – anyway, when I fell I splashed a wave of water on Regina – who was still asleep – and then, um, she was so surprised that she fell too. And then… and then we both got wet – I mean, our clothes got wet! Yeah, pretty soaked." Emma bit her lip and hid her hands in her back pockets. She refused to meet either of their faces. "So… wardrobe malfunction. Also, ah umm… we didn't set the alarm?"

Regina rolled her eyes.

"Sounds like a string of unfortunate and highly improbable events."

Emma let out a nervous "Ha," before looking away. The floor was pretty interesting to behold with all its intricate woodiness and beautiful brown coloring and... yeah.

Taking it upon herself to do damage control Regina flipped her hair, pulled her shoulders back, and jumped right in. "Listen, Hook…"

"Captain Hook, if you please."

"Captain Hook," she corrected with a cheeky grin, "I understand you wanted us present with everyone else. It is truly a selfless thing to take in a crew – half of whom you have tried to kill in the past – and give us safe passage to Neverland. I'm sure a genuine adventurer such as yourself would rather be spending your time sailing the Caribbean and drinking the finest rum in the company of ladies." Her smile faded to a frown and she tipped her head. "But that we returned your kindness with incivility is most unfortunate for all of us. Miss Swan and I are devastatingly ashamed of ourselves for wasting your time –"

"We are?" Emma's side was promptly jabbed by an elbow. "We are," she confirmed, clutching her wound.

"It was not our intention to disrespect you or this lovely vessel. I hope you can find it within yourself to accept our apology. I am sorry."

"Ow! Yeah, me too. Sorry, that is."

Hook just rubbed his scruffy chin and looking between the two. He watched Emma shuffle her feet and carry on some odd fascination with the floor. He also didn't miss Regina's 15% genuine certified smile and her waning patience. The former mayor was obviously losing steam.
"But we are here now, so if you could just give us our assignments we can be off."

Hook heard the splash of patience going overboard. Tapping his hook to his chin he pretended to be in thought. After a decent 60 seconds he shrugged and said, "No worries. Your absence lent itself to a splendid example to the good folks who had the courtesy to show up."

"That's it?" Emma asked, frowning. "You're not going to, like, punish us? Or make us walk the plank?"

"Do not give him ideas!" Regina hissed from the corner of her mouth. She went back to a 50 watt smile.

"Naw. I'm kind of waiting for Rumple to screw up before I get the old plank back out of storage."

The women nodded simultaneously in understanding and suddenly the reason for their absence peaked the pirate's curiosity. It didn't take long for Hook to put two and two together: the frequent lateness, the rumpled clothes, the fact that they share a cabin, not to mention the soft, longing stares Regina had been giving Emma when she wasn't looking.

"Nice. Very nice," Hook drawled and nodded very slowly.

"What?"

"Oh," he gave Emma a knowing smile, "I guess it's just that the late morning suits both of you. You ladies are simply glowing." He licked his dry lips.

"Gross."

"Assignments?" Regina interrupted. Her brow rose impatiently.

"Yes, yes," Hook murmured and filled Regina's open hand with her slip. He handed Emma hers as well.

"Navigator," the brunette read. "Well, it is not all I ever hoped for, but I suppose it will do." She pursed her lips.

"A standup navigator must have good eyes. And you, Regina, have good eyes." Oddly, Hook was looking to Emma when he was saying it.

The blonde mumbled what was on her slip and flashed her captain her best puppy eyes.

"Seawoman? That sounds like a lot of work. Can't I switch with Regina?"

The other woman scoffed, "Absolutely not." She wasn't exactly protective of her title as navigator. Though she had spent some time on pirate ships back in her rebellious stage as a young queen, she had little experience in navigating one. That didn't mean she was about to hand off a challenge. Regina Mills never quit at anything.

Emma pouted and whined, "But this is a two person job. Not to mention I don't have the stamina of a male sailor. Hook, please, can't we switch?"

"My decision is final. I have spent more time than necessary putting together the duty roster. I actually can't believe how high my hopes are for you people. Anyway, stop pouting Swan it's unattractive. The duties for seawoman are just as important to the integrity of this ship as any other job. It's tough work and there's plenty of grease involved, but you seem to be the kind of girl that doesn't mind getting her hands dirty."
Emma rolled her eyes. "Whatever. Can we go now?"

He nodded.

As they walked away Regina playfully nudged a hip into a sulking Emma.

Hook smiled, much more enthusiastic about this voyage than before. He waved and called out, "I can't wait to see what you two have to offer this ship."
"Emma, dear! Why don't you let me help you with that?"

Emma grit her teeth. "That's not necessary."

"Don't strain yourself."

"I won't."

"You should really pull your hair back. All it takes is one strand of that beautiful hair to get caught and – Oh! I can't even think about it! Emma just save your mother a heart attack and tie it up?"

"Mom!"

The pixie head whipped around. Her eyeballs grew out of their sockets as she stared open mouthed at her daughter's smart mouth.

"Just… enough," Emma said gently. Her focus drew back to the spool-shaped capstan and its dislodged chain. She casually waved her dirty rag in the air saying, "I'm a big girl. If I need help I'll ask for it."

"No, I know. You are a big girl. You're my big girl. And I fully understand how you would want space. I remember when I was seventeen and there was this ball at the castle…"

While Mary Margaret prattled on Emma went back to her work. Sweat dripping from her brow and grunting with the chain she became distracted by the sound of a laugh. A most extraordinary laugh.

Through oil streaked hair she spied the brunette and pirate bumping shoulders and yucking it up. Emma's jaw grew tight and she pulled harder on the chain despite the strain in her back.

Ever since the crew began their duties and Regina started navigating, the two had been extra buddy-buddy. It was like watching two old friends reunite. Besides staring at maps it was all they did together, reminiscing about grand old adventures, laughing it up over some poor unsuspecting fool they tricked in some scam way back. It was disgusting and it made Emma grow green as a jelly bean with envy.

Since the moment she saw Killian Jones his face never looked so… punchable. Not only was he arrogant and stuck up, but he was probably the most untrustworthy person Emma's come across (and she has come across some rather dishonest fellows in her previous line of work). Emma couldn't figure out why Regina would ever enjoy this man's company, now or in the past. It struck Emma then, how much she didn't know about Regina's past. The thought was shook off. Emma knew Regina now. Whatever happened before didn't matter. Hook, though, that was the one with an ulterior motive. There just had to be.

The pirate smiled at something Regina said. Emma couldn't make out his reply but it had Regina in a fit of laughter. Now more than ever she wanted to test how fast Hook's head would spin to the force of her knuckles this time.

Mary Margaret had started fussing with her hair, separating knots, and pulling back the grease stained strands. "Let me just… this one right here… honey, really? Hold still… this is a stubborn one…"
Emma gave one last swat and straightened up. Regina walked past giving her a puzzled look. In one smooth transition Emma leaned back on the capstan and raised her chin, flashing a Joey Tribbiani 'how you doin'?' smile. Classic.

"What are you doing?"

"Huh?" Emma stood up and turned to her mother. Mary Margaret had a brow raised in suspicion. "Nothin'," she sputtered, looking at her like she had just been accused of manslaughter. Or making eyes at her step grandmother, or whatever they're calling it now.

"Anyway, where was I?" Mary Margaret stared off until her eyes lit up seconds later. "YES! That's right! Prince Studebaker had met me on the balcony. He solicited me and I just said I wasn't that kind of girl…"

Emma wiped the sweat from her brow, watching the scene before her. Hook's arm was draped around the brunette's shoulder. The woman's lips twitched as they usually did in advance to the curving of their corners. White teeth sparkled and a breathy chuckle escaped. Her lovely, long neck bobbed to the joyous response. Emma licked her lips and sucked in a deep breath. She watched the tips of Regina's fingers run absently along her clavicle.

Emma's gaze returned to the arm and the thumb that had started rubbing against a shoulder. She blew out her long held in breath and glared daggers at the draping arm. She thought her father's sword was around there somewhere; it would be put to good use on that arm that was for sure.

"… and then I shoved him off the balcony like Humpty Dumpty…"

"Wait. What?" Emma sputtered, turning to her mother. "You what?"

"I was just seeing if you were listening. If I'm not talking about sword fighting, dragons, or what leather jacket would go well in what season you seem to lose interest in the conversation."

"I think you're leaving out a few topics."

"Oh?" Mary Margaret drawled. Her arms crossed over her chest. "Which ones?"

Emma did a double take. Her mouth was moving but nothing came out.

"Is this some girl talk I hear?" chimed Hook. Regina followed from behind. "Oh goodie let me in on the fun."

"None of your goddamned business."

His head practically whiplashed back from the poisonous bite to Emma's claim. "A bit defensive are we? Sounds like I interrupted some juicy stuff." He witnessed the working jaw and tightening fists. Throwing up his hands in surrender he said, "Just a word of advice. When you don't want other people in your beeswax, don't tempt them with honey. In short, don't look so obvious." He gave a sidelong glance to the woman next to him. Regina eyed him suspiciously.

Mary Margaret's forehead wrinkled to excess. "Anywaaaay."

Awkward silence followed. Emma bent down to pull on the chain caught up in its track, while her mother went back to freshening the nip on the line. Regina commenced with the folding and refolding of a map.

"I have to admit," the captain declared, "you ladies sure know how to work a vessel." Catching
Regina's raised brow he stood up from his spot of observation. "No, really. I can appreciate the many endowments the female sex has to offer, but your work ethic is second to none. As the French say, 'Superbe!'"

"You ever think about laying off the rum?" came muffled from the blonde who was straining with the chain. It finally came loose and fell into place with a dull clank.

"Now, now this is not an intervention. I really do believe that if a woman wants to take on the responsibility as breadwinner… more power to her. It's time to," he punched his fist in the air for emphasis, "break that shiny glass ceiling."

"Hook," Mary Margaret began, "are you saying what I think you're saying? Are you a feminist?"

"Why not?" He grinned slyly and sidled up next to her. "If it gets me in her pants…"

"Nope," Regina pipes up, "Not a feminist."

Mary Margaret agreed, "Definitely not."

"Spoke too soon." Emma shook her head.

"Come on," Hook insisted. He stretched out his arms in righteousness while his hips did a cha-cha. "Women's liberation is sexy."

They started to leave.

"You having a laugh?" Hook asked after them. "Ladies! Come back! My hook needs a polish!"

***

"We kidnap and ravage and don't give a hoot. Drink up me 'earties, yo ho."

David was mumbling the lyrics to A Pirate's Life for Me as he shuffled into the galley. Peering over the stack of hand towels in his arms he saw a scene that would have frightened the daylights out of anyone (except David was used to this visual).

"Yo ho, yo…Oh, hey there Gold."

The older man looked up. He was standing in front of a large waist high table which held jars of spices, cuts of chilled fish, and a plethora of vegetables. His forehead was a sheen of sweat, explaining why his shoulder length hair was tied back. A dishrag was tucked in his dirtied apron and his sleeves were rolled up to his elbows. He was currently running an 8-inch carbon steel chef's knife along a Whet stone.

"Charming," Gold greeted neutrally. His blazing fast knife hand hesitated. "How goes the laundry business?"

"Funny. How many hand towels?"

"Five," Gold replied, holding out his hand which he then retracted. "Noo, six."

David gave him an insufferable look and handed over the six clean towels.

"Much obliged."

"So, what's on the menu for today?"
David was elbows on the table, hand holding his chin as he watched the master at work. It was David's mid-morning break and he usually spent it at the opposite side of Gold's work station. It had become customary for the two men to carry out casual conversation around this time. While it was strange that two people with absolutely nothing in common (especially their ages and moral codes) could have this kind of camaraderie, it was the simple, light conversation that came easy. That didn't mean they talked about their budding friendship or shared tears over their personal issues. After all, their relationship was far from *Beaches* material.

"Poisson du jour est –"

"English," David reminded, "if you will."

The chef let out a sigh. "Fish of the day is a halibut which will be baked and then flaked once cooled. The sandwich filling consists of..." he stared off trying to pluck the ingredients from memory,"... mayonnaise, sundried tomatoes, basil, parsley, capers, lemon zest, and a cracking of salt and pepper. Toss in the fish, mix 'er up, and spread on lightly toasted ciabatta bread. Soup on the side, of course."

"Recipe?" the prince prompted.

"Giada."

David nodded, familiar with the Dark One's fascination with the Food Network star. "Don't you think she has a big –"

"Yes," Gold grated out. He glared from across the table. "I am well aware."

"I mean, she can stuff about 50 porcini mushrooms in that thing."

Gold rolled his eyes and snapped, "I dare you to do better."

"Hey," David shrugged innocently, "bitch can cook."

"She can indeed."

There was a scrap of metal to wood as a bowl of arugula was slid over.

"Stems off, please."

David accepted the bowl and began tearing the tough stems. Where Gold acquired arugula on a boat in the middle of the sea was beyond him. David chalked it up to magic and moved on.

"So how about them Blackhawks?"

Gold set the knife down, giving David a reproachful look. "I know what you're doing. And it's not going to work."

"What? They were down one in the first period, but –"

"Drop it. Hockey stats won't get you out of it this time." His tongue clicked as impatience melted away for what appeared to be compassion. "This war with Hook has to stop."

"Goddamnit!" A palm slapped the table with a crack. The poor arugula jumped from the bowl and scattered. "I'm sick of this laundry bullshit! Hook knows he's getting under my skin because of it. It's sick and it's twisted. All those stories I heard in the local village... of the fearless pirate sailing between worlds. Beat the Kraken to a pulp with only one hand, did you know that?" Gold shook his
head and shrugged. David laughed sentimentally. It died the moment he looked at the stack of towels beside him. "I can't believe I looked up to him."

Drying off his hands Gold whipped it onto his shoulder and planted one hand on the table, the other to his hip. He sighed out, "The guy has a wicked streak, I'll give you that." He picked up on the strangled cry and changed track. "But people change. You just need some patience. And confidence couldn't hurt your chances either."

"Easier said than done, man. Hey, what did you do when Belle turned you down?"

"Whoa, now. When did this become about me? We were talking about you and your issues with the captain."

"But you gotta give me some advice! Come on, I think we know each other well enough now. After how I just opened my soul about my boyhood crush you've gotta give me something. Don't leave me hangin' Gold."

"Absolutely not," Gold replied sternly, using the point of his knife for emphasis. "I refuse to get my hair braided while I cry about my problems."

David drew back wearing an expression of manly concern. He inquired softly, "Do you cry a lot?" At the sign of a knife flashing the prince surrendered with hands up. "Forget I said anything!"

The blade lowered as steely imp eyes held their target. "I think it's time to divert to another subject."

David exhaled a long held breath. He retrieved the petrified arugula and went back to tearing.

"You notice anything different about Regina? Lately she's been kind of withdrawn around Mary Margaret and I."

The knife stopped chopping. After a moment Gold responded, "No." The knife resumed its slicing.

"What's with the pause?"

"Don't know what you're talking about."

***

The upper deck was quiet by afternoon. Emma found Regina on the bow. She was sitting against the foremast, bare feet stretched out before her and reading a book. A light wind breezed through her hair as she read, completely oblivious to the onlooker. On her nose rested a pair of generic reading glasses.

"Watcha reading?"

Brown eyes still holding text, the book was lifted. *Heart of Darkness.*

"How appropriate."

"I know what you're thinking. Rest assured it's not about hearts." She gave Emma a curious look and asked, "Have you read it?"

Emma shook her head and sat across from her.

"Well, it is an adventure story and I am sure a bit more profound than most pictures books you've read."
"Ha, funny, ha."

Regina grinned. After slipping off her glasses she marked her place and closed the cover. "It recounts the tale of a sailor by the name of Marlow. He makes passage up the Congo River, the underbelly of civilization, where he meets pilgrims, cannibals, and the infamous Mr. Kurtz. At the forefront the novel deals with imperialism and the exploitation of the African natives. Reading between the lines you will find both romantic mysticism and a glimpse into the darkest corners of human nature."

"Mm, I'm sure you identify with the natives. Misunderstood souls and all that."

"Well… yes, the savages are much more civilized than they are made out to be."

Emma pulled her knees up to her chest, taking pleasure in the scene of Regina deep in thought. "Somehow I think that story is more about hearts than you let on."

"I thought you never read it."

Emma returned her pointed look and grinned. "Hey, if it gets me in her…"

"Don't."

Emma chuckled.

A finger tapped on the book and eventually Regina had to hide her amusement.

"Just what is it between you two, anyway? Every time you're around Hook it's like watching high school sweethearts catching up."

"Who's spying now?" mused Regina with a snicker. "Why should it matter if Hook and I have a history?"

"It matters because I want to know!" Emma shot back a bit louder than anticipated. "I... I mean, it's just weird seeing you like that. With him. I didn't realize it was more than rivalry that brought you two together."

"Things were not always so pleasant between us. But when they were good, they were good."

Regina saw the reddening tips of Emma's ears and chuckled softly. "Our paths have crossed multiple times and over the years Hook taught me much of living in the moment. The thrill of adventure and its risks, all the treasure it yielded... it was exciting. He was exciting."

Pale thin lips parted and then closed. Emma looked down sheepishly and mumbled, "He seems to know how to make you laugh."

"For all that bravery and goodness you sure don't think that highly of yourself, do you?" Regina let out her exasperation in a heavy sigh. Sometimes it took the most blatant of tricks up her sleeve to convince the blonde of her intentions. "What do you want me to say, Emma? That I didn't have a little fun along the way? That I took no pleasure in the exotic and the mysterious?" Her expression turned a shade darker while her tone lowered dangerously. "I can assure you, there is nothing fun about being queen to the man you were married off to. I had no choice but to run into the arms of men like Killian. It was escapism, nothing more."

"Did your husband ever catch you?"

"Once."
From the look on her face it was evident that Regina didn't want to elaborate. There was something more than hatred lurking behind that one word and it was more than desperation that urged Emma to pull her in, to take away the pain that lingered and the nights that haunted. Emma wanted to surround her in comforting touches and assuring promises. And she wanted to do so much more. Three simple words. That was all it took. Let. Me. In.

"I wish I had known you then."

"No, you don't. I was foolish," Regina dismissed. After a beat she added, "And young."

"That's exactly why."

The admission provoked a small gasp. The shock of it spurred Regina to turn away shyly. There were so many ugly shaped pieces of her past that were responsible for whom she was today. Some of those pieces had been engineered by those who sought her downfall, others crafted by her own hand. In time she learned of the futility in escaping one's mistakes, but she did learn the wisdom in keeping a safe distance. Just as she kept that life at arm's length, she also wanted to keep it far from Henry and Emma.

Out of pure curiosity she looked back to witness the still present guise of compassion. Emma's blunt honesty may be reason enough to open up and to accept that there were a few good pieces of her worth sharing. The fact that Emma cared about the person underneath and not the reputation made her eyes turn glassy. She cocked her head and returned the adoration in kind. She smiled.

They sat across from each other, silent with eyes smiling. After a while Regina decided it was time leave the chilly bow for the warmth of her bed. She surprised Emma by leaning in to place a tender kiss on her lips.

"By the way, you look cute in a little grease."

Emma noticed her gaze before she departed. Quickly wiping at her nose, her hand came away with the smudge. She scowled to herself. If Regina started calling her grease monkey she would never live that one done. Ever.

She definitely preferred 'Miss Swan.'
It was just like Hook said it would be: hard, wet, and long. While the girls got a good salty shower every once and a while, David and Gold had their own problems; David having to deal with a finicky washer and Gold trying to coexist with a broken faucet. Muscles were strained, tempers grew, and by the end of the week every crew member wanted off.

Hook wouldn't have it. The one thing he couldn't stand more than a lazy crew was a lazy crew that whined 24/7. It wasn't that they didn't finish their duties by the end of the day; they just could do so with less attitude. Hook had seen it before, it was called 'Ship Fever.' The only remedy, therefore, was a free day.

A free day, as Hook termed it, was exactly 24 hours (no more, no less) devoid of the backbreaking but honorable work. The crew jumped at the chance to shirk such duties and collectively planned out their Friday from break of day to nightfall. The rule was that each person would come up with an activity of their choice while all other persons have to participate, no exceptions. It was fair, for a ship consisting of bitter feuds and shifting alliances.

Being captain, Hook just had to have the privilege of proposing the first activity. However, what was surprising was his choice of activity. Emma's first words being, "What the hell?!"

"Alright ladies and gents! Now what I have set before you is a basic kit with all the essentials. Because I am a professional I will be instructing with my own step-by-step process that has over the years never steered me wrong. Just be sure to wash your hands before we start. You don't want me to start singing the song."

"Song?" Emma raised her brow and smirked.

"Yes, indeed. 'Twas an old nursery rhyme my mum used to sing me when I refused to wash. It goes like so…

"This is the way we wash our hands
Wash our hands, wash our hands,
This is the way we wash our hands
In the afternoon.

Germs are bad so scrub those teeth
Scrub those teeth, scrub those teeth,
Germs are bad so –"

" – Scrub those teeth," Mary Margaret finished, "Yeah, we got it."

Emma was holding her abdomen in a fit of laughter. "What, your land ran out of cautionary tales about germs?"

Hook just crossed his arms and stomped his boot.

"Aw, look. The petulant child is offended."

"Just let the man have his fun, Regina. You too, girls," David scolded his wife and giggling child. "This is Hook's activity and we should respect that."

The pirate shouldered past David, snarling in a shaking voice, "I don't need you fighting my school
yard battles." He motioned to the table. "If you would all be so kind as to sit at your places we can begin."

If Hook couldn't appear sensitive enough, the delicate way in which he approached the art of nail manicuring sure did. And he came prepared. At every place setting was a towel, a small bowl of clear solution, two bottles of cream, a brush, and a nail file. At the center of the table were bottles of nail polish in several shades reserved for the ladies (and perhaps an enterprising gentleman).

The crew hunkered down before their kits, carefully inspecting their instruments and tentatively poking a finger into the solution. Gold took everyone by surprise with his eager approach to the activity. The first to sit down, he wasted no time in placing his fingers on his towel in a lovely flourishing motion, and patiently waited for instructions like this wasn't his first rodeo.

While Hook took the helm in introducing the gist of manicures, Mary Margaret was all smiles. She was no stranger to the occasional pampering. It was one of the many benefits of the modern world, but not something she would admit to the Evil Queen responsible. David was a complete novice, but hung onto Hook's every word. Regina remained indifferent while sneaking non-too-subtle glances at the blonde's chest. And then there was Emma who was breaking the world record for number of consecutive sighs.

"Is this really necessary? You only have five fingers for Christ's sake!"

"Emma," her mother scolded, "whining is improper. We all made a pact to participate in everyone's chosen activity. Have patience. You'll get your turn."

Emma sank back in her chair with a huff. Her wrinkled forehead and pouting lips were comparable to a sulking child.

"Anyway, you are a princess and a Charming. It would do you well to take on a more feminine appearance."

David didn't seem to pick up on his being lumped into that feminine Charming group, but a chuckling Regina and Gold did.

Emma just beheld the nail file like it was going to decapitate her.

"Well I don't see why Miss Swan has to change anything about herself."

All heads turned to the brunette while Emma perked up in her seat.

When it was clear how many curious stares she was getting Regina clarified, "Just because one finds out they are royalty doesn't mean they have to act the part. I certainly will not allow a bunch of strangers improving upon perfection."

Somehow, by some stretch of the imagination, it was not the comment on perfection that startled them. Emma, however, zeroed in straightaway, meeting Regina with a growing smile and soft eyes.

"Wait," Mary Margaret held up a hand, "you've never had a manicure before?"

Regina shook her head. "Why would I?" she asked totally blasé.

David gaped from the opposite side of the table. "How can that be? You're like the Chanel of Storybrooke, the small town poster girl for Estee Lauder, the queen of beauty and wellness!"

They all winced as his voice gradually rose to a shrill pitch.
"I mean," he cleared his throat and spoke deeply, "you always wear nail polish. I just assumed…"

"You would," Regina groured, narrowing her eyes. "I oppose people touching me. And I do not make a habit out of willingly placing myself in others' hands." She made a point of ending that statement with a glare in Gold's direction.

After a brief moment of silence Gold looked up from his pretty nails to find all eyes on him. "What did I do now?"

"Look sharp now and pay attention," Hook said. Taking the point of his hook he pierced the wood end of his brush. He indicated with the new instrument and added, "Now, buff the nail like so."

Emma sighed heavily. "Fucking kill me."

"If there are apples on board it can be arranged."

"Regina," Mary Margaret groaned, "that joke is getting really old."

***

Emma surprised everyone by choosing swimming as her activity. It was surprising, of course, because she was not the best swimmer, a fact which she whined about on a daily basis despite willingly stepping on board a ship that sailed in water. Lots of water.

At midafternoon the crew walked out on the deck in their suits and climbed down the ladder lowered over starboard side. Gold had on a pair of white trunks designed with images of dollar bills while Hook sported knee length shorts that read on his ass, This booty is rated AARRRR. Mary Margaret wore a tasteful suit with a daisy print, and David scared his daughter with the image of him in leopard spandex. Emma was undecided on whether to puke or spill a liberal amount of bleach into her eyes.

While the others began swimming and splashing a ways from the ship, Emma hung back. Leaning against the railing Emma looked down at her two piece bikini. She didn't work out for nothing, so when it came time to choose a bathing suit she jumped at the chance to show off her hard work. She was proud of this bod.

And then Regina came out.

"Wha-?"

A fine brow rose and lips pursed to hide her amusement. "Something wrong, dear?"

Emma closed her mouth and shook her head violently.

Eyes clawing up Emma's slim legs and over the toned stomach to pronounced shoulder muscles. Regina smiled, satisfied. "Well come along now," she instructed, "before the water gets cold."

Emma watched as the brunette walked away in her one piece – repeat ONE PIECE – bathing suit. She looked good, that could not be denied. In fact, Emma thought she looked pretty damn great, but she was expecting a different style suit, one that would have shown off more… effects.

After an embarrassingly awkward trudge down the ladder (which seemed rigged to show all the unnecessary flab of one's body), Emma made splash down.

"Shit, Regina it's COLD!"

The brunette looked up with boredom and shrugged. "This isn't my activity. I don't know why you're
Death grip on the ladder Emma's legs flapped erratically in the deep blue ocean. Two minutes in and her breathing was labored. Losing feeling in her hand she let go of the ladder with a girly squeal and started treading with two arms and two legs. She was not comfortable with this. Not comfortable at all.

"Maybe you should join them," Regina jutted a chin towards the rather energetic game of Marco Polo. "Seems like they're keeping warm."

"N-n-no thanks," Emma stuttered through chattering teeth. She tried hugging her midsection to conserve warmth, but the strain on her legs was too much. Talk about treading in water that rivaled the Arctic fucking Ocean, this was ridiculous. And probably dangerous. But then there Regina was calmly floating about and sporting perfectly dry hair. Actually, the very ends of her brunette hair were close enough to the surface to just dip tantalizingly in. Emma was just itching to splash her, but she liked her heart where it was thank you very much. "Can't you do something? Like, with magic?"

"Magic isn't the solution to everything. It might not always be there when you need it, say when you're in exhaustion or minutes from defeat. You have to learn to adapt to harsh conditions. The water may be cold, but if your resources are not utilized you will never adjust. Why do you think I wore my one piece bathing suit?"

Cold my ass, Emma thought. This woman was capital E-V-I-L.

"Just one little spell? Pleeeease?"

Regina could agree with Hook on some things but not on this. Emma Swan was certainly without a shred of doubt attractive when she pouted. It also made Regina acquiesce against her own conscience.

"I suppose. One spell, but you will do it."

Emma's face fell. "Oh, come on Regina."

"Do not 'come on Regina' me. I've taught you the basics. It should take little brain power from that blonde head of yours to heat the water around you. That or I've seriously overrated your abilities."

"Jesus, alright, alright. You can dispense with the sarcasm. I'll do it."

"Just a few feet in diameter, and not too high in temperature. We're not talking about boiling the entire Pacific."

Emma gave her a 'do I look stupid' look and went back to concentrating. Sucking air through her nose and out through her mouth she closed her eyes. Not feeling any warmer she asked, "Can't you touch me again? It seems like that's the only way I operate."

Regina snorted. "I'm sure you like to think that."

"Come on, Regina. You can't deny our chemistry."

Regina had begun to swim over, but stopped and frowned at the smirk. It had been the first time either of them brought up the subject of their connection, magical, sexual, or what have you. It had been such a very long time since Regina put any stock in the need for companionship, but not that long ago since her last and maybe only true love gave his blessing to find another. Regina wasn't emotionally ready to find anyone much less notice the person right in front of her. She wasn't
prepared, so the comment was shrugged off and she bit the bullet.

Eyes closed again Emma went back to slow even breathing. In… out… in… out… in… Regina grasped her shoulders.

There were twin gasps as a pervading energy coiled around them. It couldn't be defined or explained, but the feeling surged under their skin and penetrated further. It jolted their hearts instantly as if they had just been revived by a magical defibrillator. The shock dissipated and made way for a warm embrace.

"We did it," Regina whispered as if this were a first time occurrence. What they were capable of never ceased to amaze her. Not wanting to admit it out loud, she secretly hoped that would always be the case.

"Told you," Emma tipped her head with that dopey half-smile. "Chemistry."

Their eyes held. The warmth of the sea hugged them like a lover's embrace. Emma panned down to slightly parted lips. Regina looked away and swam a ways back.

A throat was cleared before Regina asked mockingly, "Why propose this whole charade if you can't swim?"

"I never said I couldn't swim." Emma returned crankily. "It's just, as a kid I never stayed in one home long enough to finish a swimming lesson. I'm doing rather fine." She subsequently faltered and slipped under. Her head resurfaced seconds later. Sputtering and coughing, she doggy paddled closer to the ladder.

"What are you doing?" Regina laughed, knowing full well what the woman was doing.

"Shut it."

Unable to stop giggling at the terror struck green eyes, Regina swam closer. With arms stretched underwater she sent a pulse of magic towards the woman clinging to the rungs like a frightened baboon.

"What the hell?!" Emma cried as her body surged upward. Her hyperventilating began to gradually even out as she got her balance. "This is… this is… kinda nice."

"You're now surrounded by a salt dense bubble of water. You shouldn't have any further scares. And you can ease off the ladder now."

Eyes squeezed shut and face cringing she let go. Without the need to tread water her body immediately began floating. Emma smiled. It felt like she was sitting on a cloud. "Awesome," she said, laughing.

Regina started a sidestroke towards the stern. There could have been a glint in her eyes, but it might have been the sunlight. "Follow me."

"Why, what's over there?"

"Just do as you're told, Miss Swan."

Well that tone sounded interesting. As sheriff Emma should really have investigated. Without further invitation she followed after Regina.
From the other side of the ship the rest of the crew was gone from view and the two women were left to swim in peace. Paddling around to face the ship Emma found Regina and, really, shouldn't have been surprised. The brunette had her back against the stern side with arms out clinging to the wood gracefully. Her head was tipped back, eyes closed in the warm sun. She was a goddess.

There was only one thing Emma wanted out of this whole… charade as it was called. Okay, maybe two or three things. If she played her cards right Emma might prove the Rolling Stones wrong and get what she wanted.

"Swim into my bubble, your Majesty."

Regina let herself be pulled in and couldn't help but laugh into Emma's mouth.

"Stop that. I want to kiss you."

"I can't help it. You're so entertaining."

"I can be entertaining in other ways. If you'd only let me access…"

Regina followed Emma's gaze and rolled her eyes. There was a snap of fingers and in a flash the brunette's one piece changed to a black two piece bathing suit.

Score one for Emma Swan. Rolling Stones: zero.

The bottom half was not visible but the top half definitely was. The rounded, full breasts Emma had yet to spend adequate time with were held up and, yes, semi-covered. The top strings looped and tied behind her neck. Emma had to stop her hands from untying the frustrating little bitch of a knot.

Emma took a deep breath before catching Regina's questioning stare. With an air of sophistication she maintained, "I'm just gonna get a better look."

Before Regina could protest the blonde went under with a splash. "She just can't help herself, can she?" Her eyes darted left and right to ensure they were still alone. After only a few seconds she started getting impatient. If she wasn't swimming in the ocean the former mayor would have planted her hands on her hips. "And now I've been abandoned. This isn't fun – MISS SWAN!" she gasped in surprise as a pair of arms wrapped themselves around her middle. They no doubt belonged to Emma for the blonde had resurfaced from behind and was kissing her shoulder greedily.

"Emma stop! You're tickling me!"

"I thought you liked it when I took the initiative? Come on, you're even laughing. Don't tell me you don't like it."

"This is not genuine laughter! I'm… ha-ha… Em-ma!"

She had fully enveloped Regina while laying kisses on her neck. She was slow, taking her time in strategically placing every kiss in the desired spot on the vibrating throat. Regina had a firm grip on the arms imprisoning her body, but she continued to giggle under butterfly grazes.

Through with submitting, Regina escaped and turned on Emma. She smiled devilishly before kissing Emma full on the lips. It didn't take long for a mouth to open for an insistent tongue.

As they floated in the same bubble of water in an ocean far from home their magic entwined them closer, weaving an unseen bond that's only purpose was to grow stronger. Twisting fingers in the woman's long, wet hair Regina reveled in their reunion. It had been hours since they last met like this
and from the way Emma's lips were responding she was relishing it as well.

And so they kissed like they always did. They kissed like it would be their last.

***

"Hey, where did Hook go?"

Gold and David paused their game of football catch and looked around. There was a ship, steadily creaking atop the water. Then ocean and more ocean. They shrugged at Mary Margaret. Seconds later they heard a faraway shriek and then laughing.

"HOOK! I will rip your out heart for REAL!"

***

"There are three basic components to yoga, and those are relaxation, meditation, and deep breathing. For relaxation it is crucial to ignore all outside stimuli. Close off your mind and body to any distractions that may discourage light concentration. Look from within. Clear your mind and with the sound of my voice I will guide you to the next state which is deep breathing…"

The group sat cross-legged on their own mats with wrists resting lightly on knees. Sitting dolefully on his mat was Hook who was fashioning a chromatic bruise on his chin. After the sneaking pirate stole a handful of Regina's bikini ass Emma threw a right hook that would have made Mike Tyson look like Spongebob. No one wanted to talk about it. Especially Hook.

Leading the exercise was Mary Margaret who seemed to thrive on being the center of attention. Though generally a humble person, deep down she loved to excel in areas that her peers lacked skill in. It showed in the wide smile plastered to her face, a smile that as the minutes ticked by seemed to make her students uncomfortable despite the activity's goal.

"Meditation," Mary Margaret explained, "contrary to modern text, has origins that stretch as far back as Panchatan Times in our world. Though it was a period far before written history, our ancestors made a point to pass down what they knew through oral tales. Now, the tradition –"

"Am I here for a history lesson, or can we just get down to the good stuff?" asked a cranky Hook. "What is it called, downward doggie style?"

Several eye rolls and a head slap later...

"One of the benefits to yoga is improvement in posture. No one likes a slumper. Isn't that right my darling daughter?"

"What?" Emma's gaze ripped away from the brunette beside her. "Huh?"

Mary Margaret cocked her head and eyed Emma, a nonverbal equivalent of motherly scolding to the undisciplined child. "As I was saying, posture is key to a healthy, long life. For our first exercise please kneel on your mats so that your thighs are perpendicular to the floor. Without hunching I want everyone to bring their spine straight. Pull your head and shoulders back… yes, that's good. Now tuck your chins down a bit… very good Regina, I'm impressed." Mary Margaret caught the smirk and muttered, "If only you had done this 28 years ago."

"What was that?"

A flustered Mary Margaret quickly got back on track. "A very good start, class! For our next
exercise I want you all to lean forward, placing your palms on the mat in front of you. Now… stretch!"

"Why do you always have to look so perfect?" Emma mumbled.

"Twenty-eight years behind a desk I had to find some method of staying limber." Breathing easy and at peace, Regina smirked and tilted her head amusingly. "Or were you speaking generally?"

For Emma's part, the yoga thing was a bit of an uphill battle (a Mount Everest size hill). Sweat stung her eyes as she grunted into her thigh and reached out in vain to touch her toes. "Fuck," she muttered, "why did God have to make me so tall?"

Forehead to the floor and holding a perfect pose, Regina chuckled out a reply. "I may be wrong, but I think you are in the wrong pose."

Emma looked around her and saw Gold, David, and Hook in kneeling positions and stretching their arms out across the mat. The brunette beside her made it look about as easy as biting into a bear claw. Emma's stomach rumbled at the thought.

"Need a hand, dear?"

"Oh, you'd love that wouldn't you?"

Standing up from her mat, Mary Margaret demonstrated the next position. She instructed in a pert tone, "This one is great for stretching the hamstrings!"

Regina followed along, rotating her limber body to the appropriate pose and not sticking a single toe out of place. It was perfection, as Emma described.

Tucking her chin down Regina lowered her voice so only Emma could hear. She answered, "When have you ever known me to not take advantage of a stimulating exchange? If we were in a more private location I'm sure you would come to love it as well," Regina met Emma's widening eyes and purred, "Em-ma."

"Woop! Fuuu-

They were Emma's last words before she lost her balance and crashed to the mat in an awkward heap.

***

Yoga class had to be cut short due to Emma's insistent stomach. She kept complaining about not having bear claws on board, which in and of itself did not come as a surprise to anyone familiar with her eating habits. The need for sustanance was a perfect opportunity for Gold to start his activity.

The crew was shoulder to shoulder and perspiring in the cramped galley, but all too happy to shut Emma up with their food preparation. Knives ran across the boards, spoons clanked against bowls, and fingers tore at fragrant herbs. It was a lovely system and much more relaxing than Mary Margaret's yoga/history session, or 'Snore Fest' as Hook called it.

Despite his irritable nature, Gold was a superb teacher. Patient and detailed in his instructions he would show them his methods and shortcuts and left it up for them to decide what they were comfortable with. He treated each and every one of them equally, and chastised them when they needed the disciple. Except for Hook (Gold refused to give him a knife), citing his reasoning that the criminal only had one hand. Hook shot back that discrimination in the workplace was uncalled for.
Everyone else remained neutral during that cat fight.

Regina, having been a pupil of Gold’s, took his instructions with a grain of salt (no pun intended). She was also a self-professed queen of culinary and expert in the art of the Italian tradition of lasagna. The presence of two such monstrous egos in so tiny a room would inevitably end in bloodshed. Many feared they would come to blows.

The air was so thick with tension you could slice through it like a knife through a soggy bear claw (according to Emma). It was an extremely uncomfortable work environment, one that had the crew on their toes ready to flee at the first sign of a fire ball.

"Rumple, you're doing it wrong."

"Stick to your precious apples and I will take care of the rest. I don't need you meddling in things that are not your concern."

"That is rich coming from you, oh Dark One who manipulated an innocent girl, convinced her to murder her father, and provided her a curse that left an empty void in her heart. I hardly think she forgives you for anything less how you cut those beans!"

"I'd like to see you chop legumes with a six-inch blade after slicing ten onions in a row!"

Regina's mouth turned up into a smirk as she reached across from him to grab the loaf of bread. "And here I thought those tears were restitution from years of murder and mayhem."

"Do NOT touch my knife! Have you never seen Hell's Kitchen?"

The crew watched it all like a Wimbledon tennis match that wouldn't end. David threw a worried glance at his wife, but Mary Margaret shook her head quickly and pulled her head down obediently. Emma was debating whether or not her hair would get singed in the process of separating the two enemies when the time came. Then there was the pirate who just took it all in with a smile and threw in few words to fuel the fire.

"Oh please," scoffed Regina who wouldn't dream of touching anyone's 'knife.' "You are nothing like Mr. Ramsay."

"I take that as a compliment. I am far more superior to that hack." Gold went back to chopping and shook his head. "Psh, and you think my reputation is any less pugnacious."

"Sounds like someone has some confidence issues to work out. May I recommend Dr. Hopper? I'm sure you two would have much to talk about. Perhaps he can cure that unhealthy fixation you have with that tart from Food Network."

Gold could have swallowed a melon for how big his eyes grew. Turning to face Regina he roared like a lion protecting its cub. "That woman knows more about blanching edamame than you will ever know!"

Regina gasped visibly. "How dare you attack my cooking skills. To suggest I know nothing…"

"At least you know more than Jon Snow," offered Emma.

"Stay out of this!"

Emma backed away from the twin barks and smiled apologetically, in discomfort.
Regina's head whipped back to her opponent. Her eyes were blazing with challenge. "I know more about how to make the perfect lasagna than you will ever."

"The first time I made consommé it solidified just flawlessly. It was perfection in a bowl."

"I was making turducken before you even knew how to pronounce consommé."

"I have no qualms about eating the heart of unicorns. They are a delicacy in the Northern lands."

Regina's eyes clouded purple and her fists clenched. No one sullied her most beloved creatures and got away with it. "Really? Because I know a librarian who is adept at playing the heart of a Dark One for a fool."

The hand on a six-inch knife tightened. Gold's grimace gradually transformed to an impish grin. "At least I don't accidentally poison my spawn."

"No, you just abandon them."

"ARRGH!"

"ROOOAAR!"

A cacophony of lightening, clashing steel, and squelched beans consumed the galley. Purple and green light battled for dominance as lettuce and sliced tomato surged around them like a vegan tornado. The crew dove under sailing knives and dodged the occasional bean bullet before their adrenaline finally chose flight over fight.

The Savior took her chances with the fleeing cowards. A meal wasn't worth getting your hair scorched.

***

The two miscreants escaped with no more than a few scratches and some spinach stuck in unlikely places. Wanting to move on to the next activity David and Emma forced them to shake hands and apologize. Gold gave a weak hand shake while Regina muttered a promise to finish what they started.

Ironically, the next to propose the activity that Friday night was Regina.

The night was comfortably warm thanks to the light breeze. The upper deck was dark save for the enchanted disco ball suspended by Regina's magic. It caught the moonlight and cast a glow on the dance floor as it turned and shimmered. A boom box was procured and tunes were played.

Regina had a fascination for 70's culture. The obsession started when she saw her doppelganger in a TV show called, Swingtown. Trina Decker was everything she dreamed of being as a child, adventurous and independent. The minute that cheeky woman graced her screen she spent the next few years following up on a decade of 70s film and music.

All that research boded well for the woman. After years of 'hustling' and 'cha cha-ing' in the shadowed privacy of her home she could now show off her disco skills to the idiots who still called her Evil Queen.

The first to take the dance floor she started out a beat, warming up to A Fifth of Beethoven. The sleeveless purple dress twirled with her hips while she hugged her jiving bare shoulders. Instinct took over as she moved passionately to the song. Never had Regina felt more alive than when she danced.
She could feel the beat of her heart speeding up to its rightful tempo. Her eyes closed in ecstasy as the music washed over her senses.

On the sidelines were the speechless "idiots," including David bobbing his head to the bass line and Mary Margaret frowning at the cut of Regina's dress. A slack-jawed Emma had her eyes super glued to the gyrating hips.

"Are you coming? Or do you need a signed and stamped invitation?"

Emma's jaw closed and she shook the fog from her brain. A pair of brown eyes were intensely fixed in her direction. It occurred to Emma that Regina was speaking to her and not the four other people there.

An inviting brow rose at the blonde who stumbled across the line instantly. After all, everyone had to participate, and there was no disappointing a woman in dance heat.

Emma accepted the hand in the presence of her parents. The second they touched a surge of energy grazed her skin. It was customary for this type of reaction to occur and it had started ever since the mine. Their magic intertwined in a dance all their own as it surrounded and bound them. It was a statement; Emma's immediate response of following when called, how freely their hands met and how their fingers made love as they danced. Little did Emma know, the bold statement went unnoticed by her parents.

King Floyd's Groove Me started flowing from the boom box.

Emma cocked her head to catch the lyrics. Green eyes narrowed at the brewing conspiracy. "Are you trying to send me a message?"

"Can't handle it?"

"Oh, I can," Emma assured, "I just want to make sure you know what you're unleashing here." She pointed to herself and smirked confidently.

Regina rolled her eyes.

After trying and failing to live up to her 'unleashed' self, Regina demonstrated a few moves. They stomped, pivoted, and shoulder rocked to the beat all doing it side by side. Emma felt the pressure of a hand on her hip as they swayed forward and back, then side to side. It was heaven, even if she danced with two left feet.

"So you really can dance."

"Whenever were my dancing skills in question, Miss Swan?"

"You must practice quite a bit. Although, I have to confess it’s hard to imagine you sitting in front of the television watching a disco marathon. That must have been an experience.”

"Yes!" Regina exclaimed with an explosion of excitement on her face. "In fact, I've seen Saturday Night Fever AT LEAST 50 times. It's an extraordinary piece of cinema; the choreography, the lights, and the cinematography. Oh," her eyes lit up, "and least I forget the talented John Travolta." She looked around for a moment and leaned in, whispering conspiratorially, "I had a crush on him."

"Wow," Emma said, taken aback a bit by such candor, "yeah, that really is extraordinary. Hey, so… here's the thing, John is like…”
"Amazing, right?"

"Of course, amazing. Sure thing." The blonde worried at her lip, wondering if she should break the news. Regina had been confined within the town for 28 years, so there was no way of knowing for sure if she got wind of it. When it came down to it she didn't want to hurt the woman, but she couldn't keep Regina in the dark about the man of her dreams. Emma took breath and just blurted it out. "His sexuality has been questioned for years and it all sort of became news when someone outed him from the closet."

For a moment it looked like Regina didn't hear right. Her face remained its exuberant self, but frozen just the same.

"You do know what that means, right?"

"Oh. Well, yes." Her tone was as sharp and confident as any former politician could muster, but her eyes slowly lost their enchantment. Something died within those brown eyes that night. "It's not like I had a chance to begin with."

"Don't sell yourself short, doll face," Emma asserted. Her shoulders bobbed up in a shrug. "I say it's his loss. And that's on the level."

"Wrong era, dear. This is dance fever not hard boiled cops and robbers."

"I was thinking more along the lines of detective and femme fatale. Anyway, there was dancing in the 40s, right?"

Such a silly question brought a smile to Regina's lips. Brown eyes gained back their luster. "You tell me, detective."

"We're getting off topic."

"I would not have guessed."

"So let's talk dance movies," Emma suggested. Eyes glinted and lips turned to a smirk. "Ever seen Flashdance?"

"No," Regina searched her memory, "I haven't seen that one. Why?"

Emma's cheeks colored. She stammered out, "N-no reason."

Soon they were drawing in short, laboring breaths and decided to take a break. Emma offered to 'buy Regina a drink' at the 'mini bar.' The drinks which were solely two kinds of rum (courtesy of Hook) were free and the bar consisted of a rickety table and a pile of clean towels (courtesy of David). Regina played along and accepted the drink with a barely hidden grin.

As punishment for their earlier squabble Regina jinxed Gold and Hook so they couldn't dance more than a foot from each other. The jerky movements of the pirate paired with the penguin-like swaying of Gold cancelled each other out as they moved within their little bubble. They made for a great pair in all their awkward glory.

David was having a grand old time, twirling and singling, "Le freak, c'est chic," and shooting his hands in the air with a shout of, "Freak out!" His steps were short as he did a 'one, two, cha cha cha' all while motioning his hips ever so flamboyantly.

"David, honey, I had NO idea you were this much fun!"
"Oh, yeah. Just put on some groovy tunes and watch out, toots."

Emma had never felt more glad that her father wasn't around to chaperone her high school prom. Watching from afar she turned to Regina who was sipping her rum in the classiest way she knew how. Emma shouted over the music in a dead serious tone, "Please tell me I'm not related to that guy."

"Why do you think I cast the curse?"

Emma nodded carefully, admitting, "I'm starting to see the appeal now."

Soon they were back out on the dance floor. Regina kept them in a tight proximity, pulling Emma in by the hand or shoulder or waist when she became too shy. Though Emma was having trouble keeping up with the woman's moves the view was pretty good from the newbie's perspective. The woman had never looked so alive, so willing to let her walls down if only for a moment. She was unburdened by curses and dark magic and forever out of reach from heartless mothers. Her hair was down and her spirits had never reached such heights.

"You look really happy."

"I am. It's nice to finally have a dance partner." Regina smile twitched a bit. "But I wish Henry was here."

The only thing Emma wanted more than that was the power to make those unshed tears disappear. She squeezed the hand in hers and replied, "Me too. Did you ever teach him how to dance?"

Regina's smile came back and she shook her head. "I tried, many times in fact. He was far too embarrassed to dance with his mother, even in the privacy of our home." She laughed at the memory of a five-year-old Henry ripping his arm from her grasp and fleeing the voice of Marvin Gaye.

"There are not many things I could share with him – things that interested me, that is. He liked food, but he wouldn't cook with me. Visits to my office were rare and only occurred if he wanted something. And apple picking was, and I quote, 'The worst punishment in the whole wide world.' I thought it was just because we were different." She paused when Emma met her eyes sadly, almost in apology. "I didn't know how to be a mother."

"It's not a competition, Regina. You made mistakes like any new single mother would, but you're sure as hell not worst mother of the year. There was no one around to give you advice on growing little boys or tips to make the weekends fun. You did the best with what you had." Her blonde head tipped in order to bring their faces closer. "I think you two have more in common than you know. Just because Henry and I broke the curse –"

"I don't think I want to talk about this anymore," Regina interrupted. She avoided eye contact as her finger flicked away some mascara.

"Okay," Emma whispered. She tightened her hold on the slim waist, bringing their heat to the cool space between. "Okay. Let's just dance."

***

After a day filled with surprising tidbits of people's character, several arguments, and a wee bit o' fun the last thing the crew wanted was an activity where they had to do something. Wiped out from the day, all they wanted to do was kick back and relax. It was something Hook was counting on. He was hoping to show each and every one of his whiny crew that fun could be just as much work as fulfilling their ship duties. All play and no work makes for an over sensitized gaggle of adults.
The sixth and final activity was a relief and a blessing. Movie night was made possible by a projector which cast the film onto the mainsail. If it were not for calm winds and such a large mast the film screening would have been an utter flop. It was pretty impressive, but hardly on level with Sundance or Cannes. Popcorn and Buncha Crunch made up for that.

The first *Pirates of the Caribbean* happened to be David's favorite movie OF ALL TIME. He encouraged everyone to dress up for the screening, but was met with protests and one acerbate reply of, "If you think I'll pose as some harlot freebooter than you can run yourself through that toy sword." David put the wooden pirate sword away, but kept the dog-eared hat and the fake mustache Mary Margaret kindly drew on his face.

For the most part they enjoyed it, even laughing at David's enthusiastic shouts of "This is my favorite part!" and the occasional chanting of "Go Captain Jack!" Gold had a few issues with the plot, including how Jack Sparrow 'threw around deals like they were pennies.' All in all a movie was the perfect end to their Friday, and the man-child swinging his recaptured sword around could hardly mess with that. There was entertainment, and then there was *entertainment*.

In the back row sat the clichéd teenagers soundly making out during the action scenes.

"Did you mean what you said?" Emma asked as she drew back from Regina's aching red lips. A line formed between her brows, prompting for clarification. Emma repeated the phrase from memory because it was not something she would easily forget. "I don't see why Miss Swan has to change anything about herself.' There was also something about not improving on perfection." Emma's forehead crinkled half in appall and half in wonder. "Perfection. Were you just throwing the word out or did you really mean it?"

"I never said that."

The genuine confusion was revealing. "Yes," Emma shot back, "you did. I even remember how your eyes were shifting towards me every two seconds after you said it."

"Well I don't remember the compelling event. Really, you are about as imaginative as Henry sometimes," huffed Regina. Her shoulders shifted uncomfortably while her body grew distant from the blonde. Her eyes flickered across the movie screen before the realization washed over her face. Regina froze, lips parted. Did she really say that? Impossible. Yet she couldn't help feeling how right such a statement would be. The flash of vulnerability was covered by a cough. She put every ounce of certainty into the look. "You obviously misinterpreted the context."

Emma smirked at the tentative glance. "You can't fool me, former Madam Mayor."

Any retort was stifled by a quick kiss. Emma always had to have the last word.

"Shh!" David turned to the wide-eyed teenagers who had just separated lips. He scolded them with a dangerous look. "This is the part where Jack fake propositions Barbossa in order to prolong the blood ritual so that Will can be rescued and be reunited with his true love!"

Regina stared at him like he should have taken Belle's place in the mental institution. Damn curse loopholes.

"Sorry," Emma muttered, and threw a popcorn kernel at her father's head.

"I like this Miss Swann," Regina mentioned over some Buncha Crunch. She explained despite Emma's snort. "Elizabeth was resourceful in building the signal fire with rum. And she out of everyone seems to grow as the story progresses. I like this movie," she finished matter-of-factly.
Emma's gaze held an unreadable expression.

"What?"

"David first saw this movie a few months ago. Henry was the one who recommended it." Emma's heart jumped in contentment, her eyes smiling. "Pirates of the Caribbean is his favorite movie."

Regina did a small intake of breath and turned back to the screen. She should have felt sorrow at not knowing her own son's favorite film. She couldn't feel sorrow because all she felt was hope. Maybe Regina had something in common with her little boy after all.
Wife Swap

The fairy had traveled miles upon miles since leaving her cohorts behind. She was a rogue and a
disappointment to her teachers. "Too fool hardy and bursting with imprudent notions," they had said.
Where the elders stressed one fairy to a person, the rogue fairy embellished the granting of wishes to
anyone and everyone in need. One didn't have to be another's fairy godmother to make their life a
little easier or a bit brighter. After all, what was the downside to more happiness in the world? Her
stubborn nature and lofty ideas were not the fairy way, and was expelled as a result.

Over the sea and through the clouds she flew until a ship broke through the fog. The rogue fairy
giving off a cheery yellow glow had been following this ship for days. She had spent the hours
hiding behind the sails, looking through the window panes, and peeking over the rail unnoticed. She
had been among the crew members of the vessel and witnessed their habits and relationships with
one another. It was peculiar, the fairy thought, how they treated one another. And so the fairy was
struck with a remarkable idea.

There were those that didn't take advantage of what they had and others that benefited in more mean
spirited ways. Some were selfish while others were giving, but together a pair they did not make.
The fairy wanted them to realize what they had and learn not take it for granted.

And she would enact a spell that would teach them that very lesson.

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By her own hand, Emma felt the warmth of Regina's skin. It was the only comfort felt in a damp
cabin surrounded by the wood and the rain that beat against it. It was the only liberation from
choices, choices thrust upon them and called, screamed, wished them to act in their favor. Damn
choices and damn that frigid cabin.

A thumb brushed the skin below Regina's bellybutton. Emma could feel the hairs stand on end,
reaching for her touch. The hand stayed, never venturing lower. Watching Regina sleep was enough.
She was so very still. She hardly moved when Emma hugged her through the night. The slow,
peaceful breathing passed through parted lips. A distraught brow furrowed to a dream, or nightmare.
Emma pressed herself against the woman's side to ensure in some way that she wasn't alone. It was a
move she hoped the nightmares would take note of and understand that this slumbering woman had a
protector capable of crushing them to dust.

Emma didn't like being called a savior. But she didn't mind being Regina's.

Though as disturbing as it sounded in her head, it comforted Emma that someone else had been in as
much pain as herself. They were kindred spirits and all that. Maybe not friends, or lovers, but two
unlucky people who can only improve. It was why they now slept in the same bunk every night.
They were far from being friends or lovers, but holding each other aboard a rickety ship in the ocean
was an unspoken relief from having to choose.

However, it was escape masquerading as security. Emma knew it. Regina knew it. What they didn't
know was what would occur once they reached Neverland. How would these nights of Emma
breathing in the scent of apples and Regina tangling legs around Emma change when Henry was
rescued and they returned to Storybrooke? What would happen when there were no more private
cabins to carouse in or corners to steal kisses between? Perhaps that is why she hadn't let herself be
touched by the blonde. Perhaps that is why when every chance Emma got to cover a hand over a
breast or slip under a waistband that that same hand was ripped away by Regina.
In exchange for such cruelty, Emma called for the same hands-off policy.

But the night was their reprieve where they could wrap arms about each other and sleep. For warmth, for protection, for fleeting comfort - that was all it defined itself as. It was a small slice of compassion in their cruel world and a price to pay in exchange for something greater that could not come of it. Could not because…

Emma didn't have the slightest clue. Things were changing. People were changing. Emma was feeling protective and needy, two things she would never have willingly chosen for herself. And the only thing she hated more than the burden of responsibility was relinquishing her independence. All that slipped away when Emma felt the skin under her palm. It was forgotten when Regina shifted, snaking arms around her and nuzzled into her neck. Fuck it. Being needy and protective felt damn good in those arms. She wanted Regina to feel better. She wanted them both to feel better.

Regina shivered against her as if she had heard the thought. The stroking against Regina's belly roused her from sleep.

"Why is your hand there?" Regina asked.

The disgust in her voice felt like the bite of one of those sharp chef knives Gold owned. Emma withdrew the hand and rubbed at her chest to make sure there was no wound.

Regina brought the sheet up to her chin and squeezed her eyes shut. From the moving of the thin white material it was evident how her body was shivering. "It's cold."

"That's why my hand was there."

"You did not ask. And I did not give you permission."

Okay, Emma thought, looks like it's going to be snippy Regina today.

"We kiss, but anything more is off limits. If you don't want me touching you than why do you let me in your bed? What's the point?" Emma regretted the words the moment they left her lips.

"What's the point?" Regina repeated to the space that had grown between them. Her teeth ground despite Emma's morning state. The blonde always managed to look adorable beyond words with her matted hair and the wrinkled fitted tank. Regina was aroused by the haphazard look, and at the most inopportune time. She hid her blushing cheeks with an angry snarl. "I thought I made that clear days ago."

"I just wanted you to be comfortable," Emma defended. Nothing further would get her out of from Regina's wraith so she threw out a flippant apology and turned on her other side.

Regina was right, she had made the new, constraining borders clear. Regina had grown detached, and reticent. More than usual, that is. Emma's advances had been pushed away with the request that 'this' not go any further than kissing. And if an olive toned leg happened to curl around a pale calf during the night than that would be acceptable, too, but nothing more. Emma had no clue what Regina had to hide. Whatever it was couldn't be terrible. She could handle a tattoo or piercing, though those possibilities never entered her mind as it was former mayor Regina Mills they were talking about. Prissy, perfect Regina. And yes, sexy as hell and beautiful inside out Regina.

Emma sulked and stared at the opposite wall. A stretch of silence followed before she felt Regina's hand on her lower back. A thumb roved from side to side while the palm held ownership over her spine. She turned over like she didn't want to be away in the first place. Regina looked like she needed to get something out – an apology, an explanation – but her heaving chest prevented it. The
brown eyes were full of something besides tears. The emotion swirling in there was hard to pin down for it was liquid and mysterious. A shadow of the past, a vision of the future.

The burning in Regina's chest was unbearable. The confused expression staring her in the face made it worse. Emma's forehead wrinkled to excess as she tried to make sense of what was happening. Her effort was superfluous, Regina knew, but endearing. Without warning a sob bubbled up and she choked over it, a few tears slipping. Regina didn't want to fall back into that weakness – she still called it that. She didn't want to feel helpless and not be able to turn back the clock once it happened. Because it would happen. From the creases in Emma's forehead and her hitching breath Regina knew it would happen to both of them once the line was crossed.

Regina swallowed and whispered, "What would you have me do?"

"Let me…" Emma choked over her words as emotion bubbled up to the surface. Tears obscuring her vision she shook her head and settled for something better, something that would speak more than words could say.

It was the most tragic kiss they ever shared, mixed with tears and fueled by fears of impending hurt. Their mouths seared and burned with passion. Suddenly, the heat became real; it actually burned not as a metaphor, but searing your lips off burned. They broke apart with a pained gasp, each holding fingers to sore lips. Their eyes were as wide as the Grand Canyon when they saw it.

"What the –"

"Why are you…?"

"Jesus fuck!"

"How dare you curse in my presence?!"

"Jesus FUCK!"

Emma crashed to the ground from the shove. Flat on her back and moaning she rubbed the welt forming on her head. Her vision cleared just when it was absolutely not necessary. She inhaled sharply when she felt hands clamp around her wrists. Hunched over her and looking every bit the menacing queen was Regina, or Norman Bates' alter ego.

"I will ask once and if you refuse to answer or get smart with me I will make sure that head parts from your neck.” Her grip tightened around Emma's wrists as her face came closer. "What were you doing in my bed?"

"You think I wanted to wake up with you? I have been known to have a few bright ideas but being in bed with you is not one of them. Jesus,” Emma's voice curdled and face soured through her words, "considering our relationship that's just disgusting. I would assume you had too much to drink and threw yourself at me after another one of your guys' lover's spats.”

Regina flinched visibly. Her mouth opened in retort but nothing came. Her memory of the night before was hazy. Maybe she had indulged more than she thought. The migraine rearing inside her skull would certainly explain it. Then brown eyes narrowed and she leaned further in. "From the way you were kissing me it would seem you fell all too easily for my plan."

"Come off it, Regina,” scoffed Emma. "Your tongue made the first move. I was practically choked by your desperation."

"Where is my husband?"
"I can see the weight of your question, with you straddling me and all," Emma snarked and quickly answered, "How the hell should I know?"

"Humor me."

"What, did you forget to loop his leash around the bedpost again?"

Regina's hand met the cheek with a crack that rivaled lightening.

"God," Emma groaned from the impact, holding her reddening cheek. "You said to humor you! I humored you! Ha, ha, get it?"

She earned an elbow in the stomach before her assailant left the room like a tempest on dainty bare feet.

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The telltale sound of a fight could be heard before Regina twisted the knob. She shouldered into the solid wood and with a whoosh the door practically swung off its hinges.

Clad in pajamas the couple continued their arguing despite their visitor. Technically, they were ex-couples, and Regina would remind them both of that fact. Painfully so. She leapt into the fray, claws out.

"How dare you! Steal him from me like a thief in the night!"

"Regina, honey…"

"You…" Regina's blazing eyes never left Mary Margaret's, "… you harlot!" The infamous persona she was once known by displayed in a deep voice, and looming shadow. She bared her teeth, ready to tear Mary Margaret limb from limb. She could eat her for breakfast and not in the loving sense. Regina's heart pounded in appeal for such vengeance. She needed the warm, curdling blood of Snow White on her hands. She could almost feel it, slippery, black. It felt like victory, or so she would imagine. Regina poured the burning sentiment straight into the child-like eyes of Mary Margaret, the woman who would be her enemy in any world, at any time, and in any parallel universe. Her fists clenched and her face reddened. The wraith of the Evil Queen was upon them.

"This is not what it looks like," David assured gently.

"David's right," Mary Margaret took a step towards the growing shadow. "Nothing happened. It's a misunderstanding, Regina. That's all. We woke up and –"

"You call waking up in bed together a misunderstanding? Enlighten me as to how that could – on the other hand, don't. Do not tell me. Are you so unable to control yourself that you would take another woman's husband? My husband?"

"It's not like that. I promise you I did not mean for this."

"You promise?" spat Regina, head jutting forward in disbelief. "You're promises lost their credibility when my fiancé was murdered. David is yours no longer. He is mine. It's been three years since the divorce. I think it's time to move on."

"Honey, you're making more of it than –"

"She will pay for this! I knew what her plans were for you. Lonely, dependent Mary Margaret
missing her Charming and just can't do without him. I had my eye on her from the beginning. Ever since the wedding she's been following you, dear, watching from the shadows, clocking your movements. She looks at you like a needy, spoiled child who got her doll taken away. She probably knows what kind of coffee you get and what you order for lunch every Wednesday! Regina turned to the petite woman as a fiery goddess of hell itself. "You had every intention of getting your claws into him. Ever since he left you for me."

"That was not my intention at all," Mary Margaret gaped, waving her hands furiously. "I don't want this. After everything we've been through I would never consciously do something that would threaten your happiness. I would never try to tear you two apart. David loves you and I've accepted that. I even remarried!"

"Oh, yes, the pawnbroker. What a lovely pair you make. Such a convincing match after the great romance of Snow White and Prince Charming."

"Regina!"

Wearing a frown, the brunette turned to the shout.

David said more gently, "Regina, she's right. I love you and nothing will change that. Mary Margaret will never change that. It's just you and me. Together, forever."

Regina softened to her and her husband's loving tag line. The scowl dissipated as she melted in the arms of her prince.

"Nothing happened," Mary Margaret repeated weakly, tears in her eyes.

"Like hell it did!"

A blonde head peeked in from the hallway. Emma wore a permanent expression of shock as her parents and stepmother fought it out in the ring. From past experience it was best to stay out of it. Though the same age as her parents these fights always had a way of making her feel small. It was like being the kid eavesdropping on their arguing mother and father, and fearing they would never be a family. In fact, that was exactly what was playing out.

Emma hung back despite the savior in her. David and Mary Margaret were in their pajamas and from the looks of the rumpled bed had just woken up together. Childlike hope bubbled up at the possibility that her parents were getting back together. They were always at their best together, and the rising voices were usually kept to a minimum compared to the days they were apart. And Regina, her evil stepmother. What a bitch. Talk about getting your claws in someone. She made it look so easy. Like taking candy from a really agreeable baby.

Regina had always been the singular cause of Emma's problems. She drove a wedge between her family, spent insurmountable time with her father, and caused such humiliation on her mother. Regina made Emma feel like an orphan.

Regina shot another vicious attack at Mary Margaret while David held her back. From around the door frame Emma could see the anger thrumming and the resentment burning. She could also see fear and pain. Emma remembered Regina's frenzied state during their little power struggle just moments ago. Emma remembered how watery her eyes were and how strange it might seem to attribute that to crying. Had Regina been crying before? If so, was Emma the cause?

"… and that daughter of yours - that girl - is nothing but a spoiled, arrogant brat."

"Hey!"
Three heads turned to the offended child standing in the doorway. Hands on hips she was more the adult in that moment than the other arguing fools.

"Emma," Mary Margaret breathed out. Shaking her head to rid herself of the bad juju swirling around the room she asked, "What are you doing up? And why are you still wearing your pajamas?"

"Um…" Emma, in her shorty shorts and tank top, experienced a jaw dropping moment as she wracked her brain for an excuse. Let's see, she thought there was a pajama party in town? No. She heard shouting and decided to break up the fight? Too predictable. She was hungry? Not if her mother's room was a kitchen, and it wasn't. How about she woke up next to her attractive yet bitchy stepmother whom she probably made cry, got straddled and interrogated which made her wet as fuck, and when she couldn't shut her trap she was subsequently beaten up and left on the floor?

Nope, never tell the truth no matter what.

The wide brown eyes locked with hers, almost begging. Emma's chest hurt at the sight of dried tracts that once ran like a river down her cheeks. She looked so goddamned scared.

"I, ah – I heard some shouting," she murmured barely above a whisper. "Just wanted to make sure everyone was alright."

"Everything is fine. Just a misunderstanding. Isn't that right?" David nudged his wife. Regina nodded, still staring in abject fascination at the blonde.

"Thank you for your concern, sweetheart."

Emma nodded dumbly to her mother's words.

"I think this is enough family bonding for one day." Regina slipped from David's arms and flipped her hair back. "Come along, dear." She led him out by the hand, breezing past Emma without so much as a glance.

***

"Hey, love. Need a hand? Only have one to give, of course."

Emma grumbled something inaudible while battling it out with one of the sails.

"What's that, love?"

"I said don't call me that!"

"Sorry."

The unfurled sail dropped in a limp pile to the deck. Her shoulders slumped as she finally looked at the pirate. "No. I'm sorry, Killian. I didn't mean to… Just forget it. I'm an ass."

"Aye, we all are at some point in our miserable lives. Though your arse is the prettiest of the bunch."

"And who else would you be comparing me to? Anyone lately?"

Hook backed up before the blonde with crossed arms and a developing death glare. "Come on, you know I don't fool around anymore. Hook has done some growing up thanks to his very civil, non-glare-y eyed girlfriend."
"Do I need to be jealous of this girlfriend of yours?"

"Oh, you're being funny now. I see."

Emma stiffened like a plank in the embrace, but let him kiss her. Hmm, she _let_ him kiss her. That was a new one.

"Hey, you alright, lo-whoops, dear?"

"Oh god," she cringed at the pet name and pushed at his chest, "that's worse."

"Seriously now," he batted down the hands reaching for the sail and turned her around to face him, "you seem a million miles away. What's bothering you?"

A boot tapped away on the bridge while Emma bit on her lip. She did not want to unload her problems on Hook, especially when she didn't understand half of them and why they rustled up the most extreme of emotions. But Hook had always been a good listener, an odd feat she had uncovered after weeks of dating.

"I walked in on my parents."

"Ooo, this is getting good."

"No, you sicko. Regina was there, too."

"Even better!"

"Jesus, Killian, really? No, I walked in on them arguing."

"That's not news, Swan. Those three have been fighting since the beginning of time."

"This time was different." Way out of left field kind of different, Emma thought to herself. "My parents were fighting, but… it was not about Regina. I could see it in their eyes. They weren't fighting each other; they were fighting their feelings _for_ each other. They haven't looked like that since before the divorce. It's just… I don't know why they keep kidding themselves. They're not fooling anyone, including their own daughter. God, I'm not a child and that's the way I'm treated every time we're in the same room together. And that Regina," Emma spat the name out like it was a bad taste in her mouth. Like it was poison.

"Ah, she's just protective is all. You know I've known Regina for a while and I can see why she is the way she is. In fact, I applaud her efforts in going on the offensive with Mary Margaret. The pixie princess needs reminding who David's attached to. Gotta hang on to what's yours, am I right?"

"Simmer down, you old pirate. That's my mother you're talking about."

Not appreciating the 'old' comment, Hook scratched his head with the point of his shiny attachment. He mumbled an apology which was followed by a roll of the eyes.

"She's just so manipulative. And there's no excuse for attacking my mother the way she does," Emma accused with a solitary finger. "We were all doing fine before she came along. My parents hardly fought, they were so perfect I wanted to vomit. But the way they looked at each other, how they exchanged gifts for no reason besides wanting the other to smile… It gave me hope that it would happen for me. But then that woman came along and screwed up a good thing. She tore apart my family, Killian, and there's no way I'd forgive her or make nice."
"Who said you had to make nice?" Hook inquired seriously. His chin lowered as he looked on Emma with concern. "Are you sure that's the only reason why Regina pisses you off? She seems to know how to push your buttons. Did she punch a particularly sensitive one today?"

Well, she certainly punched something, Emma thought rubbing the area that had received a queenly elbow. Why did Regina piss her off so much? And why did it seem like she knew all the ways to do so?

It's possible that the desperation behind wanting her parents to reunite had to do with Regina. Maybe Emma wanted Regina all to herself. With David back with Mary Margaret Regina would be left in the dust, alone and unloved. Chalk it up to being the savior, Emma wanted to be the one to catch the rejected woman. She literally wanted to wrap her arms around Regina and hold her, whisper sweet, romantic things in her ear, tickle her pulse with puckered lips. Her parents had been such an inspiration and a model of what two people in love were supposed to look like. Maybe a part of Emma wanted to look at Regina the way her mother still did with her father. Maybe Emma was waiting for a birthday to roll around so she could present Regina with a gift that would make her smile, even if it was displayed after said gift was thrown in the general direction of Emma's face.

Hold the phone. Back that train up.

Whisper sweet, romantic things in her ear? Pulses and puckered lips? What the hell?! Did I just inhale some funky pink magic? Emma thought. Did I just get impaled by a unicorn's horn and get reincarnated as a hopeless romantic with a thing for stepmothers?

It was starting to feel like the romcom version of *The Twilight Zone*. Emma didn't feel like herself. This wasn't her and Regina was to blame. She was manipulative, selfish, and just plain mean. Her father fell for the witch's charms and now Regina was after the poor, unsuspecting savior. Regina was playing Emma and probably having a gay old time watching her drooling and stuck with her head in the clouds.

"No," Emma replied both to herself and Hook's question. "She hasn't pushed my buttons. Not yet, but when she does – if she does – I will be ready for that evil home wrecker."

"Aye, those don't sound at all like the words of the spawn of Snow White and Prince Charming. What a princess I'm dating."

"I'm no princess. I'm not defined by who my parents were or what kingdom I lived in for so many hours. So what if a kid wants to get her parents back together." And get her hands in another woman's pants, Emma thought fleetingly. "You can't blame a girl for hoping."

His shoulders went up in a shrug. "If David and Mary Margaret are meant to be then they will find one other."

"Please!" Emma cried in anguish. "Not that again!" She slapped the jiggling shoulders and joined in the laughter.

"At least we found each other. Not too shabby, huh?"

Placing her head on his chest Emma's arms looped around him in silent affirmation.

Her heart was not as agreeable.

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"David, please. Just listen."
"No. We shouldn't be seen together after what happened."

"That's exactly what we have to discuss. When I woke up this morning and saw you laying beside me I… I…"

"Stop!" David shouted. He slammed down the pile of socks in his grasp. Grabbing the sides of the washing machine he hunched over, closing his eyes. "Mary Margaret, I can't do this."

She looked down at her feet whispering, "It's hard for me too you know. And I don't mean Regina. When I saw you this morning, all hair untidy and snoring like a baby it reminded me of what it used to be, before the… you know. And, well, I realized how much I missed that, seeing you so peaceful, so like the charming man I married."

"How long were you watching me sleep before I woke up?"

Eyes widening at her embarrassing admission she stuttered, "N-not long! Nothing happened!"

"I know, Mary Margaret. I know."

Mary Margaret had known her husband – ex-husband – long enough to tell when he was deep in thought. Despite the vows he took with another woman there was doubt showing in the creases of his face. She took a tentative step towards him and pressed hopefully. "But?"

"I shouldn't be telling you this. I shouldn't be thinking this."

"David, we may not be married anymore, but I'm still here. We have a beautiful daughter who without us has grown into someone her parents can be proud of. She has a family of her own now, but that doesn't mean she's any further away from us. Just because you have someone doesn't mean we can't bump into each other every once and a while. We're on a ship. It's bound to happen."

"Regina doesn't see it that way."

"What I meant was you and I can still be friends. We did well before just as Snow White and Prince Charming. Before we married. It can still be that way now." Mary Margaret placed a hand on the man's shoulder. Never had flannel felt so good under her fingertips.

David inhaled slowly and then let it out. He finally met her gaze and said, "I'm still in love with you."

"Wh-what?"

"When you woke up beside me this morning and… the way you were feeling towards me that's how I felt the moment I saw you. I had no idea how we got there, but once I opened my eyes and saw you…” his head shook from side to side like it was the world's most precious conundrum, "… you were as breathtaking as when I woke you from the sleeping curse. I couldn't believe my own eyes."

Mary Margaret felt a wave of emotion build up in her chest. Her eyes filled with tears and her chin trembled. This was not how their lives were supposed to turn out. David was meant to be the last man she ever kissed. Their marriage was ordained to be only marriage in their lifetime. They were supposed to spend the rest of their lives together, not having to find each other over and over and over again. But this... it was too much, and it was too late.

"I shouldn't have brought it up," she confessed. A hand was placed over her constricting chest, a comforting gesture to keep the sobs at bay. She couldn't even look at David when she said it. "I can't explain what happened this morning. What I can explain is the fact that I have a husband now, and
you have a wife. This is absurd," her smile was about as much of a sham as their marriages, "I don't know what I'm doing."

She turned and left.

Without a thought – just a feeling - David rushed forward to snag the arm. He held onto the hand and stared Mary Margaret in the eyes. Her beautiful eyes were crying. He stared into them like they were the only things in his world because they always gave him a reason to stay grounded to it. He needed that same assurance while the earth shook beneath him, threatening to bury him in the misunderstandings that his life was defined by.

"I don't know either."

***

Emma was on her way for a midafternoon nap when she was confronted by a surly brunette. She didn't have to open her mouth to piss Emma off, just her mere presence did the job fine. In fact, Regina hadn't even spoken. She just stood in a wide stance, fists hung to her sides and glaring like someone about to steal some kid's lunch money. The strong, silent bully type. On Regina that combination translated as kind of adorable.

Hardly in the mood for round two, Emma didn't bother acknowledging the angry Pooh bear. If she had to stand there one more minute before Regina she'd have to make a beeline for a cold shower. She couldn't take Regina looking all authoritative and sexy. She couldn't see that without doing something about it. Or doing someone.

An arm planted itself against the wall, obstructing Emma's path. "I don't know what you are up to, Miss Swan, but it is borderline inappropriate."

"You got some n –"

"Ah!" Regina's raised finger stopped her midsentence. "I wasn't finished. I know what you and that sorry excuse for a fairy tale queen are up to. What I don't know is why she would be wasting her time with the pawnbroker if she still can't see past her previous marriage. Some people take their vows seriously. Your father and I are together and nothing, not some frumpy ex-wife or a hopeful child will change that. So if you think sneaking into my bed will tear my marriage apart you really are pathetic. David and I are committed to each other for better or for worse."

There was a long sigh. Emma made sure that it looked like Regina wasn't pushing her buttons. "God, you really are full of yourself."

"What?"

"No, really, that was a nice speech. It's exactly what you should say. It's perfect and neat and it probably makes sense. But you made one, maaaaybe two mistakes." Emma let that sink in. Seconds passed and Regina showed no signs of breaking her super strong façade. A smirk grew wide and cocksure on Emma's lips. She mocked, "I can't believe you don't remember. And you think I'm pathetic. I mean, I'm not shy about giving self-pleasure, but even I can't grind against myself, looking all hot and bothered. Actions speak louder than words, you Majesty."

"What are you insinuating?"

"I am, 'insinuating,'" she put in air quotes, "that you have the hots for me. You actually seem to think your charms work on me." Hands planted themselves on her hips as Emma stepped into Regina's personal space. She had to show her just how immune she was to her spell. The closer she was too
that smoking hot body the more effective Emma's point would come across. Or so she hoped. She glanced down to see the throat bob up and then down in a gulp. Regina was so out of her league. This show Emma was putting on just might work.

Their eyes locked as Emma whispered right to Regina's mouth. "I may be my father's daughter but I am not so naïve as to fall into some desperate woman's trap. I mean, do I look like a sucker?"

Yes, Regina thought, she did. Whatever game Emma was playing was turning to a complete failure. She didn't know the rules like Regina did. She couldn't know the right moves or the sleight of hand in faking one. The moment Emma stepped forward her cheeks had gone rosy as well as her neck and chest. Her breath was quickening; Regina felt it in the breaths tickling her cheeks.

It was amusing to watch someone's confidence slip, especially when they were completely unaware of it. Regina had that affect. It pleased her to see Emma was no exception. It pleased her to the point that her own body was mirroring the blonde's in reddened cheeks and a racing pulse.

Emma was being predictable. Regina would be the opposite.

Emma was expecting one of two things. Regina would slap her across the face and call her something along the lines of 'harlot' or 'fallen woman.' The other option just consisted of more arguing. What she did not predict was Regina slamming her against the wall and taking her neck with her mouth. Oh my god, Emma thought, was Regina a vampire witch?

Emma's back collided into the wall with the sheer force of the advance. Regina took the flesh with her lips and sucked. Her teeth bit down enough for the blonde to cry out but not enough to break skin. A tongue swiped against the marks before another was placed beside it. Regina's eyes were slammed shut and she just kept at it, sucking, nipping, and soothing in a delirious pattern that had Emma on her toes in ecstasy.

Emma held her arms out awkwardly, not sure whether to push the wild animal away or press her closer. It was not until a hand dipped into her pants that she decided her own hands would be put to better use of the latter. Head hung back she let out a low moan. Regina's hand struck gold in the form of soaking wet cotton. Emma heard the resulting whimper. She smiled lazily, fingers clawed through short brown hair.

Then it hit Emma like a Mack truck. Regina, her stepmother, her father's *wife*, had a hand on her crotch, rubbing agonizingly slow whilst moaning in her ear. It was all kinds of wrong. In yet her body was screaming that it was all kinds of *right*.

"I'm not gay."

It didn't at all come out like Emma wanted. The words were in their correct order, yes, but the husky tone it was spoken in and the way her hips pleaded against the stilled palm did absolutely nothing to back that statement up, a statement that may or may not be true.

Regina gaped, the corner of her mouth teasing a smirk. "That is what you came up with? Not, 'We're related,' or the fact that I'm older than you?"

Emma's head cocked and her eyes narrowed. The suspicion and scarcely concealed wonder painted on her scrunched face made Regina smirk wider. "None of those things bother you?" she asked.

"If they did do you think in that bleach blonde head of yours that I would be doing *this*?" The question was punctuated with a pressing index finger.

A whimper turned shriek let loose as Emma felt the shooting sensation spread from her clit to every
end of her body. Her head fell back on the wood with a thump and she arched into the hand. She reached blindly for Regina and felt a firm breast in her grasp. A thumb grazed over nipple a few times, raising it to a peak. Regina moaned into her neck when she started massaging the flesh, fully grabbing and squeezing as her thumb made tight circles on the sensitive nub.

Over sensitized and never before this turned on Regina moaned louder. She pressed Emma against the wall further and grinded their bodies together with needed friction.

"Shit," Emma breathed as a tongue wet her ear. She felt the lips pull at her earlobe and suck gently. The woman took great care in lathing every curve. Grazing lips emitted hot gasps into her ear which Emma's body than translated into a glorious shiver felt to her very bones.

"Emma."

As the name registered in her sluggish brain a gasp escaped the parted pink lips. The silky smooth voice did things to Emma she wasn't sure were human. Regina's voice, her lips, her breath, the whole package brought a whole new meaning to 'out of this world.'

Regina ran her hands under Emma's top and up her back. Emma did the same but drew sharp lines with her nails on the way down. The devious act had Regina gasping and practically crying out in anguish. There was no backlash, though. Regina didn't fight back with the razor sharp words Emma was accustomed to or a hand cracking across a flushed cheek. Hot and intoxicated by Emma's boldness Regina simply continued her exploration of the shell of an ear with gentle flicks.

It came as a surprise that Regina could be animalistic one minute and affectionate the next. With a hand cupping her through her damp panties and the other grasping behind her neck Emma felt cradled in warmth. She felt safe in those arms. So protected and needed.

Regina pulled back to look at Emma. She appeared minutes from collapsing, but Regina held on. Her eyes were half-lidded in pleasure, her neck arched to display the marks made without care. Regina paned up to slightly parted lips. Licking her own she grazed them softly against Emma's. Their breaths hitched in sync when they each felt the feather light touch. They locked gazes then, reading the emotions swirling in their brown and green eyes. Regina's were no longer filled with fear or anger. Emma's were curious and tempted.

But they didn't kiss. A kiss would mean something more, which was something they didn't deserve – or what they think they didn't deserve. Emma and Regina were beholden to their partners, no matter how little love was shared in those relationships. To kiss would be a betrayal.

Noses touching, Regina felt the barely there smoothness of pink lips. Her own mouth shuddered as Emma's breath mingled with hers, teasing a tongue and lips that only understood one word: closer.

But it could never be.

Before Regina gathered the courage to close the distance Emma was slipping away. Like sand through a sieve, she escaped from Regina's protective embrace and ran.

***

"Where were you today?"

"Regina…"

She looked down and swallowed. She had no right to ask it, now when guilt was eating her alive. She was swallowed whole by another woman's strength and inner grace; captured by her very
presence. Set free by the peace found in the arms of another only to be imprisoned by a marriage she didn't believe in.

So yeah, Regina was screwed.

"I've been here all morning and afternoon," David said, not looking up from the pile of laundry. He picked up a shirt and folded it neatly. "You know that."

Regina inhaled shakily. Her eyes were fixed on the white tank top being folded.

"Regina? Honey, don't cry. I wasn't trying to make you feel bad."

"I'm fine," she snapped.

David's hand fell. He shrank back with an expression of hurt.

"I... I didn't mean to... never mind." Her head went from side to side. She wiped at her cheek and sniffed.

David dropped the tank top and rushed to her side, bringing her in a hug. "Tell me."

"It's n-nothing," she sobbed, not wanting to answer. Then lips betrayed her, settling for a partial truth. "You're too good for me. I don't deserve you."

"Don't say that." His hand rubbed soothing circles on her back. "What we have is special. It's ours, no one else's. You're safe here. Shhh."

She was pinned to him, hands splayed to his chest and nose grazing his itchy flannel. Eventually she gave in. Laying her head to his chest she let his shirt catch the errant tears. They stayed like that until she could see through drier eyes.

A creak sounded from the hallway. Regina's head lifted, her hands still buried in flannel. David had not heard the noise, which was probably best for everyone.

Through the half-open door was Emma.

Brown eyes fluttered. Plump lips opened. Nothing vocal came from Regina, but her heart was screaming out for the woman standing there in all kinds of remorse. Green eyes dropped to the floor. Pale lips formed a thin line. She left.

"We should probably talk more."

"What?"

"Us," David clarified, meeting her stare. "We should talk about us. It seems like we spend more time fighting than working out our issues. Whatever happened before is in the past. How about we plan for the future, huh? Let's talk about building our own family."

"I do not agree."

"About making a family?"

"No, about the talking thing. I don't want to talk."

The back of his neck was grasped as Regina pulled him in for a kiss. It was not like before. Lips were not smooth like hers. Breath was not sweet like cocoa. There was no arousal growing in her
belly or tingling across her skin. No trace of the unexplainable magic she felt when her lips grazed Emma Swan’s. But she remembered it just the same when her mouth moved on her husband’s. It was all she remembered. It was all she knew. It was Emma.

"Emma."

David broke the kiss.

"Did you say something?"

"Emma," she whispered again. Her closed eyes were still holding the image. Feeling the memory on her lips she finally opened her eyes to the real world.

"What?!" David cried.

Regina saw David and then his bruised lips. "What?!!"

"Oh my god!"

"Oh my god!" Regina slapped a hand over her mouth. She was going to vomit.

"You said my daughter's name while you were kissing me."

"Kissing you? Kissing you? Why would I kiss you, Charming?"

"Because… well," eyes roving wildly he bucked up the courage to raise his voice, "because I'm your husband goddamnit."

"You're my what?!" she barked. The second it left her lips more images of her fake life came flooding back. "You think we're married."

"We are married."

"Oh my god."

David's confused expression developed to squinting eyes and an agape mouth. The wheels of his brain must have been clogged because he continued to appear dazed and confused. He looked about as dopey as a Labrador drunk on Milk-Bone. It was clear where Emma got her genes from.

"All right," sighed Regina, her hands in front of her in a calming gesture, "David, I think we were put under a spell. That's why you think we are married. From what I remember the rest of the crew are affected as well. The spell must have broken after we kissed. But…" her brows knit together and she stared off, "… I wasn't thinking of you, so the kiss only affected me."

"Regina, honey, you're not making any sense. If the whole crew was cursed than who would have enacted the spell?"

"I have no idea. First thing's first. You have to wake up from this delusion. I can't stand you like this."

"Hon –"

"The next time you call me that I will have you hanging from your boot straps above a sea of blood thirsty sharks and not even your wife – your real wife – will be able to do anything about it."

His jaw snapped shut and he gulped audibly.
"Now," straightening her back she shook out her hands to loosen herself up. If she could do any of the horrible things she did as queen she could certainly do this. God, just the thought of asking was about as torturous an experience as being electrocuted. She took a deep breath, willing her body to obey. "Kiss me," she instructed with slight recoil.

"… okay."

She held his lips back with two fingers and added, "But think of Mary Margaret and don't tell me you can't. I know you love her. I've known you both for far too long and from that insufferable time I know that you and Mary Margaret will…" she cringed inwardly, "…will always find one another." David was sputtering a weak refusal until Regina, hackles up, roared, "Do it David!"

Like every day for the three years he thought he was married to Regina Mills, he bent to her will and leaned in. Eyes drifting closed he thought of the ex-wife he desperately wanted back and did the deed.

Lips held in a firm line Regina kept her eyes (and everything else for that matter) shut. It wasn't until she heard the horror stricken shriek that she opened them.

"Wh-ugh!" he cried. As the memories came flooding back David reeled backwards almost tripping on a chair.

They both wiped furiously at their mouths, immensely grossed out but relieved it would never happen again, not if they put each other out of their misery first.

"How will we wake up the others? We can't go around kissing everybody."

"No, I doubt it would work anyway," Regina lied. She shifted from one boot to the other and looked down clumsily. "I have an idea of how to wake up Emma. I can deal with her if you want to do your wife."

David nodded. He then threw a curious glance her way and asked, "Hey, did you say something about Emma earlier? Before you woke up, I mean?"

A throat cleared. "Whatever are you talking about?"

***

"Emma, please listen!"

She was not, of course. The wood steps creaked under heavy boots as Emma rushed down the stairs and down the hallway to escape the woman gone mad. Seriously, Regina had lost her mind. Having played stepmother to Emma's mother, Regina declared war on the Charmings, cursed them to a fake town in Maine only to be defeated, sort of redeemed and somehow 'in love' with Snow White's husband. A quickie divorce followed by a quickie marriage followed by three years of rubbing it in Mary Margaret's face and now she was proposing a make out session with her own stepdaughter. Emma's brain felt like scrambled eggs just thinking about it.

Rounding the corner she headed towards her cabin. Try as she might Emma was not fast enough. Hearing Regina fast on her heels she stopped and faced the inevitable.

"This will not work if we don't kiss. That is how this has to happen."

"Regina, are you okay? You're not making any sense."
"The hex!" Regina shouted, waving her hand for emphasis. "We are all under a transference spell. It's..." Her words dragged off into the space between them. She flipped her hair back with a hand. Eyes closed as she tried to find the proper way to explain a complex curse to a six-year-old. "It is like body switching only instead of bodies it is emotions that are switched from one person to the other. David and I are not under the spell because we were thinking of our other halves – no, our significant others, or... damn, no, just..."

Emma's eyes widened at the very crazed looking woman before her. Emma's hand went out of its own volition to ground the brunette speaking nonsense. Or was it nonsense?

"... you know what I mean. And when we kissed we woke from the curse."

"What?" Emma surprised even herself with the jealous shout. She pulled the hand back like it had touched Satan himself. It was absurd. Regina wasn't even hers to be jealous over. "You kissed my dad?!"

"I was thinking of you."

"Oh that makes it better! You really know how to make a girl feel special."

"Will you stop acting like a jealous teenager and kiss me?! It's the only way the spell can be broken."

"Excuse me?"

"Are you deaf? The curse can only be broken with a kiss. That shouldn't be news to you. It's not like this is your first time."

"Well, that was a true love kiss."

Indeed, Regina thought. She saw Emma slouching there with crossed arms and blunt skepticism on her face. It was so like her to be stubborn about curses and kissing. She couldn't imagine how frustrating it was for Henry to convince this woman of Operation Cobra's validity. Letting out a heavy sigh, Regina said, "I will not force it upon you. If you want to kiss me than kiss me."

"Uhhhhh..."

You don't want to?

"I'm confused."

Regina rolled her eyes and could have laughed. Without warning she took Emma's head in her hands and brought their lips together.

It was instantaneous. When the lips pressed more firmly against hers, Regina knew it was her Emma. Free of the spell there was no holding back from the blonde. Emma pulled back to make absolutely sure it was Regina she was making out with. When it was confirmed their lips reunited in a hungry display of passion.

Hardly taking a breath, Regina backed Emma into a corner and slammed Emma against the wall for a second time that day. Fingers tightened in her hair. She was on the verge of sobbing at the pleasure and pain that came of scraping nails.

"Fuck," Emma gasped, "I didn't know I'd feel like this."

A liquid chill ran through Regina's veins, stiffening her body like a frozen statue. She reared back
slowly with fear clouding her vision. "Feel like what?"

"Like I haven't seen you with my own eyes in...." Forever, Emma finished to herself. Her eyes beheld her own thumb caressing Regina's cheek. "I missed you."

Regina's eyes fluttered closed. Emma missed her. Well that wasn't so bad. It was sort of akin to missing bearclaws, or missing a lost dog. Regina frowned, realizing she just compared herself to a dog and a sugary pastry.

"I missed you, too," Regina finally admitted, her eyes soft and her smile honest.

They kissed softly, patiently. Hands never left cheeks, hearts only growing.

Suddenly Emma pulled back again. Her face revealed her revulsion and gaping shock. "You kissed David!"

"Oh," Regina murmured. "It couldn't be helped. There was no other option in breaking the spell."

"You kissed my dad?!"

Regina shrunk under the rising voice. "I was thinking of you."

"Yeah, you said that."

"And why are you accusing me? You were all over Hook!"

Emma's head jerked back on her neck. She made a sour face, groaning, "Oh my god. I was."

Regina bit her lip and bobbed her leg anxiously. It had to come out sooner or later. Now was a better time than any. Looking down at the floor Regina mumbled quietly, "Well, to be accurate it wasn't the first time I tried to kiss your father."

"Do you want me to vomit all over you?"

A commotion from above made them pause. When they got to the upper deck it was clear that one of the crew was still under the curse.

"Back I say! Back!"

"Sweetheart, it's me. It's your Rumplekins."

"Will you snap out of it?! And stop trying to kiss me you wrinkly old bastard!"

"I know. I know you don't love me for my looks, but there are many likable qualities behind this face. Because true love is about what is underneath," he sang sweetly, "not what is on the surface."

"Ugh, if you knew what you were saying..."

Emma's eyes widened as her mother kept her 'true love' back with his own cane. The short woman prodded Gold, keeping him at a safe distance while trying to talk sense into the man. It was like watching a fairy tale version of National Geographic: Snow White taming the wild, love sick beast.

"It's evident that my mother will not be locking lips with Gold any time soon, even if he's thinking of Belle when it happens. Regina, you should really help them out. Break the spell."

It was no question; Regina had the power to break it. Being the Dark One, any threatening spell
placed upon him could be easily broken, and more importantly broken without a kiss.

"Why should I? They would do no such thing for me," she said darkly. Crossing arms over her chest she leaned back leisurely against the ship's railing. "In fact, I'm rather enjoying this little set up." She caught her lip between her teeth to keep from grinning too widely, but oh what the hell. Letting go of the plump flesh she beamed in delight.

"Okay, I'm going to give you a good 15 more seconds of this and then you change him back."

"Yes, dear."

Emma checked her watch. Five seconds…ten seconds… she looked up as Mary Margaret shrieked, having lost the cane in their passionate struggle… 13 seconds… Regina hooted with laughter when the other brunette craned her neck back from the pursed old lips… 14 seconds… Gold leaned in… 14.5 seconds… Gold was inches from his goal… 15 seconds…

"GO!" Emma shouted at Regina, pulling her own hair out. "Now, now, NOW!"

"Time flies when you're having fun," sighed Regina, rolling up her sleeves with sorrow. She threw a purple stream of smoke in Gold's direction before he could lock lips with Mary Margaret. The spell was reversed instantly.

There was a horrified gasp when Gold's eyes opened (literally and metaphorically) to the petite woman inches from his face. Eyes bulging they both pushed away and backed up ten feet. They would have widened the distance, had there not been an ocean of water behind them.

Regina still chuckled. "That was certainly worth it."

"Now," Emma sighed and looked around, "what about Hook?"

"Your father seems to have it under control."

Emma followed Regina's gaze towards stern and had to snicker at the scene.

***

Fists hung to his sides David's face grew redder with every word that came from Hook's mouth. It only took a few harsh words of his own and a steely jaw to back the captain into a corner.

"Well, you certainly picked the opportune time to act macho," Hook sassed. "Your watch must be off a few minutes. Where the hell were you when the bolt rope was jamming?"

"Don't get smart with me you old pirate! You kissed my little girl!"

"Emma?" He guffawed loudly, and winked. "She's hardly a little girl if you ask me."

David's fist went out like Thor's hammer and met the chin with a resounding thwack.

Body twisting comically with his head, Hook landed hard. When he came to seconds later his memories returned. Lovingly petting the wood floor of his ship, he greeted it with a smile. "Hello, sweetie."

***

From afar a golden fairy clapped her hands, rejoicing in her accomplishment. It only took a sprinkling of magic dust and a predisposition towards true love for her subjects to pass the test. The
spell had opened their long shut eyes to what was in front of them from the start. Time would no longer be wasted on past insecurities, and the relentless push would be converted to pull. If they didn't understand before, they did now.

Flapping her wings mightily, she rose to the sky with a delighted smile.

On to the next unsuspecting fools in love.
“Gold, why are we dining on fish again?”

“This is not just any fish. You cannot purchase it at your local Storybrooke grocer, nor find it anywhere on the east coast. This, Miss Blanchard, is a rare salmon. And it is a delicacy.”

“Alright, but what was the fish we had last night?”

Preparing his work station for lunch, Gold nodded definitively. “That was takoyaki, a Japanese dish made from battered and baked octopus.”

“Oh my god. That was octopus?” Emma’s face went white as David’s laundered sheets. Her head met the table as she proceeded to take deep breaths. “I think I’m going to be sick.”

“But…” Mary Margaret worried at her lip and shuffled her feet, “don’t you think it’s… inhumane?”

“Honey, remember what we talked about? Not every animal you hear is in need of saving. They’re just fish, after all.”

Face turning a nice shade of green Emma’s hand rose in the air before asking, “How do we know we didn’t eat Ursula last night?”

Regina leaned over the table with a sly smirk. “Because I would know if I was eating my friend, dear.”

Leaving Emma to figure out the context of her words, Regina went back to cutting vegetables.

“I swear, I heard one scream out in pain once,” Mary Margaret confessed and lent back into the patting hand of her husband.

“Surely if you can hear their screams you could hear their remarks about how dreadful that sweater is.”

Mary Margaret didn’t hear the jest, nor did she catch the high five Regina gave to the humble Dark One. No, she was too busy planting teary eyes on the bulging, dead ones staring up at her from the chopping block (all while absently plucking at the angora hairs of a sweater).

“Do calm yourself,” Gold grated. He selected the reddest tomatoes and passed them to his culinary companion. “There are plenty of fish in the sea.”

“Aye, those are words to live by.”

Halting her work on the tomatoes, Regina cocked her head in Hook’s direction. “I don’t think Gold was referring to dating.”

“I know. I was talking about mermaids – the other fish of the sea and let me tell you there are plenty
of them.”

Everyone rolled their eyes simultaneously while Mary Margaret slapped the pirate’s shoulder in reprimand.

“Oh!” he cried, rubbing the injury. “Those are some beautiful lassies, I might point out. Take for example, my ex-bitch Ariel from the North Atlantic hood…”

Mary Margaret’s eyes rose to the ceiling as she shook her head and mumbled, “I can’t believe I ever called you a feminist.”

“… That woman can wear some sea shells if you know what I mean. Eh?” He elbowed Emma and winked. “Am I right?”

The blonde frowned and turned away only to get a steely glare from Regina. What a time to be silently interrogated by your sort-of girlfriend.

“Aw, come on. Don’t tell me you’ve never messed around with merfolk.”

Though Emma had never ‘messed around’ with anyone but the two legged kind, Regina’s expression sure made it seem like she did. Her glare widened at Hook’s implication and then subsequently narrowed to slits. Her once beautiful luscious lips pursed as if she were plotting something sinister which meant the blonde was surely not getting anything that night and by ‘not getting anything’… well, that visual was left up to the victim. But who was Emma kidding? The mouth was still beautiful and luscious – they were just attached to one scorned, albeit once evil woman.

There was a resonate banging of fish to cutting board as Gold confirmed that the thing was indeed dead. That and he may have just wanted to see Mary Margaret’s winces every time the limp body came down with a dull thwack.

“I’d swear on my hook,” Hook went on after finishing his rum, “your walk alone is a membership card to Friends of Ariel.” His dark lined eyes narrowed and he started rubbing his chin with greasy fingers. “Or was it Friends of Dorothy?”

“Hey hey, guys,” Emma piped up with an overzealous smile, and a shaky laugh, “let’s change the subject. What about them fish?”

“Those,” Mary Margaret corrected, “and they were in pain.”

“Whatever.”

“Emma, how do you know Dorothy? I never recall your mother mentioning you two saw her when you were in the Enchanted Forest, and as far as I know she didn’t come to Storybrooke with the curse.”

“Oh, actually she did,” amended Regina. “You might not have met her yet, but she was a very good friend of mine back in the day.” She finished by inserting a tomato juiced thumb into her mouth, slowly sucking for Emma’s benefit and releasing it with an audible pop.

Emma choked a bit on her luncheon rum. “You know Dorothy??”

“Why yes. Didn’t you read her story in Henry’s book? She was a lovely girl. Beautiful as a field of poppies and as kind as the Tinman when he got his heart back.”
“You ripped out his heart?”

Offended by such an outlandish accusation Regina shot back at David in anger. “No, that was my mother’s doing. I didn’t start ripping out hearts until later. Dorothy had a solution to a particularly sensitive problem and I returned the favor by stealing the Tinman’s heart back.”

“What a lovely business transaction.”

“That’s ironic coming from you, Rumple.” She sighed and let go of the tension. Resuming her slicing of vegetables, a slow smile spread to her lips as she reminisced. “Dorothy was a dear. Taught me a great many things.”

“Aye, I bet she skipped that yellow brick road all the way up your –”

Emma cut him off. “I think you’ve had enough rum for one lifetime, Hook.”

Hook snagged at empty air as Emma downed the glass herself in one gulp. She cringed against the burning liquid and slammed the empty cup to the table. Her face grew flushed not from the alcohol but from the glint in brown eyes and the shrewd smirk across the table.

It wasn’t so much jealousy as sheer amazement that Emma was feeling. If Regina was suggesting what seemed blatantly obvious to Emma and Hook, then the Evil Queen was more adventurous than she was made out to be. It was clear that Henry’s story book was discriminatory in recounting Regina’s past and celebrating the power love, leaving Emma to believe True Love of the same-sex variety was anything but customary. Such a constraint would have posed a problem to a young woman like Regina who had been brought up by a heartless mother and watched like a hawk within the walls of her king husband. Despite a growing jealousy over this Dorothy chick, Emma couldn’t help but feel pride in Regina for breaking her chains and possessing the courage to engage in activities that were not exactly kosher in those times. Like any budding evil queen and witch in training she fought the status quo and went after what she wanted, and Emma loved her for that.

*Liked her. Liked her for that.*

“Gold, you should tell everyone how you prepare your soup du jour.” David leaned towards his daughter whispering with a vigorous nod, “It’s a really intricate process. Fabulous.”

“I thought the soup thing was a joke.” Emma finished glumly, “at my expense.”

“No, Miss Swan, the… soup thing is not a joke. The art of soup du jour is quite a simple thing, but could mean disaster if one doesn’t prepare with the adequate respect. Something your father would understand.”

“It’s true,” David admitted, puffing out his chest. “Gold allowed me to cook soup one time. Even let me use his steel blade.”

With half her body leaning across the table Emma gasped with fake astonishment. “Gold let you touch his *knife*?”

Regina rolled her eyes and took away the woman’s rum.

“It’s a simple matter of knowing what ingredients go well together. It’s about using what you have and throwing in a little extra. You can really make a soup from anything, whatever is lying around.”

“Sounds kind of lazy to me,” Emma threw out.
Regina pursed her lips. “Isn’t that the pot calling the kettle black?”

“I can make… stuff.”

Gold and Mary Margaret shot her scolding looks.

Gold proceeded to gut the fish, his knife slicing through the belly. The sickening squelch of guts leaking out caused one of the crew to emit a high pitched whining. Unlike the others, the sound of spurting entrails and razor sharp teeth cutting through scales translated as a wail of anguish to this particular crew member. Emma let out a heavy sigh beside her fidgeting mother.

“Can’t we just magic ourselves to the nearest Red Lobster?” Emma asked like it was the most obvious solution. Slouching in her chair, she propped her head up with one hand while the other was dragging a finger across the table and drawing an image of the food she really wanted. She explained, “Gold gets a break from cooking, Hook and Regina can over tip the waitresses, Mary Margaret doesn’t have to hear screaming fish, and I can get my cheesy biscuits.” After a pregnant silence and no calls for agreement Emma looked up from her inedible drawings. “What?”

***

Above deck Emma was going about her chores. The sun was high in the midday sky and beating down on the ship, heating every piece of metal in sight. If it were not for the tunes emanating from the stereo (retained from one Friday night’s disco party), Emma would have called it quits. On that particularly sunny afternoon her duties consisted of polishing all metal on the ship to prevent corrosion. Hair tied up into a messy bun and sweat pouring down her face and exposed arms, Emma went about the furious scrubbing. Regina helped.

Correction: Regina watched.

“So, ah… when were you going to tell me about this dear friend of yours?”

In an effort to better reach the rusted portion of the chain Emma was bent over, ass in the air and groaning to reach further. The visual was more than satisfactory in getting Regina’s heart pumping. She watched with baited breath as Emma’s body bobbed in and out of the small crawl space to her polishing routine. With every motion of a jean-clad behind, Regina’s mouth grew drier (which explained the need to repetitively wet them with an anxious tongue). And Regina stood there, half slumping against the mast, head tilted for a better view and watched. Because that was all she could do, watch.

It occurred to Regina’s hazy brain that her confidence in the ‘hands off’ rule was losing credibility. She had stayed strong, though as time progressed was beginning to feel the awful effects of her own rule’s downside which presented in flushed cheeks, a racing pulse, wild eyes, and an insatiable throbbing between her legs.

But the physical effects were nothing compared to the sheer number of fantasies that had taken hold of her mind. There had been so many embarrassing moments that had Emma’s parents interrupting her thoughts of bending their daughter over and fucking her into next week. Oh, and the things she would imagine Emma doing to her when the woman was sleeping right beside her… Considering all the talks her own mother gave her about how undignified it was to ‘merrymake’ with women, dear old Cora would be rolling in her grave.

Regina may not yet have given in to those fantasies, but she never once considered them immoral or degrading. Not when they were concerning Emma. As much as Regina wanted to be the reason for Emma currently grunting on all fours, she still trusted in their agreement. Every inch of her body,
inside and out, was aching to cross that line, but Regina knew once they did an explanation had to follow. Stripped and vulnerable to the emerald of Emma’s eyes, Regina would be seen for whom she really was, and she didn’t want to disappoint Emma and she did not want to be pitied.

“Regina?” Emma spoke over the unmistakable voice of Freddie while *Under Pressure* played in the distance.

Startled out of gloomy thoughts, Regina tore her gaze from the rear end. “Hm?”

“You know what? Never mind.”

“What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” Emma snapped. She wiped the sweat from her brow and squinted in the sunlight. “It’s just me and my tendency to think something means more than it is.”

“Emma, you’re not making any sense. What do you think means more?”

The blonde shook her head came out with it. “Were you going to tell me about your lesbian lover? Or the fact that she is the singing, skipping, ruby slippered girl from Oz? And how old were you? How old was she?”

The exasperated look on Emma was utterly ridiculous and cute, but Regina felt compelled to set one story straight. “Not to dwell on technicalities,” she began seriously, “but Dorothy was not from Oz. She resided in the real world – the one without magic – until an evil witch (not me) cast her to the land of Oz by tornado.”

“Oh, let’s talk about technicalities! Like how little you think about us and this arrangement we have yet to define. You care so little that you deem it unnecessary to inform me about your previous relationships.”

“Mm,” Regina smiled and scoffed lightly, “like you tell me of your former lovers? Miss Swan, let me remind you we are not having sex.”

“Because of your stupid rule!” Emma cried. The brunette glared. Her mouth opened in rebuttal, but Emma wasn’t done. Not by a long shot. “We may not have had sex, but what we have – whatever it’s called – *is* sexual. Or don’t you remember how your hand was down my pants a few days ago?”

“That doesn’t count!” retorted Regina, hands firmly on her hips. “I wasn’t even myself then and neither were you.”

“But it wouldn’t have happened if even a small part of you didn’t want it to. It only takes one singular thought, Regina.”

She snorted, folding her arms. “This coming from a master sorceress?”

“We’re getting off track.” Emma waved her hand. “Were you or were you not going to tell me about your lady friend?”

There was a sigh and then a smile that had every intention of breaking, but lost steam midway through. Emma was the possessive type, Regina knew this from the few times she’d chummed it up with Hook in front of her (all intentional and in good fun, of course). Then again, her record as a seductress and master manipulator demonstrated her possessive tendencies, too. But what puzzled Regina most was not her almost lover’s suspicions, but her suspicions toward a woman Regina had a fling with decades ago.
And then it hit her.

Jealousy was traditionally brought on by latent feelings, feelings Emma was starting to show for her (or, rather, chuck at her in an innocent attempt at honesty) when she had no business doing so from the start. What they had wasn’t serious. What they had was fun, so why dull the party by inviting jealousy?

Still unsure how the revelation affected her own budding emotional state, Regina let it be for the moment.

“Her name is Dorothy,” Regina corrected decisively, “and no, I was not going to reveal my history with her. Would you care to know why?”

Emma waved a hand in perfect Vanna White fashion for Regina to continue.

“Dorothy was a fling. Nothing more.”

Emma gaped at the shrug and simple explanation (if one could call it that). If there was ever a time the woman could prove her ability to explain herself without attitude or the need to rip a heart out afterwards than that was it.

“I’m really a fool to believe you actually would have been truthful with me,” she argued. Her chin as well as her spirit fell like a ship’s anchor to water. “Apparently I don’t deserve it.”

“No, don’t do that!” Emma shouted, leaping forward and pointing an accusing finger at Regina’s chest. “Don’t you dare pity me when it’s you who’s the broken one. I’m the comfortable one here. I had no problem talking about my past relationships. It may not be something I wanted broadcasted in the Daily Mirror, but I would have told you, and all you had to do was ask.” Emma sucked in a breath and straightened. It wasn’t her intention to attack Regina, but the rant had been building up within her for days. And Emma had to admit the wounded expression was restitution for the smear campaign courtesy of one journalist in the pocket of one former mayor.

“And don’t tell me it’s not my concern. It is every bit my concern when we’re sharing a bed every night and making out every chance we get. Dorothy was probably your first lesbian experience and it was apparently so mind blowing that you brought her over with the others when the curse was cast. So yeah,” Emma’s voice chafed with bitterness, her shoulder dipping towards Regina allowing her glare to turn sidelong, “I should be worried, especially if I have to return home to my competition.”

Nothing and no one stirred on the main deck, striking both women speechless. Silence fell suddenly without mercy. Regina’s wounded features turned to a frown, yet the sagging shoulders spoke of something more than confusion and less than having escaped unscathed. Noticing the change, Emma backed away from the woman and the words she had slung at her. She turned and started walking away. Then, as if thinking better of it, boots pivoted and Emma was returning back to her original spot. Hands planted themselves on hips while a tortured sigh left her lips.

Regina’s frown deepened at the strange behavior, but she spoke nothing of it. She also didn’t mention the fact that there was no guarantee that they could return home, and that what was spoken in whispers against bare skin and kissed away in lust and maybe something more shouldn’t bleed over into their real lives in Storybrooke. And that if it did, Emma wouldn’t have anything to worry about because Regina wasn’t interested in Dorothy anymore. Not since a rusted yellow car came barreling into her town (and its sign) and not since the car’s owner had wormed her way into her family. Dorothy was a fling of the past and nowhere near rival material. Emma was her present, the
one who challenged her, fought with her, laughed, cried, and kissed with her. She hugged her through the night, whispering promises and assurances that they would find their son and bring him home.

But Regina didn’t speak of those things.

“Who is she? Her Storybrooke counterpart, I mean.” Emma’s eyes fell to the deck and the boot toeing into it. “Have I ah… have I met her?” she stammered.

“I should think not. She works as a nurse in the psych ward.” She shrugged and explained in simplest terms, “I gave her roses.”

A brow arched. “In exchange for…”

“Nothing that is your business.”

Because, really, there was no reason to explain why she had kept Belle tucked away in a padded cell or divulge the intimate details of how she gained cooperation in keeping it quiet. There was no reason to reveal such activities when Emma wasn’t the one being cheated on during that time.

Nodding obediently, Emma took it as an end to the conversation and went back to her polishing. Regina, ever the observer, went back to her favorite pastime.

“If I may say so, you look very strapping this afternoon.”

It sounded like an apology, but Emma was far too deep in the crawl space to hear the tone. However, she did happen to catch what mattered and let out a cackle. “You may say so.”

Regina smiled. Her eyes clung to the beads of perspiration leaking rivers over skin. With ever swipe made to corrosive steel, a muscle contracted. Such a motion repeated had the muscles stretching and contracting under the sheen of salty sweat in a most lovely fashion. The visual had Regina’s hands itching to touch and a mouth salivating to taste.

Regina let out a hum of approval. “Mm, this work suits you well, dear.”

A laugh echoed from the depths of the crawl space. There was a muffled reply.

“What was that?”

“I said, I’m not hard on the eyes either.”

Regina smirked.

“Who’s not hard on the eyes?”

Their heads turned to the voice of a prince. David shifted his hold on the crate and looked from Regina to Emma, waiting for a reply.

“Uh… the uh, the sunset!”

Regina rolled her eyes at the romantic streak of her bedmate.

His face scrunched (a signature expression he passed on to his daughter) and then lit up with a cheery glow. “Oh, right. Gotta love those ocean sunsets.”

“Ha, ha… ouch!”
Emma rubbed her shin and glared up at the hostile brunette. She then caught her father standing off to the side. After putting down the crate, he seemed to stand still as if in deep thought. Emma could have sworn she heard him talking to himself. With a brief nod (in no one’s direction) David went for the pile of rope lying in a haphazard pile on the deck. He started coiling the line.

“You can kiss up to him as much as you want, but he’s never going to give you an inch.”

David jumped in surprise as if he had been caught tying a noose for someone’s imminent death. “I was just…” he glanced at the rope and gave a bashful grin.

“Impressing him?” Emma offered. “Try as hard as you like. Hook will never notice how much overtime you put in. All he cares about is rum, women, and a well kept ship.”

“But that’s why I’m working above and beyond! I know how much he values hard work. He treats this ship like it’s his child, and he wouldn’t stand anyone disgracing her. He may not see how much I care about his child…” David looked down at his fingers picking at the line and mumbled, “Maybe he will one day.”

Regina rolled her eyes at yet another sentimental Charming. How she got involved with these people she will never know.

“I just don’t want you to get your hopes up,” Emma gave her father a sympathetic smile, “Dad.”

David beamed. “You know, your mother said the same thing to me. I think we know where you got your common sense from. Mary Margaret has always been a kind, sensible woman.”

There was a choking sound in the background as Regina started gagging.

Emma laughed, throwing down her greasy rag and rising to her feet. “Okay, we better cut this out. Regina looks like she’s going to throw herself overboard if we don’t put an end to the chummy family stuff.”

It was David’s turn to roll eyes.

“No, really,” Regina insisted airily, waving her hand, “I could use a good swim.”

Then it was time for Emma to roll her eyes.

“I’m hungry.” Emma stated out of the blue. “You wanna grab a bite?”

“We ate an hour ago.”

“Yeah…”

“So…?”

“So… I guess you don’t want to eat with me,” Emma finished her own question.

A finger went to her head and scratched while a mouth and forehead bunched in concentration. The woman was clearly absorbed in some dilemma, and if Regina knew Emma at all it could be anything from one extreme to another. Considering her current appetite, Regina had an idea of what the woman was furiously mulling over.

“I could really go for a bear claw.”

“What’s new?”
“I’m with Regina on this one,” David said. “What’s with the obsession with bear claws?”

“I. Like. Bear claws. So sue me!”

“Just might have to if Granny keeps selling out of them,” Regina quipped smartly. “The People vs. Emma Swan. I can see the headlines now… Storybrooke Citizens Want Their Bear Claws Back. Sheriff Hurts Small Town Diner With Her Ravenous Stomach.”

David snorted with laughter.

Head in the clouds and dreaming of pastry heaven (where bear claw eaters were free of prejudice), Emma was mumbling distantly. “What about cupcakes? I could go for one of those right now. Light, whipped frosting… chocolaty, moist cake that melts on the tongue… Mmm.”

“If you have a desperate need for sugar, you should go to the galley. I’m sure Gold can magic something up for you.”

“Aw, yes!” Emma cried, bouncing up and down excitedly. She lunged into her father’s arms. “Brilliant! And you thought Mary Margaret was the sensible one!”

When Emma was out of sight Regina turned on David (still stunned by the hug). “Why do you put such thoughts in her head?” she scolded. “Now she’s going to be on a sugar high till 3 am!”

***

“Gold!”

The pawnbroker paused at his magically powered fridge and sighed when he heard the heavy clogging of boots.

“Gold, Gold, Gold!”

“That is my name, dearie. I would request that you don’t wear it out, but I do miss the old days of weak, helpless individuals calling me for their services.”

“That’s me!” Emma shouted, breathlessly. She came to a screeching halt at his work table, slamming her hands hard enough on it to make the man wince. Having no patience for his bullshit, Emma came out with it. “I’m weak, I’m helpless, and I’m HUNGRY. Now where is my bear claw?”

“Excuse me? A bear what?”

“Beeeear claw. Bear claw. And if you can’t give me that I can settle for a cupcake.” Fingers drummed manically on the table and lips were wet in anticipation. “Please,” Emma finished as an afterthought. Because it was just polite.

He stared at her for a moment, and froze in thought. All aspects of the request were considered, all consequences weighed. Even the price of such magic was measured, which would have a devastating penalty of an already wired savior running on a sugar rush. Dire consequences indeed.

“I am afraid I cannot grant what you seek.”

“Gold,” she whined, “I’ll do anything.”

He paused, thinking on it. “No.”

“Grrrr!”
And an unsatisfied, yet determined Emma Swan exited.

***

“Regina!”

Sitting at a table below deck, the former Evil Queen looked up from her nautical charts.

“Regina, Regina, Regina!”

“No.”

“But I didn’t even ask you yet.”

“No.”

“Just let me ask the question, Regina.”

“No.”

“Will you quit saying ‘No’ when what you really want to say is ‘Yes, Emma. It would be my pleasure to magic up a cupcake for my bestest pal in the whole wide world!’ Or ‘worlds,’ if you want to include those other realms.”

“Miss Swan,” Regina began calmly, folding her hands on the table primly, “you need to take a deep breath. Sit down…” She pulled out the chair beside her and patted. Emma sat obediently. Butterflies filled her with an anxiety she hadn’t felt since her days pacing outside the family stables. Regina bit her lip before deciding to push on. “We have been on this ship for two weeks with few creature comforts, sharing a cabin next to your parents, and having a very… close sleeping arrangement. Now tell me, what is it that you want?”

“A cupcake.”

She threw up her hands and sank back in her chair. “You missed the point completely.” She frowned, asking, “And what made you change your mind? What happened to the bear claw fiasco?”

“That was so 30 minutes ago. I can’t help it. My appetite wants what it wants.”

Regina smirked and leaned in close to Emma. A dark hand laid itself within millimeters of a pale one. Mahogany eyes darkened. “I am beginning to understand that, now,” she purred.

“A dark chocolate cupcake. Yeah,” Emma pronounced dreamily. She was completely oblivious to the slighted brunette who had fallen back into her chair with a huff. “A dark chocolate cupcake with vanilla cream cheese frosting and those star shaped sprinkles.”

Regina shook her head, staring up at the ceiling like she could burn through it and escape that wretched ship.

“Come on, Regina. I’ve gone a whole two weeks without sweets. Can’t you conjure something up for me?”

“Emma, I’m not Rumplestiltskin. I can’t create something from nothing, especially food. I need a source.”

Regina could do it, of course. She was holding out on Emma. She wanted her woman to work for it.
“Uh-uh, don’t give me that ‘I’m abstaining from personal gain magic’ bull because Henry told me.”

Regina gasped, clearly affronted. Rising abruptly, she asked in a hushed tone, “Henry told you what?”

“Our kid informed me that you conjured up a cupcake – sprinkles and all. You sly witch, you thought you’d get away Scott free, didn’t you?”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Regina,” huffed the blonde, a dangerous sugar craving in her eyes, “you are withholding cupcakes from me! Cupcakes! That in itself is cruel and unusual punishment, even for you.”

With an apathetic roll of the eyes Regina crossed her arms. “I have better things to do than hold bakery hostage, dear.”

Emma crossed her arms as well. “Give me my cupcake by oh nine hundred or there will be severe consequences.”

***

Just what those severe consequences entailed Regina was all too giddy to find out. Emma scared about as easily as a mouse scared a wolf. Knowing this, Regina was prepared to give the woman a scare herself. If a cupcake was what Emma wanted, a cupcake was what she would have. But not just any cupcake. Innuendos were always a hobby of the former queen, but to use them on Emma was a treat and (she liked to think) her god given right.

Grinning from ear to ear, she plucked the garment from the bed and slipped it on. A hand roved over her abdomen and stayed for a fleeting moment. Her breath came in a quivered gasp and her grin cowered. Fingers lingered. She closed her eyes and made a wish.

At precisely nine o’clock there was a sharp knock at the door. That Emma even bothered with formalities made Regina smile. She even arrived on time. For once.

“Come in.”

“I have been waiting all day for this.” Emma closed the door behind her. Though her voice was rough, her eyes shined with desperation. “You better have something to show for it.”

“Emma, you have not been waiting all day. It’s only been six hours.”

“Stalling,” she shot back pointedly. Her hand moved in a come hither motion. “Come on. Let’s see some magic.”

There was a low, pleasing hum before Regina stepped from the shadowed corner and into the moonlight filling in from the porthole. Emma’s breath caught as her eyes fell on the figure previously hidden by the darkness and her cupcake hazed mind. The edges of a black silk robe teased the floorboards with every step. Its sleeves ended at her forearms where there was nothing but smooth, radiant skin, and the center edges crossed over her chest to reveal an exposed neck and a partial chest Emma’s hands begged to touch.

It was teasing. It was her way of one-uping the sheriff in their usual games. But as the robe slinked to and fro on a positively bare body Emma realized it was a different game entirely. Regina would never follow through, she was sure of it. Maybe.
“Y-you don’t have my cupcake,” the blonde stammered, “do you?”

“What I have is better than a cupcake. What I’m offering is… sweeter.”

Emma’s mouth hung open of its own accord. The silky smooth and impossibly traitorous voice swirled around her, dispelling any thoughts of dark chocolate cake, vanilla cream cheese frosting, and those star shaped sprinkles. For there was nothing sweeter than honeyed vocals, creamy skin, and chocolate darkened eyes.

Eyes locked with Emma’s, Regina shed her wardrobe. It took mere seconds for the robe to fall, but to Emma if felt like hours. In the end, the material slipped over naked flesh and pooled in a puddle at her feet.

Emma had to hold back a gasp. It would have been impolite, considering, but then she never had to deal with such an occasion. Her eyes wandered over a shoulder, down the valley between breasts, around a hip, and came to a complete halt at her thighs. Regina was remained stark still, waiting with open eyes and a temporarily closed heart.

“This is why…?” Emma swallowed, immensely focused on the tops of a thigh.

Regina nodded at the floor.

“I have scars, too.”

She recoiled slightly. Whether it was because of the acknowledgment of the lines (something that she herself had never given voice to), or because Emma admitted to the same punitive fate, neither woman knew. What Regina did know was that the confession held no contempt. Emma was not one-uping her former enemy, nor was she pitying. And it made the cage around her heart ease open. Just a little.

“I never worried with… Graham. He’d forget the next day,” Regina looked away sadly. She added as an afterthought, “because of the curse.”

Emma couldn’t resist looking. She couldn’t imagine not running her fingertips along the deep grooves and faint burns. She couldn’t imagine being Graham and not noticing, not touching or kissing, or revering the scars. She couldn’t imagine forgetting – even under the effects of a spell.

“Can I show you mine?”

It was like they were children, curious and shy in exploring the gifts that god gave them, the parts of themselves that parents (or foster parents) taught them never to touch. Emma almost laughed because it was ridiculous. And because it felt so very right. With Regina.

After a gesturing nod, Emma stripped slowly, heart pounding.

Regina smiled, but it wasn’t directed at the nakedness she would worship later that night. Her hand took Emma’s and squeezed. No introductions were to be made. Not every single mark had to be explained and no stories had to be articulated. That was for another time. For then, it was a simple act of show, not tell. Regina saw Emma, and Emma saw Regina.

Their mouths came together softly, tentatively as if for the first time. Breaths came in sighs, blowing down the cages around both their hearts.

“I’m sorry,” Emma said, her lips still against Regina’s. She drew back with a face contorted in remorse. “Earlier today I called you broken. You’re not the broken one, you’re the strong one.”
Emma’s hand found itself on a hip, fingertips tingling on the surface of flesh. She glided it down to the top of a thigh, the one that held her fascination after the robe fell. There were smooth and rough areas alike, and both felt good just the same. A wandering hand came to four long ridges across a belly and Emma shivered. Wounds that would never heal. It made her sad to know the woman had suffered the marks, but it also caused her extreme joy that that same woman marred by vivid memories and lingering wounds had survived through it all and so much more.

So no, Emma didn’t mind the scars as much as Regina thought she would. To Emma, she was her perfect, prissy Regina, who pissed her off and turned her on just as fast as one could say ‘enjoy my shirt.’ For one guarded person to show her scars off to another guarded person was a sign of trust. Together, naked, and mirroring their scared and glamorous bodies they had never felt so relieved. Bearing the wounds was just as hard as bearing their souls. The former achieved, for the latter it was a simple matter of letting go and tumbling into bed.

She kissed her hard then with a desperation that rivaled that of wanting a mere sugar high. What Emma urgently desired more than words was not sugary pastry but the woman laughing under her fearless lips. She wanted Regina.

“Still impatient, I see.” Regina chuckled deeply.

“Well, you did make an offering.”

“Perhaps I should make you wait a little longer. Mm?”

“Nu-uh, absolutely n –“

“I was just kidding, dear. Now,” Regina purred, stroking the lengths of Emma’s arms, “let me serve you up something sweet.”

***

After a very sensible talking to David finally accepted the fact that Hook would never notice his attempts to impress. Mary Margaret was right, if the pirate overlooked him so persistently than he didn’t deserve the love of his ship. David worked tirelessly day and night to scrub the floorboards, polish the compass, and sweep down the wrinkles in the sails. It was all done with more love and devotion than Hook ever boasted to his ship.

That did not mean there were no traces of hope left. There at the bottom of his heart, like the errant dregs of rum in a glass was faith in the man a lonely shepherd idolized from youth to adulthood.

David was nothing if not optimistic.

Sighing out his frustrations for the day, he slipped into bed and waiting for his wife. It was then, hands folded behind his head and watching Mary Margaret remove her earrings that he heard it.

“Oh, I knew it would be chocolate!”

David turned an ear to the wall and smirked. “Sounds like someone finally got their cupcake.”

“At least we don’t have to hear her constant complaining,” Mary Margaret said, settling down beside her husband. “Honestly, sometimes I think she gets more of a sugar craving than her 11-year-old.”

“Emma, stop stalling and lick it up.”

“Patience, your Majesty. I’m admiring the symmetry.”
David chuckled darkly and wrapped an arm around his wife. “And Regina accused *me* of enabling our daughter.”

“I tell you, the look in Emma’s eyes when she sees her bear claws… she scarfs it down within seconds.” Mary Margaret cocked her head at the silence, and raised a brow. “At least she has some patience.”

“*Mm, tastes good. Velvety smooth center.*”

A thump sounded from the other side of their wall. With every word Regina’s voice rose by a decibel.

“*Run it along the side. Yeeeeeah. A little more around the top… there! Good god, yes. Use the tip… swirls… tight circles now… FUCKING CIRCLES!*”

“Our own daughter needs instruction on how to eat a cupcake.” David shook his head, rubbing a hand over his face. “I thought she was smarter than that.”
In an effort to further divert this story from canon I wanted to make everyone privy to a specific change. In the show when Mary Margaret and David were discussing a new house it was David who wanted to go back to the Enchanted Forest. Personally, I never bought that. In this story it is Mary Margaret who longs to return to their land, not David.

“It turns out some things are better than chocolate.”

“Oh, I don’t know.”

Sheets rustled and the cot creaked.

“Are you telling me, Miss Swan, that what you had last night was no more appetizing than a cupcake?”

“Um…”

“That is not a word.”

“No?”

“That sounded like a question.”

“No!” Emma cried. She pulled the woman into a (bear) hug and started placing frantic pecks in the crook of her neck. “You are more delicious than a measly cupcake! You are! Yus! Yus! Yus!”

Regina’s breathy laughs bounced off the cabin walls as she squirmed underneath the worshiping kisses of her new lover.

It was no surprise how voracious a lover Emma was. Just like her precious bear claws, she went after everything (including her apple tree) like a woman possessed. Chainsaws had nothing on Regina, not in the way those biceps flexed around her middle and those fingers thrummed inside, revving her to orgasm. And just when it all seemed accomplished that mouth would consume her again and again until she was struck dazed, delirious, and unable to form coherent thoughts much less screams. Yes, Emma was a most ravenous lover indeed.

In the after hours, when gasps turned to peaceful sighs and heartbeats slowed as one Regina took the time to evaluate. The reckless and persistent streak reminded her of who she was before the Evil Queen. There were many similarities between Emma and the young girl who sneaked out past her bedtime to steal an apple tart from the kitchens or watch the new foal dream its first dream. It explained a lot about why Regina felt so drawn to Emma, especially when the woman was delving a tongue along every raised and dipped scar of her body.

Regina’s eyes slipped shut and she hummed in appreciation.

“That was the first time I’ve seen you naked,” Emma said after a thorough investigation. Regina’s
cupcake had been devoured through and through from sunset to sunrise. Emma’s jaw was sore, if that were possible. “You’re so beautiful, you know that?” she asked in awe.

“Yes, you were practically screaming it last night.”

A blonde head jerked back. “No, I didn’t.”

“Dear, I have the marks on my back to prove just how enthusiastic you were in reminding me.” Regina stroked a blushing cheek.

“You say that like you weren’t shouting my name this morning. Also, I am pleased to find you have a surprisingly dirty mouth on you. I’ve never heard ‘Oh my fucking god’ screamed so many times in succession.”

“I most certainly did not!”

“You want to see the marks on my back?” Emma raised a brow smartly.

Regina felt a sweaty hand palm the underside of her thigh and bring it around the pale waist which had returned to its undying position over Regina’s.

“Or should I remind you just how colorful your tongue can get?”

Hips surged up between Regina’s parted legs. Regina moaned, her own hips levitating to meet the contact despite her better wishes. After a long, wet kiss and plenty of insistent grinding Regina put some distance between their overheated bodies.

“Emma, my thighs are burning and my back is sore. I also think I’m developing a slight case of laryngitis, so can we give ourselves a rest? Just for now?”

Emma pouted, but eventually acquiesced. Stealing one more kiss she rolled over on her side head propped up with one hand while the other lay possessively around Regina’s waist.

“You don’t think my parents heard us, do you?”

Fear passed before Regina’s eyes, but it was only for a moment. The door was locked and her koala bear in shining armor was wrapped safely around her. “I’m sure they have more pressing issues to worry over. Namely, your father’s bruised ego.”

“He really doesn’t get it.”

“Does he ever? When we were cursed I threw out so many colloquialisms on iniquity he just seemed to wave at them as they passed by.”

Emma chuckled into her hand. “I really… I really should not be so amused by that. He’s my dad and all…”

“And you are so very much his daughter.”

“Ah, should I be flattered? I don’t remember falling for any of your shit.”

It was Regina’s turn to be amused. “Oh, you really are adorable sometimes.”

“What? No, come on tell me.” Emma tore the hand down from the snickering mouth. “I’m listening.”

“The curse, for one.”
“Okay, see… that’s not fair. I was beginning to see the validity of Operation Cobra. Our son can be very persuasive – something his mother is too skilled at.”

“Why thank you.”

“You’re welcome. But I want to be crystal clear here.” Emma’s eyes bore into the irises of the former Evil Queen as if the contact alone was convincing enough. “I was ready to believe.”

“Uh-huh.”

“I was!”

“Your nose is growing, dear.” Regina stroked the bridge of Emma’s nose with a finger, all the while grinning brightly.

Emma grabbed the hand and pinned it to the space between them. “The book was helpful too. I’m telling you, a few more hours with that thing and I would have been batten down the hatches and going all stabby on your dragon friend.”

“Yes, I know how partial you are to picture books.”

Emma rolled her eyes. “So what else is on the list, Your Majesty?”

Regina’s gaze wandered to the porthole and the sunrise peeking through. After a moment she turned back to Emma and rasped, “My innocence in Dr. Hopper’s supposed death?”

Green eyes downcast, Emma felt the returning stab of her own betrayal. It had been one of the most disgraceful mistakes of her life, and she’d swear to god – hell, all the gods if they existed – that it would never be repeated, not if it meant the broken heart of her lover. Regina had been putting her all into becoming a better mother, and the last thing she needed was another loved one’s disloyalty.

Pale, long fingers of a reluctant hero laced with strong willed ones of a redeemed villain.

“I’ll take the blame for that. I deserve it after you tried so hard to convince me.”

Regina turned away to the window again. “I wish I had tried harder.”

“You don’t have to anymore. Because I’m going to try harder. For you and for Henry.”

The only reply was the slow caress of a thumb to the back of Emma’s hand. She looked down at their loosely clasped hands and watched as she squeezed the one in hers. Emma watched the apology of a resilient grasp and felt the devotion in a tingling jolt of their combined magic.

“Okay, I’ll accept it. I got suckered by an Evil Queen.” Eyes squinted while the corner of her mouth turned up in apprehension. “Am I still adorable?” Emma asked hopefully.

Regina’s eyes clapped on the blonde’s and smiled before her lips made to do the same. “Always, dear.”

“We need to supply a new name for you to call me. The whole ‘dear’ thing is…”

Regina frowned, asking, “What is wrong with ‘dear’?”

“You call everyone that. And when you say it to me I just feel like I’m everyone else to you – not someone… well, not someone –“
“Special?”

Emma nodded, her lip tucked between her teeth sheepishly.

“Well if you feel that strongly about it…” Regina propped herself up on their shared pillow. She flipped her hair back and pushed the ends that had strayed during their lovemaking back in their proper place. It was all done as if she were preparing for the most important meeting of her mayoral career. “So,” her voice drawled and her lips were turned up into a slight smirk (not at all the conduct necessary for political conference), “Darling?”

“Sounds old fashioned.”

“Sweetheart?”

“Taken. Henry,” Emma points out.

“Alright,” Regina mused. She squinted at the wall opposite and pursed her lips. “Hmm – hm, hm.”

Emma grew suspicious over the growing chuckle. “What?”

Her fingers went to her own lips in an effort to hold in the sniggering. “You are not going to like it,” Regina remarked drolly.

“Now you have to tell me.”

“Are you sure you’re ready for this?”

“I’ve only waited my entire life.”

Regina sighed, smirked, and let Emma have it. “Princess.”

No sound made during their tumultuous sessions between the sheets could possibly rival the earsplitting shriek.

“But I don’t like princess!” Emma whined, burying her head in the pillow. “It’s sounds so sexist. Why can’t you call me something cool like, ‘White knight?’ or… oh!” A blonde head popped up from the pillow. “What about, here get this…” Emma dragged off, building the suspense as Regina just lifted a brow dully, “…DRAGON Slayer!”

Regina winced at the bellow. She whipped spit from her eye and smiled politely. “It sounds… gruesome.”

“But sexy.”

“But if I’m the one who has to call you that. And you do realize the dragon you killed was actually human, right? It would be comparable to calling you a murderer – even though Maleficent deserved her fate.”

Emma scoffed and waved a hand. “Semantics.”

“Magic,” Regina shot back. She clasped hands behind Emma’s back and pulled her in. “You’re my princess,” she drawled with an evil grin.

“Then you’re my cupcake.”

Regina huffed crossly as Emma’s mouth dove in for her’s. Both their simpering melted as the kiss
deepened.

***

“A bonnie good mate and a captain too, a bonnie good ship and a bonnie good crew. Blow the man down, bullies, blow the man down. Blow the man down, bullies, pull him around!”

Chin skyward and mouth opened in a donut shaped ‘o,’ David belted out the lyrics through the hallway. Even with a masculine voice he could hit an absurdly high note.

Halfway through his laundry rounds, he arrived at Emma and Regina’s quarters, knocked first, and entered the empty room. He placed the clean towels and sheets on a corner table. Due to the creepy nature of changing other people’s sheets the crewmembers asked that they change their own bedclothes. David agreed because there was just a line you don’t cross with you arch enemies when it came to bed sheets.

As was his custom, David fished a square, foil wrapped piece of chocolate and ever so carefully laid it atop the pile of laundry.

“There,” he said, satisfied and nodding at his outstanding effort.

Out of the corner of his eye were the ladies’ bunks. Something looked amiss and he approached. What he saw made his brain tic.

Normally, both cots showed the rumpled signs of their owners. The top bunk was markedly different from the bottom in its disheveled appearance (obviously Emma’s) while the bottom was prepared with fine creases and not a single wrinkle in sight (Regina’s). Both still held a slept-in state of appearance.

From David’s perspective, such a comparison could not be made that day. His eyes shifted from top bunk to bottom, noticing the former’s impeccable sheets and the latter’s haphazard state complete with displaced sheets, a blanket that was hanging limp over the side, and a mattress turned on an angle.

The appearance was strikingly similar to that expression one hears when two people engage in rigorous activity. What was it called? David asked himself. Roll in the sack?

Roll… in the sack.

And it finally hit him like a two ton oar in the head.

“Holy Davy Jones!”

Hands clapped to his face as he stumbled back from the epiphany. It all made sense. The crisp sheets on one bed, the rumpled ones on another. The casual conversations, the endearing quality in body language and expressions thought to be disguised were what one would mistake between friends or lovers. Even the bickering had taken a flirtatious turn.

David remembered how coming back from the restroom that morning he had passed the two. When out of supposed earshot he picked up the whispering of Emma calling Regina ‘cupcake’ and the subsequent dull thud of his daughter tripping into their cabin door. Upon hearing it, David thought nothing of it. Just two women messing around. They had all spent so much time together on the boat that after two weeks some strange behavior was bound to occur.
But he never predicted the kind of behavior relating to sacks and rolling. And when it was between his daughter and the Evil Queen? And occurring right under his nose? A father’s nose, no less?

In David’s small little mind he never saw the warning signs. That Emma was finding solace in Regina of all people was… inconceivable. He just never expected it, which left him speechless, but also clueless as to how to react. What action should he take? Should action be taken? How does he go about disciplining his daughter? Does she need discipline? Emma and Regina were adults, after all, and had more life experience than David could admit to. How much trouble could the Savior and Evil Queen get into?

Apparently quite a bit, considering the state of the bottom bunk.

Oh, his ears. His poor, innocent ears. The lingering shouts of a velvety smooth center and instructions to ‘use the tip’ in ‘swirling’ rebounded through his brain like shotgun pellets. He wished they were shotgun pellets – anything that would scramble the memory part of his brain so he wouldn’t keep hearing those echoed cries.

He wanted to pull a Van Gogh right then.

David shook out his hands and shoulders to rid himself of a horror the sight of a dilapidated bunk sent through him.

He did not need that kind of stress in his life. He was 28-years-old with a wife, daughter, and grandson, and had more responsibilities than you can count on two hands (unless you’re Hook). The last thing he needed was another war on his conscience.

***

It was the perfect day to have a topside lunch. The sun was out, skies were clear, and the light breeze cooled off the hot planks beneath their feet. While Regina prepared the location Emma made herself responsible for lunch. Ruthlessly fixed on putting together the food herself, she had it out with the master chef himself. Gold put up a fight, but eventually complied when his prized rutabaga was held hostage and held precariously out a porthole.

To divert suspicion from a seemingly romantic picnic, Emma grudgingly invited Hook and Gold. Both declined, reasoning they would not be caught alone with two people who had at one time sought for their imminent deaths. They had been together on the ship for two weeks and rivalries endured and the Evil Queen was still that, evil. Emma reassured Regina that it was their loss, and then winked.

Sitting atop a blanket on the bow of the ship (an unstated claim that the spot had unequivocally become theirs) and backs against the foremast they ate in comfortable silence. Looking out at the stretch of shimmering ocean they munched on Emma’s surprisingly edible sandwiches.

“What is your favorite color?”

Swallowing a bit of her sandwich Regina looked up with confusion. “Pardon?”

“It’s part of our game, remember?”

A few days ago Emma proposed an innocent game of Getting to Know Your Former Enemy and Current Whatever. Regina conceded just because she liked teasing every single detail Emma copped to from the pigtail obsession during her preteen years to her first job in retail (lingerie boutique).

“I would have expected such an original and insightful question to come up earlier.”
“Hey, don’t knock the color question. It can reveal a lot about your personality. There are actual scientific studies out there. Don’t take my word of it.”

“I won’t.”

Emma smirked and sang, “You’re hedging.”

“Fine,” Regina exhaled and answered, “black.”

“Try again.”

“I am fond of black,” Regina insisted.

“No, you think you should like black. It’s domineering and makes all the peasants cower in fear.”

“Red.”

“Now I know you’re kidding yourself.”

She shot a glare at Emma’s haughtiness before slumping in defeat. She finally conceded, eyes fluttering and lifting a shoulder. “Royal blue.”

Emma smirked. “That’s more like it.”

“And you? What is your favorite color?”

“It varies,” her shoulders shrugged, “from time to time.”

“You moved around quite a bit; change being your constant traveling companion. It’s only appropriate that your favorite color should too.”

“You’re making fun of me.”

“That,” Regina conceded with a smirk, “and I’m proving your theory on color and personality.”

“Ouch, my own principles turned against me. That’s low.”

Emma’s heart sped up at the growing smile and laugh that slipped out. Dazed by the glowing look on Regina, she did not see the attack lobbed in her direction. Emma blocked the next onslaught of grapes and returned them with a vengeance.

After removing a grape from her bustier Regina upset her sparring partner by calling an end to the war.

“What do you do when you can’t sleep?” Regina asked.

“The rules of the game specified one question a day. You, Regina, are cheating.”

“Yes, well, I figured with the amount of sharing I did last night and this morning…”

Water came spurting out of a nose. Classy there Swan, Emma scolded herself, Classy. The reminder sparked images of sliding bodies and heated cries. Her cheeks grew about as rosy as Regina’s.

“Uh, alright. If I can’t sleep I guess I just lay there wishing upon a star…”

Regina snorted in amusement and lightly jabbed with an elbow.
Taking pride in the fact that she actually made the once evil and intimidating queen of the Enchanted Forest snort, Emma grinned widely and continued. “And if that doesn’t work I go for a run. It always helps clear my head. I exhaust my body enough that I just crash instantly.”

Again, yet another example of Emma going after all things at top speed.

Regina hummed in acknowledgment. After debating the consequences of sharing personal details, she cocked her head. “I listen to jazz music,” Regina stated plainly. “Nina Simone’s voice is ideal. A few minutes of those smooth, deep, smoky vocals and I’m out.”

Emma nodded like she understood.

“You have no idea who I’m talking about, do you?”

Emma shook her head.

Regina smiled. “Well, I can’t say I know about the dangers of jogging in the middle of the night, but I’m willing to try someday.” Emma’s brows went up at the upfront behavior. “As for my musical tastes…”

A delicate hand made a flourishing motion and the stereo powered on. The sound of a piano trickled from the speakers. Notes plunked sharp and effortlessly gave way to a definite bass line and the addition of a voice Emma had never heard. Despite her unfamiliarity with the artist she found herself among the clapping and hooting audience in the background. Closing her eyes, she was submerged in the sounds and eventually started swaying to the combination of piano, bass, drum, and sultry vocals.

Just in time
Before you came my time was running low oh baby
I was lost them losing dice were tossed
My bridges all were crossed nowhere to go
Now you’re here now I know just where I’m going

Emma spied a glance at Regina and was rewarded with a sight. A smile twitched at her full lips and eyes were relaxed and closed. Head craned towards the sky while marks planted in restless lust became visible on the sun-drenched neck. Her grin turned beaming at the anticipated dips and flows of Nina’s voice. Regina looked peaceful. Regina was happy.

“All of her work sounds so much better live,” Regina explained. “Her improvisations, I think, further strengthened her words and gave every audience a unique experience. She’s truly an inspiring performer, and a rather spirited woman.” She frowned then, opening her eyes slowly, sadly. “Of course, I never had the opportunity to see her perform live. She’s familiar to me only through recordings,” she added with a small smile.

Emma bumped a shoulder into Regina, spurring her to join the swaying. After a reproachful brow raise Regina gave in. And the two women sat side by side, dancing in sync.

“You’ve found me just in time.”

Breath catching at the quiet confession, she looked at Emma who was eyes shut, swaying to the music, and murmuring the lyrics that felt oh so right in the moment. Accepting such an honest admission was made easier when Emma wasn’t doing so directly. Under the cover of eyelids and hauntingly beautiful music she uttered what felt natural. Regina took the words and curled them around her heart. Closing her own eyes and bumping shoulders with the blonde Regina joined in the
sentiment.

“You’ve found me just in time.”

Emma’s ears pricked up to the softly chanted words and smiled.

Just as the song ended footsteps sounded from behind.

“Gold mentioned there was a picnic trending on the forecastle.” David slipped into view, Mary Margaret following. “Can we join?”

“I do not believe there are enough san –”

“Sure!” Emma cut in. “We got plenty here!” She shot Regina a glare to be nice and offered her parents a seat across from them.

While David dived right into the spread, Mary Margaret crossed her legs slowly and stared down at the food like it was poison. Because, really, it wouldn’t be a surprise.

“It’s not going to put you in a coma, dear.”

The petite woman narrowed her eyes into the challenging stare.

“It’s not been tampered with,” Emma assured, “I made the sandwiches.”

While it was enough to convince her mother, the statement managed to slight Regina who was very proud of her own cooking skills. Even her poisoned dishes tasted good. Or so she would assume.

Awkward silence fell, the kind that blanketed four people whom loved and loathed one other at some point in their lives. While Regina had forgone the rest of her meal to glare out to sea, Mary Margaret was taking dainty bites from her sandwich (bites so small a goldfish could have swallowed). Regina wanted to take the ham and Swiss on rye and shove it down her throat. Munching casually next to the impeccable eater was David, whom Emma noticed was casting hooded glances at her and Regina.

Regina turned to the blonde, covering her motives with an arm stretch and hissed, “This is worse than any torture I have been through! Make it stop or you will pay dearly.”

“I can’t order them to leave,” Emma whispered lowly, chin to shoulder. “And it’s not like you’re in physical pain.”

“No, but if your mother doesn’t start digesting her first bite of that sandwich someone will be in physical pain. Tremendous… physical… pain.”

Green eyes shifted upwards and trolled.

Mary Margaret continued to take miniscule bites. David was commencing not-so-confidential Operation Swan Queen; the validity of such a pairing still boggling his mind.

“They’re trying to be civil,” Emma defended under her breath. “Do you see them outwardly threatening you?”

“Your mother suggested I poisoned the food!”

“Actually, you were the one who put that in her head.”
“She would have thought of it sooner or later. The Charmings forget grudges like you forget your afternoon bear claw.”

Emma shook her head. “I’m off those things,” she mentioned offhandedly. “Thanks to you I’ve been turned on to much sweeter and more refined tastes.”

“Uncouth as always,” Regina’s scowl fashioned itself to a mischievous smirk, “princess.”

Emma’s jaw set. Her eyes narrowed. “You’re one to talk…” her lips formed a similar smirk as she spat louder than intended, “cupcake!” She froze, matching Regina’s wide eyes.

David’s face was plastered with the same petrified expression while Mary Margaret, having picked up on the nickname, looked up with a pathetically cheery grin.

“Oh! Is that because of that one time Emma licked –“

David’s hand blindly covered his wife’s mouth as he gave Regina a jolly smile.

“Excuse me?” Regina asked menacingly.

“My wife,” he let out a single laugh, “the practical joker. You are a funny one, aren’t you?” He took Mary Margaret’s chin and wagged it back and forth. “I knew why I married you!”

“What,” Emma drawled, “the hell.”

“Marriage,” Regina confirmed, nodding, “it’s called marriage. Though it never had that particular effect on me, heaven had mercy.”

David, wanting to divert from all possible conversation from cupcakes, made the kind of loving gestures he knew from experience would distract his wife. The couple, eyes squinting and smiles toothy, proceeded to rub noses.

Emma’s face went sour. “It looks awful.”

“It is awful,” Regina replied flatly.

***

That night the supposedly solid marriage between True Loves was tested. A gallon of tears and two hoarse throats later they went their separate ways. Temporarily. Each needed their space and time to cool off before something regretful was said. Mary Margaret banished David from their cabin, unknowingly leaving him free to stumble above deck with a bottle of Hook's finest.

The main bridge was deserted and quite tranquil. It was the ideal place to drown one’s sorrows, so David approached the railing. He bent over the edge to look at the water but all he saw was an inky void. It was probably a good thing not to see his own reflection or else he would have come face to face with a phony prince and a failure of a father. He grunted discouragingly, taking a swig from the half-empty bottle. With one hand on the railing, he reached up for one of the suspended ropes and pulled himself up, trying to hook a leg over the railing. Already tipsy from the alcohol, he wobbled dangerously on the balustrade, his grip on the rope cutting into his skin.

“How about you go on a pirate ship?” he mumbled, sweat stinging his vision. “Could have ma – whoop!”

The bottle slipped from his sweaty fingers and his immediate reaction was to take his hand off the rope and grab it. The problem, of course, would have been that with one hand reaching for the rum
that left his other hand the only means of support. And with one leg already over the railing… you could probably figure out his dilemma.

But David wanted his rum like it was a precious ligament of his body. Right then it was his only means of coping. So if he had to get wet in order to salvage his coping device, then so be it. If he had to sink to the bottom of the ocean like a sack of Idaho potatoes, then maybe he deserved that fate.

Hand reaching in slow motion for the bottle of rum he felt his body lurch overboard. This was the end, he thought. All for a half-bottle of Hook’s finest rum. It’s been an honor, Jolly Roger. Happy trails.

It felt like flying. A dopey smile crossed his face. He’s always wanted to fly, but he never thought it would be like this. Strangely, there were no effects of vertigo. Instead of falling he felt like his whole body was hanging in space.

Is this heaven? were his last thoughts.

“There are more effective means to kill yourself.”

David’s eyes flew open. There was no pearly, wrought-iron gate in sight. No Peter to greet him with a “Hey, how was life?” Unless heaven was a pirate ship guarded by the Evil Queen…

Apparently the non-vertigo effects and failure to hit the ocean surface were due to the fact that his body was suspended. In purple smoke. David almost slapped himself. What was he thinking? Falling to his death for a few more sips of rum?

“I would ask how you came up with such a grand idea, but with the responsible culprit overboard…” Regina sighed. “A shame, really. I was all prepared to grant my appreciation.”

Shedding a tear for the bottle, David asked, “Why save me, then?”

Her hand dropped once his feet made safe landing. She flicked her fingers to rid the remaining sparks of magic. Not much interested in the question she made a careful inspection of her gloved hand, pursing her lips and shrugging as a reply.

“Good. I wouldn’t have believed you anyway.”

“What is that supposed to mean?”

“Eh, maybe I would have. It’s all so confusing. Ugh, what a day.”

“Are you intoxicated?”

“Bitch, I might be!”

Regina’s head jerked back on her neck. Something clearly had David in a snit. Finally, the brunette knew what it was like to be at the receiving end of a bitchy attitude. She had to say, though, David pulled it off swimmingly. He had the hands to hips pose down pat along with a conceited chin raised. All he needed to complete the image was an arm flourish and a snapping finger. What a drama queen.

“I just don’t know what to do.”

Regina raised a brow. Did he even realize who he was talking to? Unloading his troubles on the Evil Queen was not a welcome gift. It brought on memories of another David Nolan who had graciously
eaten her lasagna and spoken to her with more candor than any of Storybrooke’s citizens. Even that exchange was surreal, if not uncomfortable.

But priorities had changed. They were family – she could admit that now – but unlike friends, you don’t pick your family. You get saddled with the burdensome twits without choice or preference. Regina was pretty sure she’s handled worse family than the Charmings. Dealing with Snow and her drunken prince would be a piece of cake.

She bit her lip in penance for what she was about to do. “What has you in such a predicament that in place of your wife you would rather discuss this with a bottle of the captain’s signature label,” Regina folded her arms, grating, “and me.”

“My little girl,” David murmured, chin tucked to his chest. “My little princess is sleeping with my worst enemy. It doesn’t get any more complicated than that. It even tops my bogus birthright as a prince. I didn’t ask for that. I never wanted to be a prince and I never wanted an evil queen for a daughter-in-law. No one came up to me asking, ‘Hey, PCharms, how do you feel about a union between your long lost daughter and the woman who was responsible? Hey? What do ya say?’ I mean, I would have taken it under consideration. I would have really thought deeply about it. I don’t jump to conclusions. So you see… I mean, when did it all go wrong? Where did my simple life as a shepherd go? Because I don’t see it anywhere,” David threw up his hands and looked around like his childhood home was hiding behind the mainsail, “do you?”

Dumbstruck, Regina shook her head, opening the gap between her lips.

“Don’t answer that.” David waved it off. “I’ve heard more from you than I’d ever wanted to hear. Oh! Woe is me!” Face buried in hands, he tried to wipe the memory of last night’s debacle – wall thumps and all. “And you just had to leave the evidence. Right in the open! Have a little modesty and straighten the mattress at least! It figures though, a queen flaunting her conquests. Nooo surprise there,” he drawled boringly.

As the alcohol wore off so did David’s rambling. His regained his posture, no longer needing the support of the rope from above. His gait remained a bit wobbly, though, and his eyes were glassy.

“I should be taking action,” he said definitively, nodding. “I’m a father now, and it’s my responsibility – nay it is my right to intervene. I mean, I wasn’t around most of the time. Hell, I wasn’t around at all. Didn’t see her first steps, her first words. Couldn’t teach her how to ride a horse or warn her of the dangers of talking to strangers in the village.” A shrill hiccup escaped, making Regina jump in surprise. David wiped at his eyes, sniffled and continued. “If I had been in her life that bastard… Nealfire wouldn’t have broken her heart. He wouldn’t dare, not if I had been around to throw a few punches. But I’m here now. Emma’s fallen under some spell and I’m here, my fists are ready, and… and…” His voice dropped off. Drawing a blank, David peered strangely at Regina imploring, “What do you think I should do?”

“Um…”

David’s hands clasped as if in prayer, his pleading almost childlike. “Please, Regina?”

“We are talking about the same evil queen are we not?”

David nodded.

“You are asking me advice on how to handle your daughter sleeping with me.”

He frowned deeply, trying to figure out if it was a question. “I don’t know,” he replied dumbly. “Is
“Ah, I just… well, what do you want me to say?!” Regina shot back, fuming. “You weren’t supposed to find out! And Em – Miss Swan and I never intended to let it go this far. We… we just…” Fingers gripped at the wrinkles in her forehead. She was searching for words. She was grasping at an explanation.

David finished for her. “You and my daughter just fell. Head over heels.”

“It is not like that.”

“Oh, it is. That’s how it happens. And people like you are the last to know. People who think they don’t deserve a second chance. People who feel used up, dried up and lonely.”

“If you are aiming at a compliment…”

“One thing is for sure,” he muttered, peering over the railing to catch a glimpse of a remnant bottle, “I’m not paying for the wedding.”

“Ch-Charming…” Regina stuttered, suddenly growing red from the neck up. “That is – it’s absurd.”

“If only you had said that hours ago. Ugh, it would have saved me so much distress.”

“Putting an end to our… association would not have any effect on you. That is why we kept it from prying eyes. I don’t believe Miss Swan would go along with terminating the agreement, anyway. She is as stubborn as her father.”

“Agreement?” David scoffed lightly. “Wow, now I know how it would have been dating you.”

“Please,” Regina moaned, “never again bring up the possibility of an us. I could lose my dinner right about now.”

“Agreement,” he repeated, shaking his head, “I don’t know how Emma puts up with you. You’re about as romantic as a handgun. But,” he paused, scratching his chin and mentally dispelling childish grudges, “it seems that she’s chosen you. I don’t have to like it, but I respect her wishes. I respect where her heart wants to be.”

Heart. Emma’s heart.

Her throat closed off a whimper. Regina closed her eyes, letting lose the first tear. She breathed in the confession, and imagined accepting the heart of one she already held dear and pressing it to her own until it melded with hers. The gasp escaped unsteadily.

“That would be the near death experience talking,” Regina replied quietly. “Don’t worry; this whole forgiveness kick will be forgotten come tomorrow morning.”

“For what it’s worth I am willing to put it all behind me. Everything – the curse, the repeated attempts to separate my family, the murder, the manipulation … etcetera. All for my daughter.”

Regina didn’t know what to say. Giving thanks did not seem an appropriate follow up. David was not responsible for this new act of kindness. It was not by his choice alone to forgive the Evil Queen. Emma was her savior in more ways than one, and would need to be thanked that night. Very thoroughly appreciated.

“Again, we shall see what tomorrow brings.”
As Regina walked away a puff of purple swirled nearby. The smoke cleared to reveal a full bottle of premium rum sitting on the rail. David smiled and took it gratefully.

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The first thing Emma did at the sight of the drunken exploits was go on the defensive. Her walls came up immediately, her knees bent ready to flee at the first sign of trouble, and hands bunched in the case her legs were not fast enough. She had known and lived with foster fathers who were hammered enough to hurt his kids, his wife; fathers angry enough to hit her with just as much force. She had the unlucky opportunity to have known and to have slept with plenty of men, all capable of putting her in a coma if it were not for the self-defense tactics picked up over the years. She had first-hand experience with alcoholics, with the ‘occasional beer or two,’ and the ‘one more and I’ll call it a night’ kind of upstanding citizen.

But Emma saw David sitting on the boat’s railing, legs hanging over the edge and swaying playfully. She looked into his kind, rosy face, felt his innocent smile, and heard the pirate song slipping toneless from his heavy lips. She saw her father and her fists relaxed and her wall melted. David would never hurt her – drunk or sober. No, he would jump off the ship before he hurt either his daughter or wife.

When Regina came into their quarters, sober and pensive, she had suggested Emma go see her father who was three sheets to the wind and contemplating a one way ticket to the bottom of the sea. Thinking it a joke, Emma brushed it off and cited David’s petulant behavior as the only means to cope with a second-rate role model and a clinging wife. What was not a joke was the way Regina had torn the blonde apart with a defense of the man whose only wish was seeking to make up for lost time with his daughter. The sharp words flung from a flustered, yet radiant brunette was enough for Emma to make tracks up to the main deck.

“Ever hear the expression ‘pace yourself’?”

David turned with a wide grin and eyes swimming in the moonlight. “Come on over and catch up to your old pops.”

“Is this safe?” Emma questioned, hiking a leg over the railing to sit.

David shrugged and passed over the bottle gifted from a purple haze. She took a swig. Lips smacked to the taste and her mouth curled, satisfied.

“So what brings you up here this time of night? And what in the hell would drive you to climb the ship like a drunken baboon?”

“Falling was not my intention,” David assured with a wagging finger and drowsy eyes. “I just wanted to get a better look at the ocean.”

“Yeah, well you can do that from behind the railing. It’s safer, not to mention you won’t get bitched out by Mary Margaret when she finds out – if she finds out.”

“Your mother can do so much more than bitch me out. See this?” He pointed to the crevice in his chin, a scar that only seemed a few years old. “That is all Snow White.”

Emma narrowed her eyes, staring at the scar. “I never figured Snow White and Prince Charming for the arguing type. What was the fight about?” After taking another sip, she handed over the bottle.

“The more recent fight, I mean.”

“Your mother wants to return to the Enchanted Forest. We talked about it back in Storybrooke when we were searching for houses. Nothing was decided then, mostly because it didn’t seem right to be
house hunting while a giant was wreaking havoc on the town. Things never died down enough for
the conversation to come up again.”

“Until now,” Emma accessed.

“Yeah, until now.” David guzzled down a quarter of the rum, coughing at the tail end of his
mouthful. “I’ve actually thought about it a lot since the start of our trip. I never considered
Storybrooke my home. It was a reminder of what was missing, and what was taken away from us.
But then we left and I started seeing it differently. Storybrooke isn’t what I thought it was. It
symbolizes a new beginning. It’s not the place that haunts us of what was taken. It is the place – the
home – that gave us what we lost. Storybrooke was where you found us. It’s were we became a
family. Now that we are miles, worlds, from that place I realize what we had. I miss it.”

“You don’t want to return to the Enchanted Forest, do you?”

David winced, knowing what was being asked. It wasn’t a simple matter of choosing where to live,
rather a distinction between who David and Snow were as people and what they wanted out of life.
“I love Snow and my heart will always be where my family lies, but if you and Henry wish to stay
where you are… that is my decision as well. I can’t imagine losing you a second time. I won’t make
that mistake again.”

“But if Mary Margaret is dead set on going back to the Enchanted Forest, to your castle and your
land and titles, then where do you stand? Would you make up for your mistake by staying with
Henry and I only to break that same promise to your wife?”

“I didn’t say it was simple,” David argued with a shake of his head. “Your mother and I, though we
love each other very much, grew up as two very different individuals. Our worlds, our rules were
never the same. I wasn’t born into royalty. That life belonged to Snow, which is why she is so quick
to go back. When I think about the mess we would have to clean up at the castle and surrounding
lands… the organization and ruling… I grow tired. The only people I care to be responsible for are
my daughter and grandson, not an entire kingdom. And the fact that Regina introduced us fairy tale
characters to a democracy – of a certain kind – makes Storybrooke all the more appealing.
Everything and everyone there has a place, a purpose. There’s no need to push borders, form war
councils, or call tribunals. We’re all the same in Storybrooke. We look out for each other now.”

Emma smirked. “You make it sound so utopian.”

“Well, it sure isn’t. I just mean that Storybrooke offers us a better way of life. There are pros and
cons to every town, but this one, this small, secluded town in Maine is ours. It is our home.” Letting
out a sigh, he cast a glance out to sea, squinting at the shapeshifting moonlight on the water. “Our life
in the Enchanted Forest is over, it’s destroyed. Your mother still doesn’t see it that way.”

“Sounds like you guys have a lot to work out. I’m not sure what else to say… but I hope you do. I
wouldn’t want my folks to split up just when I found them.”

David looped an arm around her back, grasping a shoulder and pulling her in. He kissed the crown
of her blonde curls, whispering into them, “It’s okay, kiddo. Whatever happens between your mom
and I isn’t your fault.”

Emma laughed weakly because she wasn’t sure how else to react. It was her first induction into the
father/daughter talks sure to make multiple appearances throughout her life. She went with the flow,
taking the hug and silently smiling to herself. The awkwardness of it all soon got to her and David.
They disengaged.
“This stuff isn’t half bad,” she muttered, taking another swig of rum.

“You can thank your girlfriend.”

She coughed up the precious liquid, nearly tumbling overboard. “What?!” she screeched.

“Regina,” David clarified, “your girlfriend. Unless Hook had some operation I don’t know about and that’s who I heard screaming last night.”

“Wh –” Emma made an incoherent sound of disgust. “How… what… you… but I…”

“I know what you mean. That was my response when I figured it out.”

Despite her inability to ask how he knew, Emma aimed a finger at the man and glared menacingly. “You cannot tell, mom. I swear to god if she found out… I don’t know what she would do to Regina – or me.”

“I’ll admit, once I got over the initial shock I had this urge to string that witch up to the tallest mast. That, or prodding her into shark infested waters.” He sighed heavily, looking down at the half empty bottle and picking at the label. “But you’re not a baby anymore. I keep thinking of you as one because that was the last time your mother and I saw you, the last time we held you and kissed you goodbye. You’ve grown up from that babbling baby swaddled in a blanket. Though it’s hard to accept, Regina isn’t the same person either. She’s not the queen my people and I sought to destroy all those years ago.”

“How am I supposed to believe any of that? Even after she helped Mary Margaret and I return home through the well you guys still treated her like she hadn’t changed. I treated her like she wasn’t trying to change. How do I know it’s just words, and that you won’t just stick a sword through her the first chance you get?”

“I think I can speak for your mother in assuring you we have bigger issues at hand. Regina doesn’t seem to be the baddie of the week, anyway,” David snorted amusingly.

“Please do not joke about that,” Emma replied, brows furrowed and eyes unyielding. “She is trying. It doesn’t help that everyone else doesn’t believe her, or worse, makes fun of her. After what Regina’s been through she deserves better.”

“No, I get it. When I was accused of murdering Kathryn I hardly had a support system.”

“You seriously did not just compare that one night in jail to the years of shit Regina suffered through.”

“Alright, so maybe I have a lot of catching up to do? I can’t claim to understand what happened to Regina and I don’t think that day will come. What I do get is family. She’s Henry’s mother, too, and that makes her one of us. Damn, that was hard to say,” he mumbled before Emma patted his shoulder. “I don’t exactly know what to make of her now with this fling or whatever with you. But you’re a good person, Emma, more kind and forgiving than any of us losers. You found us after all these years and helped break the curse. You restored hope to those that lost it long ago. I have faith in you. You’re a big girl and I’m sure this isn’t your first rodeo.”

Emma’s face contorted in revulsion. She reeled back. “Aw, don’t even go there. That’s out of bounds territory for you. And mom.”

David just laughed and said, “You’ve made it here with far less parenting than I ever had. Snow and I didn’t have the smoothest of journeys, but you seemed to end up in the right place with a good head
on your shoulders.”

“That really means a lot,” Emma murmured tearily, “Dad.”

“You know what you’re doing.” He nodded until his brows knit together comically and he peered at her. “You do know what you’re doing, right?”

“Ah, I think so? I don’t know.” Emma hung her head and shook it dejectedly.

“Well, at the cost of becoming aware of more than a father ever should, I’m going to pass on the details. What I will say, though, is that eventually you should know what you’re doing. Whatever this is with Regina, you have a responsibility to Henry to figure this out. Both of you do.”

Considering the years Regina had taken from them, such generous advice was a surprise. Emma took it gladly, but with hesitancy. It was true; she didn’t know what her and Regina had. They had magic, chemistry, a son. They shared pet names, scars, whispered affections in the still darkness when the other was thought to be asleep. Their affair could just be a product of the voyage, emotions brimming and sparking out of control. The habit of finding comfort in their bodies, their mouths, and their sighs could also be a result of fear over their son’s welfare.

“Did you feel anything for her before we set out for Neverland?” David inquired gently, breaking Emma’s train of thought.

Emma surprised her father. She also surprised the hell out of herself.

“I – I think I did.”

She turned to him like a child who just broke her parent’s vase, bottom lip jutting out, forehead wrinkled in worry, eyes faithfully shining to her own admission. David nodded. If anything, he was satisfied that his daughter knew herself enough to speak the truth.

They got drunk, happily. Songs of woe, songs of sailing on the high seas, and of beautiful maidens… they sang them all till the rum was gone.

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With a slide, shoulder jag, and shuffle to the side Emma danced her way down the hallway. Despite David calling it a night, Emma was still loose and liquored enough to burn the candle at both ends. Half-stepping it to her room she mumbled lyrics to the song that marked both David and Emma’s haphazard states.

“See what we can be if we press fast forward. Just one more round and you’re down I know it. Fill another cup up. Feeling on yo – “

Disoriented by the shifting floor underfoot, her boot met the wall and she stumbled, face smacking right into the wall. “Uhh,” Emma moaned. She kept upright enough to finish the line, “… butt what?”

Shimmerying to the song circling her hazy brain, Emma got to her door.

“You can blame it on the Goose. Got you feelin’ loose? Blame it on the Tron. Got you in the zone. Blame it on the al al al al al…”

The bang resounded as the door practically flew off its hinges, Emma stumbling in behind.
“Why is it so fucking bright in here?!” she cried, covering her eyes amidst the very dim light. Her hand fumbled against the wall in search for the switch to turn off the lantern.

Regina stood – scratch that, vaulted – from their bed, arms flat to her sides and hands tightened into lethal weapons. “What took you so long?” she demanded hotly. “When I asked you to talk to David I did not permit an hours long bonding session. And I can see that gift I sent to your father was shared. The whole bottle, I presume?” She folded her arms, making an intimidating force to be reckoned with.

“God,” Emma slurred and slammed the door shut, “you’re not my wife. Quit fussing.”

“Thank god for that! I don’t know how our marriage could survive with you gallivanting off to who knows where!”

“I don’t need your permission. I don’t have a curfew, either. David needed some company. And as for my state of mind…” she frowned, and explained weakly,” I just had a few sips.” To emphasize, Emma’s hand waved unsteadily, her eyes following the strange movement with fascination.

“It would have saved quite a bit of trouble if you had poisoned yourself like this months ago. I wouldn’t have had to bother with the goddamned apple turnover!”

A heavy silence fell. Emma’s chin quivered. Regina’s mouth parted.

“I – I didn’t intend to bring that up,” the brunette murmured. She wrung her hands, the same ones that nearly caused the undoing of their son. “Ever.”

At the thought of the brown-haired, fairy tale aficionado, Emma burst into tears.

Ironically, it was Regina who offered a shoulder to cry on. So many times previous called for the Savior to do the saving. But the job of bringing someone up when they were down was reversed, and it was the former Evil Queen taking the Savior in her arms.

Regina guided a sniffling blonde to the bed. They sat down, one hugging a petite waist, the other cupping a shoulder and dipping into limp curls.

Regina wanted to cry. It had been days since tears were properly shed, mostly due to the demand of her navigator duties. She had also been distracted by the happiness filling the weak spaces of her heart. She wanted to cry for the one void that wouldn’t be filled – couldn’t be when the one who resided there was miles away on a treacherous island. She needed to let it out.

But Emma was doing enough sobbing for the both of them, so Regina put on a brave face and took on the mantle of strength. The fear was still eating away under the armor; nibbling inch by inch every day since Henry was stolen from her side.

The sobs were abating and Regina decided to offer a distraction. “Did David have anything to say about us?”

Red-rimmed and puffy eyes lifted. “You knew? I mean, you knew that he knew?”

“Mary Margaret may fall for David’s poker face, but I do not.”

A ragged sigh emitted from the blonde. “Of course you knew. You have eyes everywhere.”

“Hm, I wish.”
“He… he actually gave me dating advice.” Emma almost choked with laughter at the woman’s bulging eyes. “Don’t have a seizure. I didn’t say we were a couple. In fact, I haven’t revealed anything relating to us,” Emma’s palms perspired through the lie, “and he just came out with an olive branch and a pat on the back. I don’t get it.”

“Welcome to the world of parenting.”

Emma rolled her eyes. “I can’t wait till Henry brings home his first girlfriend.”

“He’s not dating,” Regina avowed, head shaking, “not if I can help it.”

“Sure as shit he’s not.”

Squeezing a shoulder in reply, Regina returned Emma to the safety of her bosom. “I’m sorry I yelled at you.” The apology was barely above a whisper, but strong enough to retain its sincerity. “You don’t need my consent to set off. I… I just…”

“… don’t like being left alone,” Emma supplied. She felt the chin nod against her head. It finally occurred to her how her actions affected Regina. That she had any impact on the woman to begin with was nothing short of impressive. Yet the plausibility that what Emma said, felt, and did could have a negative effect on Regina ripped a hole in her chest. She had spent so much time focused on her own happiness that she never accounted for Regina’s. It was assumed that somewhere along the way, through languid kissing, and kneading flesh, Regina was content. But assumptions could be misleading. Never once was Regina’s state of mind questioned. Was she truly happy with their arrangement? Was it too much? Did she want more?

It did not escape Emma that Regina’s fear of being alone might stem from her wanting more out their relationship, more from Emma. The demand for such an inconceivable notion of more weighed heavy on Emma. She didn’t do commitment. She didn’t do more. Tears leaked from her eyes because she wanted that to change, but didn’t know how to go about it.

“Oh,” Regina soothed, cradling the hitching body to her, “my princess.”

Still choked by sobs Emma felt compelled to put the other woman at ease. “I do like b-being here. Y-you’re not such a bad roommate.”

“Oh,” Regina rubbed circles on the small of her back, fully aware that Emma was not just talking about their ‘roommate’ situation. It was more than the physical act of staying. It meant more. Regina smiled ruefully into the mess of blonde hair. “You get sad when you’re drunk, huh?”

“Mm-hm,” Emma replied, sniffling through a hiccup.
No one knows how it happened.

Actually, one of them did. She just didn't want to come clean about it.

One moment everyone was minding their own business above deck finishing their ship duties and the next they were interrupted by an explosion of smoke. The sweet librarian was just as shocked to arrive on the ship as the crew was. They all scratched their chins, mulling over the happenstance. All but Regina.

Wind back an hour to when Regina was overseeing her pupil's magic drills and throwing out strict remarks that only aggravated Emma's hot red sparks. A spell was either too weakly executed or not executed at all. Her technique was atrocious to the point of lazy, lacking any form or flourish. She was not bold in her attacks, nor confident in her capabilities. Emma was afraid to push her limits.

Regina's criticisms and acerbic commentaries were not to demean. It would have been true before, when the heart of the queen was weathered with loss and untouched by forgiveness. She would have made an embarrassment out of the unpolished student, cutting her down enough to resort her to tears. But the queen's heart was no longer lonely or unacquainted with the hand of compassion. Submitting Emma to harsh training was for a purpose higher than her own. She was pushing so that those limits could be realized, so that when the time came Emma knew exactly when her body and her magic could not bear her survival. The day when Emma would be tested, when Regina's tutelage would be judged, was growing nearer each day. Emma must be prepared to fight, to endure. She had to be willing and practiced enough to stand by a witch less powerful but more experienced in the face of their enemies. If not for Emma's sake, then surely for Henry's.

Though every aspect of Emma's faults was brought to light, it did not mean she was not improving. The practice of manifestation came second nature, having the skills to produce butterflies, raining arrows, and the occasional blinding white light from a palm ('Iron Man style' as Emma described it). However it was her control that needed refining. Also her mindset, her confidence, her patience… all the things Emma rolled her eyes at and waved off as irrelevant. To Emma, if she could produce rum in a cup then sound the bell because she was fucking Harry Potter.

(Note: Emma's magic had yet to yield alcohol, much to Regina's relief. Also, Regina still could not grasp the concept of a magical school where everything was made up and the points did matter.)

Although Emma was making general progress in magic lessons, there was little hope that Gold's deal would be seen through. Regina did not believe in the power to restore life. The failure to revive pale, cold flesh had been witnessed while the loss of that life was felt in the pit of her stomach and the corner of her heart. But if anyone could bring back the dead the power would surely come from the hands of the savior.

Pressed for time, Regina was unable to make good on Gold's demands. It took years to hone one's skills in magic, but years they did not have. Concerned that he would make good on his threat,
Regina made other arrangements. Compensation in the form of one Belle French.

With the summoning charm muttered under breath Regina only had to wait for the unveiling. In the meantime, she bided her time in the background while the rest of the crew went about their day. Gold made use of the sunshine by de-scaling and drying out the fish of the day. David and Mary Margaret bickered over condos and castles (much to Regina's delight). Emma practiced her fire throwing aim, turning everything in sight to a blackened crisp (much to Hook's dismay). Regina threw in a few tips from time to time, though her ears were devoted to the loving couple's superb arguing. She didn't catch Hook's frequent observations to Emma about how her inadequate aim was linked to not getting laid enough. She also neglected to hear Hook's squeal as his leather tush set fire.

"Belle!" Gold cried.

And there she stood, clutching a glass of iced tea and looking quite taken aback.

"Belle, how are you here?"

Still unmoving, she took in her surroundings. "I – I don't know. One minute I was having lunch with Ruby and the next I'm…" she caught Hook standing at the helm, "… am I on the Jolly Roger? How is this possible? Why is this possible?"

"Don't fret, darling. You're here! That's all that matters!"

"Um… okay." Belle muttered into Gold's shoulder, his arms binding her in a hug. Holding the iced tea at arm's length, Belle patted his back.

"She didn't even get to finish her lunch," Emma noted, the librarian still munching on her burger. "That sucks."

"I'm sure she has more pressing matters than finishing her meal," Regina pointed out and turned away from the awkward reunion. "It is none of our affair, anyway."

"Wow, really? None of our business? That's a new one." A finger went out to poke the brunette. Green eyes narrowed doubtfully. "Who are you and what have you done with my cupcake?"

Gold still had a possessive arm around his girlfriend. Mary Margaret rushed forward with a worried look. Working around him she inspected the woman for possible injuries sustained from her travels.

Though Regina was making an effort to conceal her interest in Gold's growing contentment, Emma wasn't quick to buy it. Regina stood facing towards the sea, her eyes shifting to the crowd every so often and a small smile tugging at her lips. It was not like her to fail in masking her curiosities. Actually, that wasn't entirely true. Emma had caught the former mayor making sexy eyes at her both when they were staring blatantly within their personal space and when the sheriff was supposedly not looking.

Emma crossed her arms. "You're up to something."

"Isn't that what I'm accused of on a daily basis? After 30 some years I'm used to it." Regina jutted her chin in Gold and Belle's direction. "Perhaps I had a hand in this peculiar turn of fate."

Emma placed her hands on her hips and said idly, "As you so kindly reminded me, I have a tendency to fall for your lies. How do I know you're telling the truth?"

Regina shrugged and smirked. "Figure it out."
"Oh, I will."

"Your jacket is on fire."

Emma's gaze flew to the tail of her coat. She started swatting manically at the smoking embers. "Harry Potter didn't have to deal with this shit," she grumbled.

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"Belle! You're here!"

"Yes, Rumple, I think we've established that."

"I – I just… I'm just glad we're together!"

"We've established that as well."

Gold scoffed easily and brought her in another bone crushing hug. After ten minutes of blissful hugging they parted. Leading her by the hand, he took her on a tour of the ship. Though she had already visited before when she rescued Archie Hopper from the hold and knocked Hook’s lights out, Gold insisted on it. Anyway, the place had been spruced up since her last stay thanks to Mary Margaret's touch.

"And for our grand finale…” Gold's back was to the closed door, his hand placed over his heart. When enough suspense was built he threw open the door and prompted Belle's entrance with a grand flourish. "…Belle, meet the galley. Galley, meet Belle."

Standing in wait, the man's hands twisted anxiously. He was most excited to the point of hyperventilation.

The galley was the only place on that godforsaken ship that he could call home. It was where he was most comfortable, a place where his skills were appreciated, not denigrated. He could be himself here and have the freedom to cook whatever meal that tickled his fancy. If someone didn't like his selection of foie gras… tough shit. Sous chef was boss. Sous chef was god. Even Hook lost all authority the minute he crossed over the threshold. The galley was Gold's territory, his place to reign over food groups of all sizes, flavors, and acidities.

To share this with his love was more than he could ask for. Finally, Belle would know him for who he really was. Finally, she could understand his true power. He was no Dark One, no swindling broker of deals. And the only magic exercised within those four leaky walls was the kind that derived from his herb seasoned, Sashimi bōchō wielding hands.

Gold put a damper on his smile, not wanting to freak her out. "Do you like it?" he asked hopefully, his heels popping up from the ground.

Approaching the work station, Belle's hand grazed reverently over her love's most prized possession. It was a gentle touch, a first meeting between strangers. Gold beamed in delight, appreciating her willingness to treat such things with respect. After all, it was a lot like riding a horse. One doesn't simply throw one's leg over the beast and command it onward. It was essential for a relationship to be created between horse and rider, much like the bond between chef and workstation.

"It's incredible, Rumple." Belle's eyes shined brightly with tears. She smiled. "I'm so happy you've found a place here."

Hands clapped together. Tears fell. "Oh, Belle. This is more than I could ever ask for. You, here in
my domain. This, this place is like a castle to me. It is all mine and I would very much like to share it with you. Belle, will you allow me…” his breath hitched with something between anticipation and dread, not knowing how his request would be taken. "Will you allow me to show you my secret to preparing consommé?"

"Oh… oh my dearest Rumple," Belle murmured. She took the shaking hands in hers, pressing them to her heart. "You had me at the magically powered refrigerator."

There was a choking sob of relief. They embraced lovingly before the enchanted GE appliance.

***

While prescribing a liberal coat of varnish to starboard deck a light bulb switched on. Dropping her brush, Emma raced to the bridge.

"You did it. I knew it!"

"Bully for you. It only took…” Regina read her watch, "… four hours and 56 minutes."

"Aw, come on! Give me some credit. I used this thing all amid the fumes,” alleged Emma, pointing to her head.

"My, my, that is some feat."

Wrinkles developed in a forehead and her face sagged. "Aren't you gonna ask me how I figured it out?"

Sighing, Regina put down her pencil and the sextant. She smiled politely. "How did you figure it out?"


"Yes, my magic is purple, but so is Rumple's." She shrugged, explaining, "A common misconception. Don't wrack yourself over it. I wouldn't want you to break something."

"But… you still did it. You magicked Belle here."

"Yes, Princess."

"What are you looking at?"

"Nothing." Regina's gaze continued to fix on the space between furrowed brows.

A boot stomped the deck. Emma folded her arms petulantly to the snicker.

"You worry far too much," the brunette mused. Without thinking, her thumb went to the target and brushed away the paint. Her hand stayed momentarily, a palm catching the warm breath.

"I worry plenty." Emma lent her cheek into the backs of fingers as they retreated. "It's not like you to act in favor of others – an enemy no less. You were selfless. And a regular old softie, I might add."

Regina huffed at the likelihood and stole away from their closeness. "I did not bring Belle here out of my own noble free will. I am not a savior – that is your department."

"So why do it?"
The nautical charts crinkled as the pencil rolled from the coast of California to a nameless part of the Pacific and back.

"To keep Gold occupied."

Emma watched the pencil move assisted by dainty fingers. "With Belle here Gold will be focused on her. His deal with you will be pushed to the background." Regina nodded. "You don't think I can do it."

"I never said that."

"You don't want me to, do you?"

"Is that really what you think?" Regina's attention left the pencil for the blonde. "All the drills I've put you through, the intense exercises… Do you think I push you so hard to reach your potential just so you could lose him again?"

Emma wouldn't put it past her. "I don't know."

Regina's jaw clenched.

"I don't know what to think," Emma continued. "I don't know how to feel because we haven't talked about it. The magic lessons have been difficult for me. But the pressure you put on me is nothing compared to this deal. I'm being asked to bring back someone's dead son, Regina. How the hell am I supposed to go about doing something like that? Do you even know?"

She stared into the green eyes imploring for direction. Regina wanted to give Emma what she sought after. So badly, and Emma didn't know it. Maybe the former Evil Queen was more self-sacrificing than she claimed.

Regina swallowed hard and looked away. Her answer came just above a whisper. "True love is the purest form of magic." It was difficult to say in more ways than one. "It can surpass any boundary, any realm. Even death. As long as they believe, two souls tethered will never be parted. You are a Charming," a smile developed painstakingly. "Finding true love is in your blood."

"That's bullshit."

"You will know. If anyone can bring Neal back it is the savior. You do not need me for that."

"What if I want you? What if I screw up? What if I need you?"

Regina's head tipped amusingly. "I thought we agreed you needed work in the confidence department?"

"That true love stuff is crap," retorted Emma. "It doesn't work." Her lips formed a stubborn line.

"I'd like to think it does. If Daniel was my true love then I would have been able to bring him back. Our magic would have restored his ashen heart, we would have escaped my mother, Snow, the king… we would have married. Instead of riding on this decrepit old ship with my mortal enemies I could have had a life. I could be with my love." Regina's hand brushed her nose fleetingly. Her dark gaze turned away when she added gravely, "But I didn't try hard enough."

Their chests rose and fell with the diatribe. The pair of hearts beat apprehensive to the idea of an alternate reality that set a path to unparalleled existence, choices, romances. It wasn't possible. I wasn't probably. Yet it was a concept nonetheless. It was a fantasy, and fantasies always endured.
Emma wasn't about to crush such a fantasy, but she felt compelled to point out the flaw in Regina's theory.

"If that's true Henry wouldn't be in your life. He might never have been born."

The thought of living a life without Henry even in a world where Daniel was alive pierced Regina's heart. She could never save one love only to lose the other – or others as Regina was beginning to realize. Henry's inexistence was Regina's inexistence. He was a piece of her and she of him, regardless of their non-blood relation. "I don't want that, Emma," Regina declared softly with tears staining her cheeks. "But I also want to believe I could have saved Daniel."

"It's not wrong to wonder what could have been. You can believe whatever you want to believe." Emma stepped closer merely to offer friendly support despite wanting it to mean differently. "If you believe with all your heart that Daniel was your true love then don't let his passing make it false."

Regina squeezed her eyes shut as more tears leaked. It was all irrelevant. She tried, she tried so hard to believe, but all it did was leave a bad taste in her mouth and expand the hole in heart that much greater. Emma's words were conflicting with the truth Regina hadn't faced, yet it was felt in every fiber of her being. Every time Regina thought of her, the very second their eyes met, each touch and embrace weighed more than some theory and greater than a fading memory. Their magic, the blood that pumped within their veins whenever they were near… it was no fantasy.

Emma was tugged by the belt and encountered with a startlingly tender embrace. Regina's hands grasped her shoulders from behind. Lips gingerly met the pale skin of her neck, pressing but not in a kiss. Emma translated the body in hers, the gripping hands and the tortured breath tickling her clavicle. No statement screamed so blatantly to the blonde before. It was a choice, and Regina had made it despite everything Emma had just said. She was giving something, someone, up for a chance at possible happiness – or possible disappointment. It was a risk, a roll of the dice. Maybe it was time for Emma to make a choice as well. Maybe it was the right moment to take a leap of faith.

Emma held Regina, her blonde head resting on the brunette's.

"Let's not put so much faith in other people's theories. If I gained anything from my past it's that rules were meant to be broken. Let's make our own future."

"That's a deal I can agree to," the smiling lips murmured.

Their embrace endured through the gust of wind, the flapping sail, and the sea gulls cry. Emma kissed the woman snug in her arms, not a care in the world if anyone was watching. Regina's concern melted, too, as their lips slid together, opening to make a deeper connection. One mouth drew greedily on the other. A tongue snaked forth to join another. They sealed their contract with sighs, kissing deeply, passionately until all breath expired.

"Here's the thing," Emma gasped, retreating a bit to look into the lust filled gaze, "earlier today when I was burning everything in sight Hook suggested I need to get laid more. He said it with a sneer, so I doubt he was referring to me laying him."

"I thought you didn't take orders from scruffy, untrustworthy men."

Emma gazed hungrily at the smirking lips she had dreamed of being in oh so many wonderful places. "I think I can make an exception just this once."

"Oh yeah?" purred Regina. There was an obvious glint in her brown eyes, and a devious grin that stirred a growl from the blonde. "How about the princess shows me how thorough she is in taking
A grand dinner was prepared for the guest of honor. Gold wanted everything to be special for Belle, so he enlisted the help of Mary Margaret in decorating the dreary dining room. Candles stood on a white tablecloth (bleached to David's standards), the floor was swept, the air was laced with a hint of perfume, and after enough cajoling from the chef Hook broke out the fine silver cutlery.

In order for the dinner to be a once in a lifetime experience Gold knew what he had to resort to. To be honest, he would rather curse himself to an eternity at sea then ask the impossible. But the event was for Belle, and Gold grudgingly asked for Regina's assistance in the meal.

"You want me to what?"

From outside the doorway Gold peered at the woman wrapped in nothing but a sheet and pushing at the wild mane of hair. "Shrimp fra diavolo. Can you or can you not make it for tonight's festivities?"

"Ah… yes," Regina breathed with a distracted, lazy smile that had nothing to do with Gold's request. "I suppose I could."

"Excellent," Gold replied. He shifted to the side but Regina drew the door closer to her body, blocking the view. "Now if you wouldn't mind telling Miss Swan you have another engagement I will wait for your culinary expertise in the galley. Fifteen minutes sufficient?"

Surprisingly, she agreed. Though if Gold had come to hers and Emma's cabin door minutes before she would have been less… courteous and more enraged by the interruption in their… exploits.

Though marked by a few minor disagreements on heat level and Gold's persistent defense of Giada's technique in deveining shrimp, the food preparation went smoothly. The main dish being shrimp fra diavolo with linguine, there were also platters of maize and potatoes, asparagus spears, glazed carrots, broccoli with garlic butter and cashews, scallops and ginger butter sauce, crab cakes, steamed mussels, battered and fried octopus tapas (which Emma wouldn't touch with a five foot pole), loaves of garlic bread, loaves of plain bread, flavored olive oils for dipping, and an antipasto plate.

It was a feast for kings and queens, princesses, Dark Ones and librarians. In addition were the bottles upon bottles of wine and kegs of rum, which were cause for the lively conversation.

"Oh, oh, oh!" Mary Margaret cried, waving her hands to get noticed amid the hoopla. "I know the secret ingredient!"

The table quieted down. All eyes were on her.

"Right, yeah," she jumped at realizing she held the floor, "it's red pepper flakes!"

"Esattamente!" Regina raised her glass to toast the woman's accuracy.

"Pardon?"

"'Exactly,'" Emma assisted. Ever since coaxing Regina to get drunk with her a few days ago Emma was getting a crash course in Italian. After a few glasses of wine it seemed the former mayor's tongue got loose in an entirely different language. Emma didn't mind. The husky, flawless accent was sexy as hell and worth the hangover.

"Don't take this the wrong way, Regina, but I'm shocked that the people at this table would eat
anything you cook." Belle cast a curious look at not only Regina but everyone at the table.

Regina's nonreply spooked the crewmembers about as much as her developing glare.

"Well, unless I'm still under a sleeping curse most of us ate Regina's lasagna during the welcome home party for my wife and daughter and escaped with only a mild case of heartburn." David shrugged, getting a similar sentiment around the table. "It tasted damn good, though."

"That was the red pepper flakes," Mary Margaret chimed in helpfully.

"Please don't take it as a slight to your character," Belle implored the surly brunette. "You all have to understand, the last time I saw you guys the atmosphere was quite bleak. You were all so tense, so on the offensive. The last thing I expected upon arriving here was… camaraderie."

"We are a friendly gaggle of pirates, aren't we?"

David blushed at the greasy black head slumped on his shoulder. He took it gladly, knowing Hook wouldn't remember it in the morning.

Emma raised her mug, shouting, "Hear, hear!"

The crew repeated the sentiment loud enough to drown out the blonde's squeal.

"Brava," Regina purred into an ear, "bene." Her hand slipped further into the back of Emma's jeans. "It is a surprise that we haven't torn each other apart by now," Gold remarked with a frown.

"Aye, my hook is practically rusting from unemployment."

"I haven't had to sharpen my sword, either."

Emma rapped the wood table with her knuckles. "My gun hasn't been oiled in weeks."

"Pensavo di essere l'unica che lubrificava la tua pistola?"

Emma rolled her eyes.

"Peace is nice," Mary Margaret mused dreamily. "No having to saddle up the horses, prepare the battlements, or call for reinforcements…” Her chin dipped towards her husband and she smiled in silent affirmation. "The quiet life is a good life."

David returned the grin, kissing her softly to seal the deal.

Gold draped an arm around Belle. "Sometimes I find myself wondering how different things would have been if there was no curse."

“Intendi se non avessi avuto una madre senza cuore o un folletto manipolativo come insegnante?”

Emma shot Gold a glare, translating, "You mean if she didn't have a heartless mother and a manipulative imp for a teacher?"

"I was speaking in general, but if you want to get down to specifics let's all play a round of Who's Fault Is It Anyway? Starring…” he let out his signature giggle and twirl of the hands, "… Regina Mills, former, failed Evil Queen who murdered her father, attempted to assassinate her mother, killed a village, and damned an entire town to a frozen hell."
“Hai tralasciato il più colpevole autore: Tremotino, che ha ucciso sua moglie, abbandonato suo figlio, ed ucciso più innocenti di Hitler.”

"You left out the most culpable perpetrator," relayed Emma, "Rumplestiltskin, a wife killing, child abandoning, 500 plus year old cripple who has slayed more innocents than Hitler." She frowned and turned to the flushed brunette. "You knew Hitler?"

Regina offered a single shoulder shrug. "Ho visto un documentario."

Emma nodded.

"I think we're getting off track here," David offered.

"Agreed," Mary Margaret spoke, "We don't want to ruin this nice dinner we've prepared for Belle."

"I'm so sorry if I've offended anyone," Belle mumbled. "You all are pulling out the stops to make this a wonderful night. I don't mean to put a damper on things."

"Dearest Belle, do not apologize. You have been a gracious guest. If anyone is at fault it is this drunken Italian drama queen here."

“Non parlarmi di persone melodrammatiche, tu spastica ragazzina ridacchiante, fissata con le tazze di porcellana e maniaca dell'attenzione puttano!”

Emma's brows soared up. "Do I really have to translate that?" Her shoulder earned a good whack. "Ow! Alright!" She translated to Gold, "Do not talk to her about drama queens you spastic, girly girl giggling, china cup infatuated attention whore!"

"Wow," Hook murmured to the Charming couple, "she really is drunk, isn't she?"

"E quei pantaloni di pelle così stretti ti fanno sembrare evirato."

"Ew," the blonde turned, disgusted, on Gold, "you wore tight leather pants?"

"It was the fashion then," Hook and David retorted simultaneously.

"Still is." The pirate slapped his leather clad thigh for emphasis.

David shot him a high five but his palm got impaled upon his attachment. "Ah!" he cried in pain, blood spurting on the remaining food and into people's cups.

"Hey! I wasn't finished with that!" Emma dove to shield the bowl of potatoes from the spraying red gore.

Mary Margaret's eyes bugged out. "Oh, David!"

"Sorry mate! Really, you gotta watch me hook!"

"Stem that shit up, dad!"

Gold was laughing with tears in his eyes. "Guess whose fault it is!"

Regina growled, shooting up from her chair.

"My apologies. I don't speak broken Italian, your Majesty."
"Ecco," Regina's hand plunged into the bowl of linguine, "che ne dici se ti ficco un po' d'italiano dritto in gola?"

An arm pulled back and lobbed the handful in Gold's direction. Her aim was off, though, and the pasta smacked limply to Belle's horror stricken face.

Gold leapt from his chair. "How dare you!"

"La vendetta è dolce."

The other side of the table was experiencing the continued efforts of Mary Margaret to stop the blood flow, but David's wound was leaking like the Red Sea and only getting worse with Hook's efforts.

"Aw," the pirate cried, stomping his boot in frustration, "sorry!" The hook accidentally pierced the hand again in his attempt to apply pressure.

"You're ruining all the food!"

"You want more food, Miss Swan?" Gold asked the frantic blonde. He sneered as he took up a bowl of leftover fried octopus and threw it square in Emma's face.

That enraged Regina, who slung more insults at the master chef, all vicious and all in Italian.

"It's Ursula!" Emma wailed in revulsion and swatting away at the fishy tapas rolling down her shirt. "Get her off me! Get her off me!"

An epic food fight ensued over the burgundy soaked table cloth. By the end, Belle was the only one still in her chair, weeping under a hairpiece of linguine.

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"There, all better." Gold's thumb brushed her cheek leaving behind a sauce-less, pasta-less face. All other food stained areas had been magicked away, their clothes looking as crisp as the day they were laundered.

"It's good to see you using magic for good."

"Good is a point of view. Who's to say we're not out for ourselves?"

"You're helping me now. That is not the actions of a selfish man."

"This is low level magic," Gold returned simply, gesturing to their spotless clothes like it wasn't worth the praise.

"More is not always better, Rumple." She took his hand, spurring him to meet her eyes. "It's the little things, the simple ones that make life beautiful: a hamburger, a chipped cup, a kiss…"

Belle planted her soft lips on his. "That is magic."

"It's so easy to forget after… after everything."

Belle nodded her understanding. "And I wish I could be with you every step of the way, now and forever. I don't know how long I am allowed to be here, but I don't think you need me, not after what I've seen today. I think you are remembering, Rumple, and all because of this journey and these people beside you."
"What are you talking about?" Gold stepped back with an expression of appall. "We hate each other. Did you forget the anarchy of flying crab cakes and potatoes not an hour ago? Regina threw a bundle of linguine in your face!"

"It was an accident," she censured. Belle bit down a smirk. "She was aiming for you, anyway."

Gold opened his mouth in retort but was cut off.

"Those are not same people I knew back in Storybrooke. You know I have a gift for reading people, Rumple. I see people without judging. Bloodlines, past mistakes, prophesies… I don't think of those things when I look at them just as I do not with you. I've observed each and every one of them and they no longer carry the burden of revenge – at least not for you. Their way of fighting has changed. Before, it was about total destruction, humiliation. Now your quarrels are for the purpose of… well, entertaining. It is quite amusing to watch, don't ask me why," Belle added with a chuckle. "How Hook was able to stab David eight times in the same place is beyond me. For a pirate he is highly uncoordinated – unless detaching the prince's limb was his intention... And Regina's assault of asparagus spears after you threw octopus at Emma? I had never seen such wrath."

"Oh, yeah. They are an item," Gold mentioned off-handedly.

"Really?"

"But you can't tell anyone."

"I would never," Belle replied, waving a hand. Knowing what the former queen was capable of she would keep any secret of hers to the grave.

"This is absurd, Belle. You can't know these people. You've only been here a few hours."

"That's all it takes." Her hand found a place on his shoulder, squeezing some courage into him. "They're changing you. This journey is turning you into the man I know you want to be. I think being here is good for you. They are your family, after all."

"Not all of them…"

Belle bowed her head, taking the morose tone. She cursed her tactlessness. Heart aching for his loss, her chin fell to her chest. Fingers picked absentmately at her pressed blouse. "Do you wish it was Bae here and not me?"

"I had wished for him to be here – even brokered a deal to make it happen. But now I know that wish can never come true. You being here has made me realize what I have, not what I've lost. I'm sure Bae would understand his father choosing life over impossible resurrection. It is a far better choice and a reality I am content with. Happy, even." His head dropped, hair hanging limp to disguise the lingering pain. "There will always be some part of me that longs for my boy."

A palm cupped the side of his face, bringing his chin level with the floor. "I would never ask you to forget him. I would ask you to celebrate his memory," both hands stroking his stubbled face, "by living in happiness."

"That's were you come in."

"Yes," a sly grin rose to her lips, "if it is I who makes you happy."

"You already know… it is you. Always, my Belle."
They kissed, whispered, and caressed, luxuriating in the quiet solitude of Gold's beloved galley.

***

Mary Margaret was having a problem with the shower. It wouldn't start.

Still covered in the ripe scent of tomato sauce and fish, Mary Margaret worked tirelessly to get the community shower back in business. There was an entire crew probably lined up to use the thing as everyone had been hit with some food missile or another. Mary Margaret, for her part, was still gagging over the smell of decomposing shrimp and the soggy, sludge that was tomato sauce in her bustier.

Badass warrior that she was, she took to batting the shower head over with a wrench – like all it needed was some good common Charming sense knocked into it.

"Honestly, you're as dense as my husband!"

_Bang!_ went the tool to fixture.

"You callin' for me, hon?"

David came upon his non-stealthy wife in midair, legs braced against the shower sides just like the spies she read in her favorite Tom Clancy novels. She froze with a most comical expression of 'You did not catch me butchering our one and only community shower.' Yet actions spoke louder than countenance, and her arm looped around the shower head in a choke hold and a wrench held in a downward killing strike rendered as 'assassination' to a guy like David.

"What are you doing?" he cried, liberating the weapon from the child. "Killing is not the answer, Snow!"

"It is being a little bitch! It deserves to die!"

"There are more honorable ways to deal with 'little bitches,' you know that. Remember that bandit who stole your jewels?"

Hands flew to hips and chin jut out defiantly. "Robin was a bitch!"

"Yeah, but we decided not to execute him for that offense, didn't we?"

"I guess," Mary Margaret mumbled, bare foot toeing at the ceramic tile.

He sighed. Taking pity on his wife, he joined her in the small space and started tinkering with the fixture.

"Are you sure you should be doing that? With your hand and everything?"

"Regina did a good job of healing it." His palm went out for her to examine the evidence for herself. "See? Good as new."

"It's strange, Regina doing favors. It's unlike her to offer something that is not strictly to her advantage."

He cleared his throat and licked his lips. "Who knows?"

She nodded because who did know? Nobody.
David worked the wrench inch by painstaking inch around the base of the shower head. Taking the nail she had been worrying at between her teeth, Mary Margaret pointed at the leaking nozzle.

"Is it wise to be doing that? I thought after that one episode with Gold's magical dishwasher you wouldn't want to get anywhere near another plumbing issue."

"That was an unforeseen setback," David huffed. "I had no idea he rigged it to explode at my hands."

"Maybe we should ask Emma. She would know what to do."

"Let's not bother her."

Suspicion shadowed Mary Margaret's face. It was unlike her husband to contradict her so quickly and in such a clipped tone. "Why not?" she asked slowly.

The wrench paused in its turning, David's head cocked. He glanced over at her and said, "It's good to spend quality time together. Just us, you know?"

"I suppose."

There was a manly sigh. The wrench resumed its turning until a low groaning emanated from the shower wall. A metallic clinking rang out followed by a sputtering shower of water. Husband and wife shrieked under the stream of frigid water. David immediately went to turn the temperature up.

Their shivering turned to short giggles and eventually grew to full on laughing. Drenched from head to toe, clothes stuck to skin, and putrid leftovers running down the drain, they laughed until it hurt.

It was silly, really, how their fights got so out of hand to the point of throwing one out and leaving them alone with no one to talk to. It was silly to leave the other in a sobbing mess on the bed while you get drunk and suicidal.

"You look absolutely ridiculous," Mary Margaret wheezed, sputtering on water.

Hair plastered to his forehead, David drew his soaked, yet clean wife to his chest. "You look worse."

Smiling into their kiss, they continued to occupy the community shower into the late hours of the night.

***

Cleanliness is a virtue that every man, woman, and child take to heart in their own capacity. Some prefer luxurious baths or a dip in the ocean over the hot spray of a shower. Others use what special gifts given to them in the form of purple, sparkling magic. Then there are those that waste no time with magic, showers, baths, or the entire ocean surrounding them.

"Regina, slow the fuck down!"

They hadn't yet gotten to their cabin and Emma was already stripped half naked. Because Regina was too preoccupied with licking up pasta sauce in the crook of a neck it was up to the other to pick up the discarded clothing. How her bra and tank top was in the middle of the hallway was not a story she'd care to tell her mother.

Carelessly tossing her blouse over a shoulder (for Emma to pick up), Regina curled her arms around Emma's neck and placed her lips tantalizingly close against an ear. Emma's cheeks grew apple red at
the throaty suggestion and proceeded to moan softly as the Italian grew thicker and more adventurous in its proposal.

"That sounds like fun," she mumbled unsteadily, walking in reverse towards what better had been their cabin, "but let's hold off until we're behind closed doors."

The reply came in the form of sharp nip to her earlobe. Emma bit down on a moan, wondering why the fuck it was taking so long to get to their cabin.

"You callin' for me, hon?"

Emma's eyes flew open.

"Shit!" she hissed, clamping a hand over her mouth. "That's my dad!"

Regina replied something about how there's nothing he had heard before that would surprise him and continued suckling on the flesh of Emma's ear.

Grabbing her hand, Emma hauled them the few feet to their quarters, growling, "Come on!"

They winced as the door slammed with a crack. Making sure the lock was engaged Emma fell back against the door with a sigh. Regina just went on giggling in her drunken state, arms now around the blonde's waist, and nearly inclined on her body.

Among the many Italian phrases and expressions she was filing away for present and future use, Emma was also figuring out how frisky a drunk the queen could be. Things would have gone so much easier for Emma if she had taken advantage of that information back when the mayor was in power. Though uncoordinated and frighteningly brazen, Regina had no problems turning on her partner. Powers of persuasion intact, she could literally get Emma to do anything with the simple sigh of, 'Per favore?' It was ironic how the drunk was the one taking control and advantage of the sober one. But that was Regina for you.

Bypassing the shower, bath, ocean, and even the magic at hand to both, Emma and Regina resorted to cleaning each other up in more pleasurable ways. As per Regina's suggestion, they sucked, licked, and savored every food splattered surface of their bodies, garlic butter sauce and all. The feeling of a tongue curved into an orifice sent their spines quaking. Lips lapping deeply while nails raked, causing one to let loose a string of Italian profanities – the other a plethora of curses in English when the lavishing was returned with biting teeth and an unforgiving drawing of the mouth.

Giving Emma a run for her money, it only took Regina a tweak and a kiss to get her on her back in bed.

"Voglio che tu…" Regina breathed against a pale, nipped throat. Her vision blurred slightly, whether from the wine or Emma's submission she didn't care. "Voglio… I want che tu… mi faccia urlare…"

The effects of the wine were wearing off and so was the accent.

Emma sighed, neck arching into lips and hands roughly pulling the licked clean figure closer. "English, now," came the order.

"I… I want you to make me scream," moaned Regina. Another sigh escaped, low and long when a hand cupped her sex. Neglected and achingly wet, she was begging for release. Multiples if she played her cards right.
"Fuck," gasped Emma. She was proud that it was a curse rather than a sob because her fingers were bathed in Regina, and the sensation of heat coating her hands coupled with sloppy open kisses to her neck and their erect nipples brushing… well, 'fuck' was a more appropriate response.

Regina keened to the fingers entering her. Remarkably at peace with the invasion, she started a rocking motion that intensified every thrust from Emma.

Emma frowned and pulled back regretfully. "What about someone hearing? These walls are –"

Hips stilled. "Soundproof spell, dear." Regina waved her hand pointedly. "I did it ages ago ever since you made that sound when I did that one thing…"

"Ahhh," she drawled. Situating her body more comfortably under the weight, Emma squirmed atop the strewn blanket. "Yeah, by the way you have to show me how you managed that," she added nonchalantly, as if they were not naked and in the middle of more pressing activities. Emma's brows went up to show her captivation. "It felt wonderful."

"Well, if you stop talking and…" Regina gazed pointedly to the hand unmoving between her thighs, "…follow through I would be more than happy to return the favor."

A mischievous sparkle (the one so often shining in green eyes when Regina was on the edge of orgasm or nearly there) displayed. Emma curled the tips of her two fingers just enough. She smirked when a broken cry emanated from Regina. "If I'm getting lucky tonight I better be quick about this."

Regina chuckled and replied, "Not at the expense of quality, I hope." She kissed Emma's mouth soundly.

Emma brought a free hand up to a breast, massaging and feeling the weight against her palm. Her fingers found a rigid peak, giving it all the attention with a brush around the area to tease, and scraping nail to elicit a hitched breath, and a rolling pinch for good measure.

"You saying I don't take care of your needs?" Emma inquired after sucking and nipping casually on a bottom lip.

There was a noncommittal grunt. Regina ran her hands up the woman's sides and curled around the back of her shoulders. Not timid enough to start begging, she used the leverage to bound on the fingers too shallow for her liking.

"It's funny because every time after you… you know…"

"No," Regina hissed impatiently in her ear, "I don't. Tell me."

"Well, um…"

Regina chuckled at the adorable blonde, face scrunched in reticence. "I don't understand such nonsense words. Why don't you demonstrate for me?"

Her hips ground down on Emma, signaling her meaning.

Minutes later Emma had the woman panting to her boring fingers. Back arched and nails dragging down bare flesh Regina rode to a screaming finish (as promised). Emma watched with subdued need, giving her partner all the time she needed to make the moment last, to make it meaningful. She refused to blink, not bearing to miss a single ripple of pleasure, or sigh, or rush of heat running through her fingers. The muscles in Regina's neck stretched to the cries of a name that had Emma grinning like a fool. In that moment, as in every moment from then on, she would not – could not –
imagine choosing anyone else over this woman.

Gasping, Regina allowed herself a few minutes of blissful serenity before resuming the conversation. "You were saying?" she asked, drawing shapes above a pale breast.

"Well, every time after you…"

"I think we've established that part."

Emma smirked through her blush. "…I always wait for some snarky comment to come out of your mouth."

"What 'snarky comment' are you referring to, Princess?"

"Well, like at that town hall meeting when I totally misjudged your playground initiative you said, 'I hope you're satisfied.' Or those dozen or so times you leave saying, 'Enjoy this,' 'Enjoy that.'"

"Mmm, I almost forget how much fun those days were."

"Heeey!"

"Oh, don't worry. You still look like a frightened rabbit every time I get one up on you."

"Wow," Emma huffed, crossing her arms and looking unreasonably put out despite her naked state, "what grateful behavior after that wall shattering moment I gave you."

"I promised to return the favor. Do you not trust me?"

Emma turned away, brows crinkled together to get across the point that she wasn't taking this shit.

"That's too bad because I was set on making waffles tomorrow." Regina shrugged, unaffected, and peeled herself off the woman.

A blonde head turned back. Never had an expression turned from offense to outright enthrallment at lightspeed quickness. "Wait, what?"

Regina scoffed at the expectant, wide green eyes. "It really says something about you that you'd take my waffles over my more pleasurable services."

Emma's head cocked innocently. "I can't have both?"

The pout paired with puppy dog eyes did wonders on Regina and Emma knew it. That sweet, harmless 'I'm just a girl looking at another girl asking for a little food and good lovin' did things to the cold, hard parts of Regina. The brunette cursed her softening reserve.

"My princess gets anything and everything," she responded with all the sincerity her mouth offered.

Emma pressed her lips back in silent thanks.

Without hesitation Regina kissed a path down Emma's body to dine on the sweet nectar between spread legs.

"And if I catch you saying, 'Enjoy that' I will turn down those waffles for real."

***
Returning from a nice swim in the ocean, Hook whistled down the hallway on his way for a snack. A few laps around the ship was good to work up an appetite, not to mention he got rid of some of the blood from his hook and food caught in his hair.

A few paces from the galley, he hoped Gold cleaned the place of rotting fish and asparagus spears lodged in the walls. He stroked his belly, dreaming up delectable options available in the form of an ice cream carton. The moans and banging against a table could not be heard over his rumbling tummy.

Opening the door to the galley he stumbled upon a sight no one with eyes should see.

"Aw," he groaned, "not the table! We ate on that table!"

A mortified Belle leapt away from Gold who threw down the zucchini as if it was a hot potato. It was too late, though; the captain saw it and wailed like a little boy who walked in on his parents going at it.

Hook flew from the galley, clawing at his eyes and bumping into the hallway walls at a speed fast enough to transport himself to the final circle of Hell.

"It's like the Food Network version Ghost! What the bloody fuck is wrong with you people?!"

His screams of anguish echoed throughout the Jolly Roger, but could not be heard over the lucky, good times being had by the rest of the crew.
“Oh my god. Look at it, Regina. It’s huge!”

“I’ve had bigger.”

“Way to make a girl feel special,” Emma mumbled. Her focus turned back to the object of her desire. “Here I go!”

Emma took a swan dive, flopping face down. The queen bed fit her Vitruvian Man locus and then some.

“I live with a child.”

“Regina, we could swim in these sheets!”

“I take that back. I live with an infant.” Regina dragged their suitcases further into their suite (alone because her travel companion was currently doing Olympic jumps on the bed). “Emma!” she censured. “Don’t wrinkle the sheets. We just got here, for heaven’s sake.”

Lying comfortably on her stomach, Emma supported her chin in hands. “What’s got you all in a snit?”

“Be an adult for five seconds and help me with these bags.”

Emma grumbled something about why the witch couldn’t just use magic and then rolled off the bed for the helpless woman. “There. All done.” Relieved of her duty, she soared back onto the bed, rolling and rutting in the cozy comforter and knocking the pillows askew with a big, old smile plastered on her face. Emma caught a glare from Regina. “What?”

“You are messing the sheets.”

Emma paused for a beat. “So?”

“So,” Regina’s face melted into her ‘sexy face’ as Emma called it, complete with half-smirk, hooded lashes, and a hint of a blush, “I want them to be clean, so that we can dirty them up for later. You can’t fault me for wanting that, can you?”

“Absolutely not, I can’t.”

“Princess, we have to work on your sentence structure.”

“I can think of more important things to work on. You were saying something about back pain on the way up here?”

Well, well, well. The student was learning after all.

A smile gradually developed. “I didn’t think you were listening.”

“Cupcake,” sighed Emma, “it’s kind of hard not to listen to your bitching and moaning.”

“The use of my nickname will not soften that blow. You are in for it tonight, dear.”

“Oh,” Emma’s eyes lit up like a Christmas tree, “what’s my punishment?”
Though she indeed had penances lined up for the disobedient blonde, Regina played up a sulking pout. “I thought you preferred my softer, affectionate ways.”

“Regina, if you will be so kind to take the following into consideration.” Sitting cross-legged on the bed and clasping her hands before her, Emma presented her talking points with political precision. “Hook gave us 24 hours of shore leave on a magical island that rivals most Carnival excursions I’ve stowawayed on. Now, somehow – I can’t prove it but I’m pretty sure you had something to do with it – somehow we got comped to the presidential suite here at this nice little resort. We get free meals, drinks, and a private deck with jacuzzi. We are in a huge bed fit for an evil queen and a savior, and miles from my parents. The last thing on my mind, dear, is slow, quiet sex.”

“Oh,” Regina replied, approaching the bed stealthily, “well if you insist.”

“I insist from here to the moon.”

Emma yanked her the last foot and they went tumbling back into the soft bed. Regina straddled Emma’s hips and fingered the hands stretching out to her. Her patience would be rewarded, she knew. Luxuriating in the sight of splayed golden hair that would run and sparkle through her hands come morning light, Regina knew this time would be different. Watching Emma bend under her and eventually come upon command of her mouth and fingers would be different.

Then she scoffed at the inanity of it; she was far from a virgin and hardly prudish about the act. She was not a bright-eyed, love-struck teenager blushing at the thought of someone taking her virtue. It was different for the plain fact that she could have Emma in an entirely new light (literally).

The suite was a far cry from their shared cabin on the ship. It was a well-known fact that the Jolly Roger’s cots were limp with no spring. The sex was astonishing and beyond anything she had ever experienced, but limiting in terms of the mattress’s dimensions. Where the cabin was a damp, shadowy, bleak room the size of a college dorm room, the suite was an expansive place filled with silver tea sets, full length mirrors, carved portrayals of angels and Celtic knots into every single piece of pearl shaded furniture. The whole room was a mix of ivory and silver and the thick bathrobes, bedclothes, and curtains daubed in grey. Floor-to-ceiling double doors led out to a balcony. Regina believed that her lover’s fatigued, sweat stained body would look beautiful in the moonlight streaming in from those panels. Everything shined and sparkled and reflected. The suite certainly lived up to its name – a name that neither Emma nor Regina had the stones to voice.

So while this was not her first time with Emma, her feelings of simpleton affection for the blonde were rapidly transforming into more complexity. And what shocked her beyond anything was that it had nothing to do with sex or the newfound privacy to have it.

It did not come as a surprise to Regina how novel the experience was for Emma as well. A long time ago, the woman had lived on very little, moving from one discount motel to the next until she stumbled upon a low rent apartment with few cockroaches. Expectations were low, handouts rejected. Emma never once complained about their cot aboard the Jolly Roger because she was familiar with the substandard.

It was why Regina waved some Jedi mind trick on the resort manager, bumping them up to a master suite. Regina found herself wanting to do more of these things for Emma. Little kindnesses that brought up a smile when a long lost jacket appeared out of thin air, polished and smelling of coffee and French fries. When a squeal of delight arose at a tower of bear claws that materialized on her breakfast plate one morning. Or when a selfless turn of magic resulted in regression to adolescence and bouncing on the bed like the happiest 29-year-old in the world. And so it made Regina smile, too. It made her heart grow two sizes larger and it made her want to cry in happiness.
After a series of demanding kisses they broke apart. It did not escape them that in the midst of making out their hands had found creative ways to divest half the clothing from their figures.

Rolling Regina onto her back, Emma kissed along a jaw. She interlaced their fingers and stretched them to the sides of the bed. She loved how there was no edge to drop off of or a wall to prohibit a limb’s perspective. Myriad positions flew through Emma’s mind; images of angled hips, spread legs, arms outstretched… all the things she dreamed of doing with Regina ever since – well, ever since she could remember. In fact, she recalled seeing the brunette in a few interesting positions during that yoga session…

“I could fuck you ten different ways right here right now.”

Regina shivered under the frenzied lips that hinted things she had wanted to do with Emma for… well, for as long as she could remember. She pushed Emma back with a hand. A brow rose. “Ten?”

“Too much?”

“Not enough.”

***

Emma squinted into the blazing light. One hand shielding the sun and the other gripping her walking stick, she powered her way up the gravel hill, huffing and puffing as she went.

“This… is not… what I had in mind… when you wanted to get a work out.”

“You are a healthy, adult going-on-30 more than capable of walking this trail.”

“And you’re what,” Emma mumbled, “60? What the –“

“Watch your step, Princess. This island holds many dark and dangerous pitfalls.”

“Yeah, and sadistic, tricksters, too. Whoa! Fu – “

Emma took another spill into the knoll, sharp pebbles biting into her knees. “I swear, if you had something to do with this…”

“You will what?” Regina turned, rather light on her feet. She was breathing easily and hardly had use for the tall stick in her grip. “Punish me? I thought we did that earlier.” With a simple shrug she turned back to the trail and strolled up the hill. Strolled, like it was some elevator at a shopping mall.

“Sadistic,” Emma muttered. She strained to gain another few feet before another breather was in order. “Yeees, very sadistic.”

To be fair, the trail was not entirely challenging. Athletic and limber, Emma could handle a little jaunt through the woods, but after several rounds of raucous, uninhibited sex it was asking a lot of her screaming thighs.

The sights definitely made up for the trek. The higher they climbed the more landscape that came into view. The trail boasted of a beautiful panoramic view of the ocean and sandy, white beaches which could be enjoyed at the top of the ‘mountain.’ The moment they reached the top Emma quit complaining. It was indeed all it was cracked up to be and was made more beautiful with Regina in the foreground.

The solitude from up high reminded Regina of Firefly Hill, a magical place Daniel had taken her to
after they had met. The view of the village was exhilarating. Daniel was enchanting. The kiss was unlike anything. Years later Regina was standing on a different hill, with a view just as breathtaking, and standing beside someone she actually might have a future with.

Before descending they marked the special moment with an embrace and slow, indulgent kisses. It was just as magical (if not more so) than the kiss with Daniel, if Regina was thinking about it. But she wasn’t. It was romantic, if that was what they were into. It was, but they weren’t telling.

Emma would soon regret the mall reference because the very same was found at the end of their journey. Who the hell builds a shopping mall at the end of a grueling three mile trail through forest, gravel, and mountains? Someone who required Dr. Hopper’s services, that’s who.

One hour and 13 minutes later (Emma clocked her watch by it) and she was leaning on the clothing rack with the other arm stuffed into the pocket of her recently attained red leather jacket. She scratched her brow in reticence, trying to block out the horrible elevator music bouncing off the walls. Throughout this hour and now 15 minutes Emma watched Regina pick up an outfit, scrutinize it back and front, finger the edges, inspect for loose stitches, and put it back with a dissatisfied arch of her brow. This process was repeated 23 times (Emma kept count). She rolled her eyes every time, but shut her mouth. It’s what was expected of her.

If Emma didn’t know any better she was waiting like a good little wife so her partner could go about her excruciating process of elimination. “It will only take 15 minutes,” she said. “I just need a skirt to match my blouse at home,” she said. Emma scoffed and muttered under breath, “You mean a skirt to match the four million other blouses at home?”

To ease the boredom she’d carry on a one-sided conversation with the mannequins. After a curious poking to judge if it was indeed a non-magical entity, one wobbled precariously on the dais. Emma went about righting it in a flustered state of embarrassment, smiling at passersby.

She nodded if Regina wanted her opinion, saying, “No, sweetheart, that dress does not make you look fat,” or “That’s an amazing color on you,” when it really wasn’t. At one point a saleswoman approached Emma at her most jaded, asking if she needed assistance.

“Oh, no I’m just waiting for my…”

Regina paused in her scrutiny of skirt number 30 and turned an ear.

“Oh… I’m just waiting. I’m fine, thanks.”

Anyway, Emma was waiting on Regina like a good wife should, offering comments when comments were needed, and shutting the hell up when they weren’t. It reeked of domesticity and Emma thought it absurd that the notion of marriage sprung to mind, considering their relationship (or whatever it was called).

“It wouldn’t hurt to smile.”

“Yeah, but then someone would think I’m enjoying this.”

Regina shot her a critical look.

“Which I am,” Emma put on a 20 watt smile, picking up a hanger for show, “enjoying this, that is.”

“Indeed. I didn’t know you were pregnant.”

“What?!”
Regina simply pointed to the selection in Emma’s grip, a black, billowing dress that any fool with eyes could tell was maternity clothing.

The hanger was flung back onto the rack like it was diseased.

“Why don’t you like shopping?” Regina asked, with genuine curiosity. Her grin only widened at the likely reply.

“Just because I’m a girl doesn’t mean I do all girl things,” Emma shot back with annoyance.

“Woman.”

“Excuse me?”

“You are a woman,” Regina put back a tight, satin skirt with a cringe, like the entire department store was beneath her, “not a girl.”

“Yeah, well this woman doesn’t like shopping. Not unless it’s strictly for her.”

“Well, I’m sure there is a pleather outlet around here somewhere. Or a Vagrant Outfitters For Daughters of Frumpy Crocheters.”

“You’re hilarious.”

“I thought it was funny.”

At the checkout, prize winning skirt number 45 was rung up. Emma brow went up when Regina handed over a credit card to the saleswoman. The card gave off an odd, magical glow.

Regina defended, “It’s just a little something I keep with me.”

“Uh-huh,” Emma grunted, folding her arms. “I could arrest you for fraud, you know.”

“Don’t be silly. A sheriff of an inconspicuous town in Maine has no jurisdiction here.” After accepting her receipt and purchase she patted Emma’s cheek lovingly. “Save the handcuffs for later.”

***

“Aw, yeeaaah!” Hook hooted. “This is what I’m talking about!”

Gold and Hook followed a trail from the resort out a few miles. That trail led them to a line of bushes. Beyond those bushes was a beach. At that beach was something very out of your ordinary run of the mill beaches.

Gold’s eyes went insane as the pirate started stripping right in front of him. “What on earth are you doing?!”

“It’s a nude beach! Come on, strip off those skivvies and show’ em what you got you old crocodile.”

It was in fact a nude beach. No shirt, no shoes, no exceptions. All along the water were bare assed men and women, some sunbathing, others playing a game of volleyball, many swimming and splashing and luxuriating in all their naked glory. It was unnerving to watch, though the more Gold did he started to pick up a sense of freedom. It wasn’t like the liberty one gained when letting your junk hang all out in the privacy of one’s home; it was the fact that no one there seemed to care. There weren’t disgusting orgies like one would suppose at a nude beach. Everyone there was acting like they would if it were a normal, clothes required beach.
“I will do no such thing,” Gold affirmed with a lingering, and most fascinating stare of the nudists. “What would Belle think?”

She wouldn’t have to know, of course. Twenty-four hours after her appearance she disappeared with just as much mystery. Still, no one knew the how or why of the happenstance (and Regina was stoically not telling). Short as their time had been, Gold felt rejuvenated by Belle’s visit. His spirits were high and he seemed just as motivated as the others to arrive in Neverland, save Henry, and return home.

“Well, I have no idea,” Hook replied, shrugging bare shoulders. “But that lass right over there? She’d think up some interesting thinky thoughts, I’m sure.”

Gold knew he would regret it. But this was his vacation. For the past three hours Hook had gripped to him about how he had to loosen up and strike a few ‘promiscuous’ deals every once and a while (‘preferably with the natives’ Hook added with a wink and a nudge).

Gold sighed and started stripping. Blushing to the tips of his ears, his eyes shifted nervously over the beach goers. “I hope I don’t know anyone here.”

Giddy as a school boy, Hook leaped over bushes and started streaking down the beach. “I love this island!” he screamed.

***

Though their resort package included a free massage session, Regina bypassed the hands of a stranger for those of her lover. Every knot and kink tormenting her back was worked out with the simple oils provided by their suite bathroom. Returning the kindness, Regina helped release some tension in her massage partner, kneading at her overstrained thighs. An occasional giggle of riotous proportions rang out when fingers encroached on sensitive territory. Exhalations of relief echoed off the vaulted ceilings as the queen-sized bed creaked to the languid pressure. It really was the epitome of massage therapy and about as innocent as the pope lurking in a strip club.

Courtesy of the resort, they enjoyed a candlelit dinner with a window view of the beach. Emma sat, munching on a breadstick and perfectly satisfied with the view across from her. She had to remember to breathe once and a while because Regina was a vision and if she didn’t start breathing soon she couldn’t enjoy divesting that vision of clothing later on. The dress was sure to have broken a law in some uptight town or another, for it lent easy access to heavenly cleavage. Her hair had grown over their journey and was gathered in a French twist, giving a full picture of a neck and shoulders. The getup made a certain statement: I mean business, but not at the expense of femininity. It was one of those tuxedo dresses, white and strapless with dark buttons and black from waist to kissable knees. All it need for a finish was some sparkling jewelry – something Emma Swan could never afford.

It looked stunning, and Regina felt more so with those eyes on her. For Emma’s part she donned a similar strapless dress, emerald and adequately clinging for maximum exposure. Emma felt constricted, uncomfortable, and extremely vulnerable under hungry eyes. Regina simply enjoyed the view, smiling balefully to the fantasy of emerald and milky pale skin clouding her mind.

Regina’s temperament soon disintegrated after the placement of drink orders. Emma noticed the change from trancelike rapture to quiet melancholy. A sudden anxiety butterflied its way through her stomach as a result. Placing the half-eaten breadstick down, she dived into what would most likely turn into a vat of acidic backlash.

“Look, I know this isn’t us. The candlelight, the violins…” her eyes bug out when they fell on the menu, “… the over-priced appetizers… I never actually took anyone out on a date before. I’ve never
even been asked to a place like this. I could never afford 20 dollar bruschetta….” Her voice dropped off at her dinner partner’s face. “Oh, shit. I said ‘date.’ I wasn’t supposed to say that, was I? Crap, I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to put a label to this –“

“Emma,” Regina grabbed the hand floundering in midair and placed it on the table between them, “it’s alright. This is nice. I want this.”

“Then how come you look like don’t want this?”

“I… I feel bad. We should feel bad that – “

“That we’re together like this?”

“No, Emma, will you let me finish? I have greatly enjoyed our time together here. I’m overwhelmed by how easy this is, just you and I. We’re not on the ship anymore. We’ve been dropped in this entirely new environment with nothing to remind us of Storybrooke or the people there. It was unexpected. I thought it would be different.”

Emma leaned forward on her elbows. “Different how?”

“Well, I can’t speak for you, but I thought we would be fighting half the time.”

“We still kind of do, Regina.”

“Friendly banter is what I would call it.” She shook her head, motioning with her hand. “What I’m trying to say is… we’re good here. I wouldn’t go as far as saying we’re thriving, but it seems like that’s where we’re headed. But if feels wrong, doesn’t it? It feels so wrong.”

“You’re talking about just the two of us,” Emma stated, the realization dawning on her. “No little third party begging for ice cream as a first course.”

Regina nodded morosely. “It’s not right that we’re seeing the sights and shopping and eating all these free meals…”

“I doubt Henry will feel neglected for missing the shopping part.”

“…and Henry is probably tied up somewhere, hungry, and without a night light. He hasn’t even brushed his teeth in weeks – he still needs me to remind him. We should not have taken this excursion,” Regina declared. Her back straightened. She wiped down the creases in the tablecloth to distract her from the pain of a breaking heart. “This is wasted time that should be spent reaching Neverland. We have to go.”

Regina never made a move, though. The defensive mechanisms were a no-go as the first round of tears fell.

“Hey, hey,” Emma soothed with a soft, silky voice reserved for the two most important people in her life. Her thumb stopped the tear and ran up its trail. After swiping the watery mascara from under an eye she stroked the cheek with reverence.

“We need to stay – just for the night. We’re on the last leg of this journey, Regina, and Hook’s worked us to the bones. For weeks we’ve been cold, wet, bored to the point where I could use my mom’s sweaters for target practice…”

Regina bit down on a chuckle. The small smirk failed to reach her eyes, though.
Squeezing the hand in hers, Emma continued. “We’re tired, Regina. Don’t tell me you’re not because I know you and I sleep next to you. I know you’re awake three hours before sunrise. I know those nightmares that keep you from a good night’s rest. I want to get Henry back just as much as you do. We need this,” Emma said, indicating their surroundings; the candlelight, the expensive wine and posh décor, their clasped hands. “We are no good to our son sleepless, scared, and wound up like a yo-yo.”

“I am not tightly wound.”

The blonde head angled to the side. “You could have fooled me.”

The cockeyed smirk, true emerald eyes that matched a stunning dress, and a lame joke were all it took to mend the broken pieces. The pressure left her chest and Regina found it easier to breathe. The silverware held a brighter shine, the candles provided a deeper heat, the smells wafting from the kitchen made her taste buds tingle, and the woman grinning across the table managed to turn her frown upside down.

Emma Swan just made everything better.

The first course (tuna tartar with avocado mousse that rivaled that of the Jolly Roger sous chef) made way for relaxed conversation. Fine wine turned cheeks rosy, bacon wrapped quail elicited the most indulgent of moans, and the waiter’s recommendation of grilled octopus provoked a severe, “Fuck no” from the blonde. They ate, and they talked. Hands remained close, fingers playing against one another in an affectionate game only they knew. Until the inevitable.

“Emma Swan!”

The tone. It was the tone that frightened Emma the most. Normally, she wouldn’t allow herself to back down from a mother she’d only known for two years (one if you’re counting on mutual understanding of one’s true identity). But that tone. Fuck.

The lovers’ hands disengaged like they’d been burned, but not soon enough.

“Why her?”

Emma drew back at Mary Margaret’s bluntness and flagrant disregard for “her’s” presence.

“Wait, no. I’m asking the wrong person.” Mary Margaret’s finger switched from Regina to Emma. She directed the question to the stock still brunette. “Why her?”

“Why her’ what?” Regina shot back. She was so still she could have been mistaken for one of the mannequin’s Emma chatted with earlier.

“Why my daughter? Why this restaurant? And above all, why now?”

“I’m sorry, I don’t pencil in my lovers for dinner months in advance.”

Well that was a bold move, Emma thought. She gazed on her lover with something akin to pride.

Mary Margaret gasped. “Don’t you call her that.”

“Then what shall I call her? Have any ideas, Charming?” Regina turned to David who peeked from behind his wife. “What was the title you referred to before? Oh yes, my future wedded wife.”

Mary Margaret was close to choking. “David?”
“Dad!”

“Charming!”

The man leapt back, hands out in surrender. “Whoa now! Leave me out of this.”

“Leave you out of this?” Hands gripping her hips, the petite brunette’s rage grew with every syllable. “Apparently you are already in it! She’s our daughter! And she’s dating... her! And you didn’t think to tell me? Your wife?!”

“Madame,” the mustached maître d’ cut in, “if you would be so kind to allow me to seat you and your husband to your table. You are disturbing the other guests,” he whispered lowly.

“It’s no problem.” She waved her hand to the tuxedo and plopped herself down at the table next to Emma and Regina. Against his will, David was dragged down to a chair. “This is an intervention,” she stated, as if it was the solution to global warming itself.

With a wary nod the maître d’ left them to their conference.

In the seat closest to Emma, Mary Margaret glared through the candlelight at her nemesis. “How dare you take my daughter like she’s another one of your possessions. You should be ashamed of yourself. Henry prattled on about how hard you’ve tried and yet all you’ve managed to do is fall into the same old line.”

“Don’t speak to her like that! You may be my mother, but I’m warning you, Mary Margaret, who I choose to spend my time with is none of your business. So can the maternal commentary.”

“I am not just speaking as your mother. In case you’ve forgotten I was raised by this woman. I’ve seen the kind of queen she turned into. I’ve witnessed the kind of evil she inspires. I’m speaking as one who knows Regina, one who’s known her for years.”

“With all due respect, you don’t know Regina.”

“Do I get a say in this?”

Mother and daughter shot identical glares at Regina and answered with a resounding, “No!”

Regina fell back into her chair with a roll of her eyes. David gave a sympathetic pat on her shoulder.

“So...” David started while the other two went about bickering, “what resort package did you and Emma get?”

Regina raised a brow to the light conversation, but complied with a wave of her hand. “The ah... you know...”

“The True Love Package?”

Regina grunted an affirmative.

“Does she know?”

“No, and I would appreciate it if it stayed that way.”

For fear of getting cursed, David hid the smile. “Yeah, they offered a great rate. Mary Margaret went nuts over the shopping coupons. Me not so much.”
“You would have a great deal to talk about with your daughter, what with all the adventures of raiding the mint patty machines, and striking conversation with inanimate objects.”

“The mannequins? See, I knew I wasn’t the only one who thought they were real! They’re so lifelike!”

“Now I really see where Emma gets her clever wit from.”

“Huh?”

“Oh, nothing.”

“Hey,” he whispered, leaning in, elbow settled on his knee, “did you check out the resort spa? I didn’t realize deep tissue massage was a thing in this world. Why didn’t they have masseuses in the Enchanted Forest, I wonder?”

“Because they’d all be decapitated for their lascivious craft.” When David failed to understand she leaned in with a smirk. “You forget how subdued the principles in our land were. And enforced, if I might add.”

“Huh,” he rubbed his chin, cocking his head to the possibility. “It’s a shame really. Those masseuses can certainly work some magic. I could have used that kind of stress relief back when you were trying to kill us. But anyway… my masseuse was great. What about yours?”

“Mm,” Regina swirled the burgundy liquid in her glass before taking a sip. Licking her lips she stared at the woman, her blonde hair askew from an expressive defense of her queen, eyes ablaze, and cheeks a nice glowing red. “Emma wasn’t so bad herself. I can now say with absolute certainty that her hands indeed work magic.” Finishing the confession off with a lazy smirk, she continued to make eyes at the blonde.

That caused David to shut up and return back into an upright position. Scratching the back of his neck, he allowed his wife and daughter’s bickering to permeate the air, all notions at striking up conversation with his daughter’s ‘choice’ dashed.

Regina felt a stab of guilt. It was a bit harsh. While she wouldn’t consider David a friend, they were friendly. And he had given her and Emma a sort of semi-blessing. His acceptance wasn’t set in stone, of course, but it was as close to acceptance as they were going to get. For now.

With a tortured sigh she handed over her glass of red wine. An admission of guilt and an olive branch that seemed apropos coming from the former Evil Queen.

David murmured his thanks and knocked it back in one big gulp.

“I don’t understand how you can sit there and actually admit to possessing feelings of... of... of warmth for her!”

“She’s Henry’s mother. Of course I have feelings for her!”

“That’s not what I’m talking about and you know it. Tell me what this is. Make me understand, Emma.”

“Why? So you can overreact and take away my right to make my own decisions? Trample over the people I care about? Well you can’t! I don’t own you an explanation. I won’t!”

Once he spied the developing tears all he wanted to do in that moment was gather his daughter into
his arms and rock her soothingly. It wasn’t his job to coddle anymore and it wasn’t Mary Margaret’s prerogative to steer them onto the proper path. Emma was making that very clear. So although she stamped her foot petulantly, shouting “I won’t” or “You can’t make me” there was something very adult-like in the way she argued. Emma stood up for what she believed in. She defended the person she trusted.

“Mary Margaret, it’s late. Maybe we should call it a night. I’ll order room service.”

“Do not think you can soften me up with room service, Charming. Emma may have her reasons, but I would never have expected you to purposely keep me out of the loop.” With one last cold hard glare she said the words, “We will discuss that later.”

“Don’t blame him,” Emma mediated. “I asked David not to tell you. Be angry with me not him.”

“I’m not angry with you. I’m disappointed.”

It was becoming a chore to sit quietly, which explained Regina’s fidgeting. There was strength behind Emma’s words that had no intention of waning. The more Emma defended their affair the less optimistic Regina was. She was not as strong willed as Emma and she wouldn’t damn her to a lifetime of familial arguments or, if it came to it, estrangement from the parents she’s only just found. Emma was being so beautiful and so strong. Mary Margaret was being her stubborn, unbalanced self. Regina couldn’t take one more second of it.

She rose suddenly from her chair, threw down her napkin, and gathered any remaining fortitude available for what she was about to do.

“You’ve won, Snow dear. I’ve been convinced enough from this little intervention that my presence is no longer needed in the Charming family. Not anymore.” From the corner of her eye, Regina could see the disapproval in her lover’s gait. She could almost feel the ‘no fucking way’ building in her throat. Every part of her wanted to fall into those green eyes and say over and over again how sorry she was. But she held onto the hazel eyes of the girl – the woman – whose betrayal nearly killed her, and finished what she started.

“You have nothing to worry about,” Regina announced to Mary Margaret. Swallowing over some persistent feeling, her words were disturbingly steady (or so she thought). “I’m leaving in the morning. Alone. No harm will come to your… princess.”

Emma looked up, startled by the familiar tone of affection that the name carried. Despite Regina’s vulnerability and her icy determination in covering it up (and failing utterly), she was still just as gentle as a kitten. All the times and places the name had fallen from red lips… their cabin, their weekend swims in the ocean, before their morning coffee, in bed when they made love and again after Emma fake fell asleep. It sounded so innocent coming from a former evil queen. It tasted just as sweet from those lips.

Emma was blindsided, her jaw hanging open almost comically. So shocked by the dismissal of their affair, she completely missed the brunette’s hasty exit. She shot an unforgiving look at her equally jolted parents and raced after Regina.

Global warming, it seemed, would not be remedied by intervention.

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“You do realize I have a key to this room?” Emma pressed her forehead to the door. Eyes slipped shut and she challenged softly, “Regina, you can’t keep me out forever.”
A moment of silence later the lock clicked. Emma stepped in to find Regina sitting on the bed and hugging knees to her chest. She looks so sad, Emma thought. She needed a hug or words of encouragement, something. Someone needed to coax this woman from the edge (literally the edge of the bed because it looked like she would fall off). Someone had to lift up that trembling chin, look deep into her brown eyes and tell her she’s the most beautiful woman in all the realms. Someone had to step up and give this woman a reason to keep fighting, to tell her that the journey was stormy but at its end was smooth sailing (no pun intended). Emma looked around and was struck by the realization that this ‘someone’ was her. Suddenly, the blonde had the strong urge to cut and run.

“The maître d’ wouldn’t let me bolt without a slice of their tiramisu.” Emma lifted up the white to-go box which was worn on the corners and slightly opened at one end. “I got a little hungry on the elevator ride. Sorry,” she confessed with a shrug and a bashful smile.

Way to cheer up your girlfriend, Swan, Emma cursed herself. Allow your parents to run her out of your life and meet her halfway with a measly morsel of tiramisu. That’s love.

“Please don’t take anything that she had to say seriously. It’s the shock that was talking tonight. I think you can relate?” Emma submitted hopefully. Ever since Regina called a verbal quits on their relationship Emma had been praying to every mythical god she could name from the high school classes she didn’t skip out on. She prayed that Regina didn’t mean it.

Scowling at the arm curling round her waist, Regina stalked to the dresser. She rummaged through the drawers, handfuls of clothes coming out, a silk blue blouse purposely abandoned to the bottom drawer. Barely concealed sniffles couldn’t stop her from liberating the essentials.

Emma realized what was happening and stood up immediately to thwart the attempt.

“Mary Margaret may not have been serious but I was. I meant it, Emma.”

“Please.”

“No.” Regina shoved the clothes further into her suitcase despite the opposing hands.

“Why do you care so much about what she thinks?” Emma snapped, her anger getting the best of her. “You never gave two fucks about her before. Why now? Why give up so easily? Her argument was bogus, anyway. Couldn’t you see it?”

Her wrists were being pressed together by Emma, much like they would by the sheriff’s handcuffs. How appropriate, Regina thought sullenly.

“What are you going to do? Keep me here until I care what that holier-than-thou Snow White has to say?!?”

Clearly, the woman had her head so far up her ass she couldn’t distinguish Emma’s argument from her own. She couldn’t see how mismatched her feelings were to the words coming out of her mouth.

“No!” Emma’s grip tugged the suitcase away while Regina tugged back with equal force. “I don’t want you to care because that’s not the real you. It’s why I like you so damn much!”

The zipper ripped its way along the suitcases edges, sealing closed with the aid of trembling fingers. On its journey around a corner it became gridlocked with a finger.

“Shit!” Emma yelped, retrieving her hand. She immediately stuck the digit between her lips, attempting to soothe the throbbing.
Dropping it like it was hot, Regina's anger made way for all consuming concern. Her eyes locked onto the suckled finger, all but ignoring the twinge of desire running through her. The fuck were they arguing about anyway? She couldn’t remember.

“Is it…” Regina’s hand went out and hesitated, “…is it bad?”

“Oh, now you care?”

“Why can’t we just –“

“Talk? Love to, but we have this habit of beating each other up…”

“Emma, I didn’t mean to.”

“Like you didn’t mean to leave me by the wayside earlier? Do you even know how hard that was for me, sticking up for you in front of my parents? I know Mary Margaret was talking bullshit, but she’s my mother and… and I love her. She just wants to protect her kid. Kind of like how I was protecting you. She has no right to judge you, Regina. I love my parents, but their opinion is nothing to me if it means losing you. We don’t need their blessing.”

Regina shook her head. “This is too much. My only objective now is saving my son. And I will do so without the assistance of that motley crew of heroes. It’s better this way,” she muttered down to the suitcase, her hands staying from the handle. Not yet. She wasn’t ready just yet. “I will find my own way. I am the Evil Queen, as so many describe me.”

“That’s not true. You may not love our fellow crewmembers but I’ve seen you grow to like and trust them. Hook, he has no connection to Henry and yet where is he? Steering a ship on its way to the kid. Gold, the guy wasn’t exactly jumping for joy at his new status as grandfather but he’s lending a hand, isn’t he? That’s one more magic user on our side. And I know my parents aren’t on your ‘to hug’ list, but you can’t deny they would risk their necks for their grandson. I… I’ve only known Henry for a year or so, but he feels like another limb, one I have to get back otherwise I might not survive.” The heel of her hand ground itself into the dampness of her eye. She trembled amid the overwhelming feeling of dread burning a hole in her chest. “You’re his mother, Regina, and you belong with him. I want it so badly no matter how many times you think I have this agenda to take him away from you. We’ve all set out on this trip because we share one thing in common: we want to find Henry.” She made a grab for the pair of hands, unsteady as her own. Emma achieved the impossible feat of drawing the woman to sit beside her. Regina was so compliant it was as though she wanted to be talked down from the very beginning. “Please. Don’t leave. I don’t want you to. Besides, we haven’t finished magic lessons. I’m… well, I’m scared of using my powers without my teacher beside me.”

The brunette head tipped in admission. “You are ready.”

Emma pouted, refusing to take no for an answer. “I want you to see for yourself how badass I am. I need you there to make insensitive jokes about how I know nothing, how I need work on my aim and flourish. I need you, Regina. I can’t do this without you. I won’t.”

“What you need, Princess, is a new catch phrase. ‘I won’t’ will not get you everything, no matter how endearing a pout.”

“Well… you’re vocabulary is pretty extensive. How about you stay and help me choose a new one?”

The choked sob could have passed for a chuckle. “I hate you.”

“Pretty sure that’s old news,” Emma scoffed lightly, scratching her head.
“I love you.”

Emma stopped because she was sure she didn’t hear that. The last person she professed her love to died just seconds after it had been uttered. But this was a safe place, wasn’t it? No one would get hurt after the fact, surely. If she admitted to the sentiment, she wanted the words to carry a greater weight. She wanted them to hold every ounce of truth, every molecule of her existence. It was close to unbelievable how this woman admitted the love in her heart. Regina spoke with truth, with weight, with her entire being. Instead of copping to the same, all that ran through Emma was shock and awe. Also, the words ‘come again?’

“Emma Swan, if you don’t say something I will walk out that door right now.”

“Can we stop talking?” Emma rushed out, her hands latching anxiously around a waist. She couldn’t take her eyes of those lips, wanting to taste ‘Princess’ off of them till the end of her days. Because there was only one way she knew how to deliver her message. With truth, with weight, with her every molecule.

“Is… is there any tiramisu left?” Regina ventured weakly. She wiped at her eyes, sniffling. Incoherent mumbles of doubt tumbled out. “Ehrm… there might be a corner left? You wanna finish the rest?”

Emma made to get the take out box but was stopped by a tug on her arm.

Regina’s insistence of “later” was barely voiced before her mouth lay on Emma’s. Doubt leaving her like the dipping sunset, Emma flattened herself onto the woman, pinning her to their queen-sized bed and causing Regina to let out a squeak of surprise. They actively sought out bare skin, not a care in the world for busted zippers or disapproving mothers. Devoid of dress and thoroughly kissed, their progression changed.

This time it was slow and patient. It emphasized a deeper longing, a stronger bond. Every touch, every word of direction and sigh of acknowledgment meant something new. Breaths mingled as bodies intertwined. The idea of ‘becoming one’ during the act of sex always made Emma laugh. Silly rabbit, those tricks were for fools.

Emma wasn’t laughing then. Emma may have been a fool, but she was a fool in love.

When they made love she returned the sentiment, several times, very loudly.

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The mother was always last to know.

That was the single train of thought Mary Margaret puzzled over as they all gathered on the main bridge. Since returning from shore leave it was revealed in subtle glances, smirks, and raunchy pirate jokes that everyone knew of Emma and Regina’s more than friendly relationship. Everyone but the mother.

It was impossible, that was what it was. No possible reasoning could be given to explain why her daughter and her ex-stepmother turned villain turned mayor turned reluctant relative yet again were together and… in love? It sure looked that way from the many stares Mary Margaret now opened her attention to, the adoration in those eyes and the persistence in Emma’s body that just couldn’t be more than an arm length’s away from Regina. It hadn’t been there before, surely. Not for the weeks spent on the ship and definitely not before in Storybrooke.
Regina cherished Emma. It could be believed because Mary Margaret cherished David. She understood what it looked and felt like. She shared that same wily smile, that sparkle in brown eyes, the shift in breathing when her other half was near. If seeing was believing, than Mary Margaret believed Regina did in fact love her daughter.

But she didn’t have to like it.

It was midday, after their chores. Hook had them lined up on the deck and acting quite suspicious as to why their captain was wearing away at the planks.

David reined his wife in with a tight arm around her shoulder. Mary Margaret could only clench her jaw in the presence of Regina who still vehemently opposed her earlier promise to depart alone.

But she was very much not alone. Regina made a point of keeping the display of her hand steadfast in Emma’s in full view. She wouldn’t allow Snow to make her feel sorry for it. Not a bone in her body tolerated apology.

“All right, crew,” Hook declared, halting his pacing. “I have an announcement to make.”

“Does it by any chance not have to do with the rum being gone?” Emma folded her arms condescendingly. “I told you before, Hook, I’m done magicking the stuff for you. You almost ran us aground trying to get to that island. Drunk while driving doesn’t begin to explain how – “

“It’s not about the bloody rum!” Hook snapped. The crew jumped at the unexpected display of authority and the slander to his prized drink. “It’s regarding Neverland.”

“Never-Gonna-Get-There-Land?” Emma asked seriously. Two weeks into their journey (so long and unpredictably arduous) she had since dubbed their destination a more appropriate name. One that emphasized her frustration.

“Then we’re nearly there,” Regina gasped. Her hand absently sought out Emma’s. “We’re going to get Henry back.”

The pirate nodded. “Neverland is just a day away. But we must be on our toes. The last leg of the journey is always the most taxing, the most dangerous. I don’t know what we’ll find when we get to shore, or who will be waiting for us.” Hook looked to each and every one of his crew members whose chins were high and ears open to orders. He had taught them well. “So sharpen your swords, string those bows, and stretch your magic fingers… or whatever it is you do… because Neverland awaits!”
Promising Something For Everyone

It all started on a day much like the morning they set sail on this grand adventure. The choppy seas had come and gone between bursts of sunshine and clear skies, marking an unpredictable weather pattern. It had set back their journey by two days. The crew was weary. Time dragged on as they worked tirelessly to get the Jolly Roger to their destination. Though the weeks had been long, cold, and difficult it certainly helped their collaboration skills. The ship worked like a well-oiled machine in the control of a ragtag team of individuals who had come to learn about as much as themselves as each other.

On a particularly sunny hour the crew pushed and pulled at ropes, turned wheels, and mounted the sail quietly and without complaint.

Boredom going straight to her head, Emma began singing. “I’ve got soul, but I’m not a savior. I’ve got soul, but I’m not a savior,” she sang while hauling yard on starboard.

The breeze carried her voice to Regina who grinned to the spirit. Emma was no soloist (more of a disjointed yodeler), but Regina felt compelled to help a girl out.

“Another head aches, another heart breaks,” Regina joined in as she continued her tugging of a sail. She winked at Emma. “I am so much older than I can take. And my affection, well it comes and goes I need direction to perfection, no no no no…”

“Help me out!” David added in his broken soprano. Working at the main sail, he elbowed his wife to contribute and sang on. Mary Margaret eventually joined in with a laugh.

“These changes ain’t changing me,” Hook belted to the greying sky.

Gold finished, “The cold-hearted boy I used to be!”

“Yeah, you know you got to help me out,” they all sang in unison. “Yeah, oh don't you put me on the backburner,” they crooned to the sea gulls, fleeing from the discordant band, “You know you got to help me out,” they sang their hearts out.

The Jolly Roger troupe singers’ cacophony was interrupted by a crack of lightening. Ominous clouds rolled in, forming a shadow overhead. The boat creaked and started rolling to and fro with the increasing current. It was the storm Gold had prophesized. It was the day they all had prepared for. But it was trailing in much quicker than expected.

“Ready about!” Hook shouted from the main bridge. He pointed to the husband/wife team and commanded, “Prepare the boom!”

The drizzle that had cropped up turned to a downpour. Emma strained to see in the rainstorm and pushed at her errant hair dancing in the whirlwind. She held tight as she could to the halyard until Hook ordered differently. Though he was the last person she trusted with her life (or her rum) the pirate was a superb helmsman. Not to mention she was her captain and there were rules – rules that she would take to heart considering their predicament.

“Stern on course!”

With a hand gripping a wheel’s handle and a hook locked with another, Hook steered the ship around breaking waves. Waves crashed into the side, testing the ship’s integrity that Hook prayed would see him through one last journey. When stern was pointed correctly downwind he steered his
vessel at top speed. The faster they flew the further distance they were from the eye of the storm. The faster they sailed the safer they felt.

Just when the crew was ready to yip and hoot their victory a gust of high winds blew through. Traveling at such a high velocity, Hook lost control of the helm on a wave face. A vicious squall forced the Jolly Roger heeling off course. The crew began to slide under the unbalanced deck towards the port railing. David snagged an arm around the masthead, but missed Mary Margaret’s hand by a centimeter.

She slipped down the deck, screaming and fingers clawing the wet planks. Before smashing into the wall side the magic of a once dark witch wound a rope around Mary Margaret’s wrist and hauled her up to her feet. Panting wide-eyed, she cast a death grip on the port railing. No one especially Mary Margaret noticed the swinging boom loomed towards her. She cried out as the horizontal pole broke off and knocked her overboard, the chopping waves consuming her sweater weighted body.

Without thinking Emma screamed, “Mom!” for the first time and bounded over the railing.

Regina heard the shout followed by the splash. Blinking through the sheets of rain, her nerves ran cold. She didn’t react for a few seconds, hoping what happened did not just happen. Her fear quickly turned to fury. “You IDIOT!” she roared over the howling wind. She marched unsteadily to the port railing.

Not hearing or seeing his wife and daughter through the storm, David ascended for a better view. With every step on the rungs his fears amplified. He remembered the last time he climbed the lookout, but unlike then he was not afraid of getting reamed out by his idol pirate and captain.

At the lookout pinnacle he strained to see through the whipping sails and pelting rain. The high winds swung his nest precariously. In the distance he spotted two heads above water, one blonde, another black. They were together. Thank god.

Shouting at the top of his lungs David commanded “Lower that ladder over starboard side!” and pointed out to his family floundering in the chaos.

Hook stared proudly up at David, gave a salute and responded, “Aye-aye, quartermaster!”

Gripping the railing enough to break it in two, Regina watched as Emma hoisted her sputtering mother to Hook’s helping hand.

“Got her?” Emma shouted up.

“She weighs a ton!”

“Excuse me?” Mary Margaret gasped in outrage despite having just escaped from drowning.

“You couldn’t have purged the five pound sweater while you were down there?”

“You would have liked that wouldn’t you? Saving a naked damsel in distress. Humph!”

Just as Mary Margaret made it safe and sound on deck into the unfortunate arms of the captain the boat careened sideward creating a swelling wave. Emma didn’t even have time to gather a breath before she was sucked into a whirlpool. Regina screamed after her but the blonde head had disappeared under the boat. She shouted for Emma again and again until her throat was raw, but was met with the lapping of waves.

She immediately peeled off her jacket, casting it aside. Regina would be damned if Davy Jones’
Locker got a hold of that idiot before she was through reaming her out. Diving into danger without a second thought, as always, never looking before she jumped, never asking for help before acting the savior, never caring for others’ feelings before threatening her own life.

Emma, she begged within the confines of her mind.

Then it occurred to Regina, those were actions she purposely endorsed through their magic lessons. From the beginning Emma was hesitant to use her magic and use it to her full potential. She always had to ask a question before casting a spell, making absolutely sure she was supposed to be setting fire to the right target, or manifesting salt in the correct teacup of a Dark One. For once, Emma had actually learned from her teacher. Perhaps she learned too well.

Yet she never wanted Emma to sacrifice her own wits over such heroism. She never asked for her heart to drop into her stomach and feel so queasy she could retch over the side. Because it was not the rocking ship that made her sick, it was the prospect of a loss she could never live with that was cause for nausea.

“Are you mad?!” Hook stomped over to her. “The sea will suck you both down!”

Not dignifying the absurd question with a response, Regina disappeared in a puff of purple smoke. Seconds later her body felt like it was being attacked by pins and needles. The shock of the frigid water literally took the breath from Regina. She gasped deeply above the chopping waves and began hyperventilating. Limbs waving erratically below the surface, she struggled to keep her head up. Through the rain and the wind she could no longer see the Jolly Roger, nor its captain. And she could not make out the shouts to come back. All she heard was the crack of thunder, and the water rushing at her ears. All she saw was white foam and black ocean. She was alone – teeth chattering, fingers numb, wet, tired, and alone. The fear of freezing, the fear of drowning was so strong. But the horror of her own death was nothing compared to the death of Emma.

Knowing what – who – was at stake, Regina allowed her magic to surround and bind her. Just as Emma had, Regina called forth her powers to warm the water around her body. Then she dove under.

It was just as fear inducing, the unknowable blackness of the water. The storm above was child’s play compared to the whiplashing currents and rivers below the surface. She allowed herself to be sucked into the current, hoping it would lead her to Emma. The deeper it took her the darker it became. The flashes of lightening from above ceased. Black, the color she thought was her favorite, wrapped around her like a blanket. It was suffocating, and if it weren’t for her magic storing up the need for breath she would have expired already. Such a thought did not bode well for her Emma.

Eyes were no good in the pitch black ocean, so Regina opened herself up to magic, completely and without regard to whether it was dark or light in character. If intent was everything, than it would be enough to save Emma. Her aching heart should be reason enough.

It came like a star at twilight, fuzzy at first as if you were imagining it. So she blinked. The star remained. Something told Regina this was one star she had to catch. Every part of her was drawn to the target, her body, mind, and more importantly her magic. Nothing else mattered, no storm could hold her back, no leviathan could frighten her off her path because the star had already seemed to latch on to her. Regina began swimming in the direction of the force pulling at her chest. She swam for the star, a silver glow growing brighter and nearer.

No bubbles. That confirmation almost slackened Regina’s jaw into a mournful wail. She grabbed fistfuls of leather and braced the inert body to hers with astonishing force.
If the main deck was not soaked from the storm it was positively drenched by Mary Margaret’s tears. The storm had dissipated, but it was just too late. The moment purple smoke thinned into the winds they all knew it was for naught. No one could have survived the squall. These magical waters were a security system controlled by Pan and his Lost Boys. Children playing at magic, Hook sneered. Pathetic.

It damn well was an efficient system, Hook thought glumly, that was for sure. He looked down, contemplating over how he could have better prepared his crew, how he could have trained Emma properly. Perhaps he shouldn’t have insulted her magic technique all those times. Perhaps he should have lent a hand or a hook. He had seen more action than the sheriff and had faced Neverland’s seas before. Perhaps he should have been a better captain. Perhaps he should have been a better friend.

Hook still stayed glued to the helm, preferring to keep a distance from the sobbing crowd while Gold thought in solitude as well. He was leaning against the capstan; a piece of machinery the blonde had the frequent pleasure of cleaning. He could almost hear her complaining over the kick of her boot to the metal.

Gold tapped the end of his cane at the deck, remembering her more sufferable moments. Like her kindness. He broke out into a smile at the memory of Emma defending his crankiness to the airport security guard at Logan. She had referred to him as her grandfather. He also recalled Emma giving him words of encouragement, and how she stared him dead in the eyes asserting, “You’re not gonna die. I won’t let you.” She had done all that not because he had threatened her family (which was now their family), nor because of a contract. Emma protected him in New York because that was just what Emma did.

And yet another member of his family lost forever.

David enveloped the small, shivering body in his arms. Chin on a shoulder he and his wife were the only ones still staring into the water. The dying waves still held a magnetizing tragedy about them. It was so enticing Mary Margaret had the idea to go out and join the surf, join her daughter. David held her back and they cried together. They mourned the loss of their first born a second time for the last time.

The deafening thud ripped them from their individual guilt trips. The sight was so shocking they froze were they stood.

Regina rubbed manically along the sodden arms of leather, igniting some heat into the body. Emma lay on her back, unconscious and blue. Straddled over her hips was Regina, equally sodden and on the brink of passing out. The use of her magic had taken quite a toll. The amount of strength it took to focus on Emma’s magic amidst the tempest had weakened her body and soul. There was not much she could stand to do. Except revive Emma Swan.

She finally noticed her stock still audience. “She’s not breathing,” Regina declared to the comatose body. Tears leaked from her eyes. More water. More goddamn water she didn’t want to associate herself with. If she ever got out of this, if Emma got out of this, she would take her to a nice dry cave or a mountain. It didn’t spell romantic, but at least it wouldn’t involve the ocean. Maybe they would even return to the resort and the queen-sized bed of their True Love Suite. “And she’s cold,” she added definitely, trying desperately to school her features.

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“Use these.” With a snap of his fingers Gold brought a pile of blankets. “They’re imbued with heat and should curb the hypothermia.”
Once the essential parts were covered with heat Regina began chest compressions. She had never performed life saving techniques. A slave to her magic, it had always been a simple matter of waving a hand for Regina. But without a spark or flicker of magic on hand Emma would not be saved by supernatural approach. Even if Regina had it within her, even if the Dark One himself had the power, it couldn’t be done. Emma was already far too gone.

Regina thought back to the books she had read and the programs she had watched into the early morning hours. She remembered soaking up every emergency treatment and first aid remedy known to man in preparation for the arrival of her infant son. Modern medicine was a whole other animal to a native of the Enchanted Forest, but it was not without its benefits.

Regina’s hands pressed between pauses, controlling the pace and force of the compressions as her memory recalled. It all seemed so barbaric, pushing at one’s chest like she had to punch Emma in order to get her to breathe. Hm, Regina thought, maybe that would work. The warm glow of magic was a more appealing preference. She missed the tingling sensation when it was succeeding, and the beautiful result that presented just seconds later. With CPR it was a “wait and see” process. It was grueling and personal and ugly. But if it resulted in bringing color back into that blue face and the opening to emerald eyes than Regina loved the fuck out of CPR. She’d love it till her dying day.

Mary Margaret cried some more. She clutched at David’s hand and stared in a mix of fascination and fear. For a moment she couldn’t understand why Regina was crying so hard over her daughter’s body. Why did she get to cry more than her? What gave Regina the right to be more upset over Emma’s blue and semi-expired existence than her? She was Emma’s mother, goddamnit, and it was her heart’s prerogative to suffer more agony. Yet all Mary Margaret could do was watch Emma being unsuccessfully revived by her lover. And cry some more.

Even Hook looked like he would break down into tears.

The resuscitations grew more erratic with each pump and less controlled than before. The minutes passed like hours and Regina was still breathing air into Emma’s mouth and now punching fists into the chest. Still no pulse. Still blue as the silk blouse they had ceased to remember who owned first. Rising from her straddled position over hips, Regina leaned into the motionless chest and pressed her mouth once again onto the discolored lips. She had lost count by now. It could have been the fourth time she puffed breaths into the mouth or the even the thirtieth.

On whatever count it was, instead of giving air Regina offered a kiss. It was the last thing she had left to contribute. It was their last hope. Desperately, she pressed her mouth fully against Emma’s, hands placed unsteadily on the chilled flesh of her cheeks. Mary Margaret surged forward but was halted by David.

“Please,” Regina begged against blue lips. “Breathe for Henry.” Her voice was raw from screaming. She was disoriented from the flurry of activity. She was dizzy and breathless from the exertion and could barely hold herself up. But she had a little bit left. There was an errant spark remaining that she would mine for all it was worth. “Breathe for me.”

Her whisper was so low she could barely hear it herself. Regina pressed in again, this time with more passion. Forgotten tears falling, she kissed with that same old magic. Nose pressed alongside Emma’s, Regina let her lips and her tongue work in tandem as they had always brought out the most seductive of moans and pleasant of sighs. Her tongue flicked gingerly against a lifeless tongue, whimpering at the contact. She kissed her very best kiss because it might very well be her last.

It was not beautiful nor did it give off a tingling sensation, but the result was accepted nonetheless. The water spurted out of Emma’s warmed lips like a small fountain. She rolled under Regina’s weight, coughing up sea water. Once her lungs were clear Emma stared wide eyed at a teary and
aghast Regina.

She expected Emma to make the usual cheesy comment like, “You saved me!” or “Hey beautiful” or even the more likely “What the hell took you so long?” But all Regina received was a gaping stare.

“Oh, my baby!”

Regina heard the cry and the stumbling feet of Mary Margaret. Without a word she made way for the mother.

David brought Emma to her feet, hugging her from behind while Mary Margaret hit her head-on like a professional linebacker.

“Why would you risk your life like that?” the petite mother questioned after a long embrace. “Never,” she stated firmly, shaking her head and gripping Emma’s arms, “never do something stupid like rescue me. That’s what I have David for.”

Gold raised an amusing brow at David who rubbed the back of his neck, his red cheeks displaying his failure to get to his wife fast enough.

Hook slapped a hand (not a hook because he learned his lesson from the palm stabbing incident) to Emma’s shoulder. “Welcome back to the land of the living.”

“Yeah,” Emma muttered tiredly, “I’m still not taking you up on that offer to go skinny dipping. Nice try, though. And great timing.”

Hook shrugged, taking it as a compliment.

“Next time let me do the saving,” David chimed in. He hugged Emma’s shoulders tighter, giving her a noogie and eliciting a riotous laugh from the girl. “You’re making your father look bad. And I’m an experienced knight!”

Gold rolled his eyes. “You mean an experienced shepherd?” He even smirked while saying it, proving just how cuddly he had grown around the Charming family.

“A shepherd turned heroic knight,” the wife corrected and joined in the laughter.

“I don’t know,” Hook said, scratching his chin. “A sheriff turned savior screams greatest bedtime fairy tale story to me.”

“Gross! Stop talking about your smutty bedtime reads,” Emma griped lightly, “cause you’re not getting any.”

The pirate gave a “harrumph” before he received several punches in the shoulder, all playful of course.

Not far away, but distant enough not to be taken notice of stood Regina. With the last shred of respect she had for Snow, she allowed the mother/daughter moment. When their hug finally ended Regina took a step forward with the newly resurrected blonde in her sights… but then hesitated and shrunk back.

From within the lively, happiness infused family reunion, Emma sought out her own savior. Before leaving, Regina’s eyes locked onto Emma, giving her love with a small smile which quickly dissipated.
Emma allowed them an hour – two tops. Mary Margaret and David coddled their soaking wet daughter and doted on her with fresh, dry clothes, and kisses and plenty of hugs. They even pushed food on her which Emma for the first time in her life declined. Something was not sitting well. Half her attention bestowed on her parents, the other half was buried in the recess of her mind. Something was missing, and she still felt cold and shaken. These were not her blankets and the kisses David laid on her head and Mary Margaret on her cheeks were not the ones she desired.

After several reassurances that she indeed was fine Emma broke away in search of Regina. She was found behind the opening door, folding a neat pile of tank tops on their bed. In all the time Emma had known the woman she had never seen Regina do laundry. She was not sure why, so she filed away the curiosity for later.

Stealing inside their cabin Emma spied the lingering hand on a folded tank. The strap was fingered and petted down with a care Emma hadn’t even seen when Regina was in her most tender state post-coital.

“Hey.”

The gentle undertaking halted. Then the tank was crushed under the gripping force of the hand. It twisted and wrinkled under the pressure of the closing fist. It bent to Regina’s will so quickly Emma could have sworn she heard it scream in pain.

“Hey?” Regina ground out.

“Yeah,” Emma replied slowly, blinking. “Like, ‘Hey, how ya’doing?’”

“You risk your life to save someone you’ve only met a year ago,” the tank fell to the bed like a distraught victim as Regina turned on Emma, “and then almost die in my arms, and you have the gall to say ‘hey’ to me?”

“Umm, you want a hug instead? My parents couldn’t get enough of them.” Emma offered an uneasy ‘ha’ but it only seemed to further aggravate the situation. Whatever situation it was.

“Well I am nothing like those blubbering fools. And I sure as hell do not require a hug,” she spat out.

“Noted.”

When there was no reply Emma dug her toe absently into the edge of a floor plank. She had never been in this situation before, where it was someone else doing the saving, so Emma had it in mind to strike up casual conversation. Because people usually make fun of intense and horrible stories after the fact right? To little the mood?

“That was a close one wasn’t it? I almost didn’t think you actually cared enough to retrieve my sorry ass.”

“Of course I care about you… you stupid woman! I wasn’t about to let you drown!”

Emma’s eyes went wide at the wrathful snarl and backed up a step or two. Then she saw the hands that would not stay still, and the welling tears, and the bobbing throat to sobs that would probably burst through the walls. Regina insisted that she didn’t need a hug, but her body was screaming for it. Knowing every reaction of those parts of Regina, her dips and curves, the increasing pace of her chest, and the words staying like a mournful lover on her tongue, Emma surged forward to answer those prayers.
She was just as frail in Emma’s arms as she herself had been in Regina’s. Chest to chest they embraced with an insistence anyone would think was madness. Emma had been kidding herself and her parents when she admitted to being fine. She was not fine, and the hot trails down her cheeks were evidence. She hadn’t shed one tear in the presence of Mary Margaret and David. She couldn’t. But with Regina Emma felt she could do anything. She could cry her heart out, bear her soul, reveal every last piece of her sordid past and still feel accepted. Still feel loved. It wasn’t that she feared her parents would judge harshly, it was that they would be too lenient. Regina would berate her extensively, lift her chin up, and then give her a mind-blowing kiss that verified Emma’s worth (which to a former queen was quite substantial if she could say so herself). Mary Margaret and David were capable of many things but not that.

Emma let out a shaky sigh. In the crushing arms of Regina she felt two steps from great and three from elated.

Regina sobbed once into the shoulder and then again when the hands fistied into the material at her back. What would happen if she let go? Would the sea take Emma away again? Would her love be ripped from her heart like Daniel had been? She did not think she could survive it a second time.

When they faced each other the tears were gone. Hands pet the cheeks of Emma’s face, feeling the solid warmth of reality. The inner wrists of those hands were stroked in circles by calloused thumbs. After a few moments of quiet staring and satisfied that they were indeed still there, the two separated awkwardly.

Emma pushed her hands into the backs of her pockets, scuffing her boots on the floor. Regina smoothed a hand over her blouse, eyes searching elsewhere. They were so unnaturally clumsy it could have been a dream.

“I need to ask you something,” Emma started, her face scrunching, “and I don’t want you to freak out.”

“When have I ever been so unreasonable?”

Emma assumed the response ‘seriously?’ with a cock of the head. Then she grew anxious. Her boot kicking further at the crack, teeth running along a bottom lip, and eyes diverted anywhere but the patient brown of Regina’s. “Did you revive me with True Love’s Kiss?”

After an agonizing moment of silence Regina answered quietly. “Why would I be upset by that question?”

“Well, I-I just thought…” stuttered the blonde.

“You know how I feel about this – us. Emma, if you don’t trust me or you doubt my affection for you then I implore you to say so now. If so… this,” she waved her hand between them, hesitantly, her voice thickening to the point where she was stumbling over words, “this should go no further.”

“No! No, I haven’t changed my mind about anything related to us. I asked because… well because I wondered if it could happen – if it was possible.”

“It’s not.” Regina flinched, seeing how her honesty was misconstrued for a blunt shut down. “I mean, it wasn’t necessary. You were not under a curse, and you were not… gone from this world. So no, magic was not achieved by a kiss. I revived you with a little thing called CPR, the magic of common sense.”

There was a low grunt that could have passed for “oh.” Emma’s eyes lowered to the floor and stayed
there.

Regina looked on in worry, her hopes at a response dashed frighteningly quickly. It wasn’t every day that Emma missed an opportunity in responding to snark. She really liked the challenge. She missed it almost as much as she missed her son.

“Are you disappointed?”

Green eyes flicked up and widened. “No, I’m not disappointed. I’m grateful.” Blood rose to her cheeks and a bashful smile drew across her lips. She chuckled over the inanity of it, admitting, “I just thought the kiss thing would have made it more authentic? Fairy Tale Land stamp of approval, you know?”

“Miss Swan,” Regina spoke deeply, taking a step, “Princess,” another step towards the inert blonde, “Emma,” she grinned in an impossible feat of wickedness paired with fond affection, a hand exploring the curve of a hip, “are you a romantic?”

“Uh, th-that’s not really what I was going for.”

“You’re a romantic,” Regina affirmed sweetly.

“That doesn’t exactly scream Savior/former Evil Queen material.”

“It’s endearing.”

“O-okay.”

“And sexy.”

“Mm?”

“Mm-hm.”

“Listen, not to shatter this great and stimulating moment here, but… Regina, you saved me.” The awkward teenager turned serious. With an intense gaze she latched onto the other woman’s hands, breathing out what she had wanted to say the moment she came to in Regina’s arms. “You saved my life.”

“It was nothing.”

“It was not nothing,” Emma retorted. Her stern expression softened to something unreadable. “It’s everything.”

Regina thought she experienced an end to her tears.

“There is nothing I would not do for you, Emma. And that includes forfeiting my own life.”

“Noted.” Emma nodded tearily. “Same goes for me. I’d rip that beating thing from my chest just to save you.”

“Please don’t. You only have one and I like your heart where it is. It helps me fall asleep in the middle of the night. Even when I’m awake its rhythm keeps my own going.” She gazed down at the hand above Emma’s breast. The thumping sped up under her finger’s soft ministrations. Her eyes drew up to Emma’s. Nose wrinkled with a bit of whimsy, Regina flashed a smile. “And it also lets me know when its owner is aroused.”
“Regina…”

“Yes?”

“That’s it,” Emma gasped before taking Regina’s head in her hands. “Just you.” She kissed fervently and without ceremony. Their mouths locked with each other, not a single care to be apart any longer. “Regina,” Emma half moaned, half mumbled before gripping the woman’s neck and enticing her in a deeper kiss.

Thrusting her body, her tongue, anything that would move up into Emma, Regina sank into the once cold flesh of her lover. She thrived in the reality of what could have been lost. The heart was beating again, the skin had a healthy glow to it, and the woman herself was proving to have a little more “oomph” in her than she thought. Emma was alive and so very excitable to the touches laid upon her. She growled to the nails raking down her shirt, threw her hips into the ones pleading for hers, and stripped down to nothing before Regina even got a chance to lay a hand on a button much less a belt buckle.

“I have an idea. It’s something I’ve wanted to do for a while, but didn’t have the guts to suggest.”

“Mm,” Regina purred. Her eyes slid open to show Emma the extent of her desire and allowed herself to be led to their bunk. “I hope it isn’t like last time. You know how uncomfortable this floor is, and I will never forgive you for getting me that wet.”

“Hey, talk to Hook about the leaking floorboards, not me,” Emma shot back with a snicker. Her lips pecked Regina’s and then again for good measure. “And it’s not like that. You’ll like it. Hell, you’ll love it.”

“If you don’t stop talking and get to the point I will find some other means to please myself.”

Emma groaned at the thought. But as tempting as that image was she wasn’t a watcher. No, Emma Swan was a doer and she would do Regina a world of good that night.

“I’m thinking we won’t have this chance again, seeing as it’s our last night here. And I fully intend to take advantage of this cabin, and that top bunk in particular.”

Not at all one for being teased, Regina let out a heavy sigh and detached from Emma. She made a valiant effort to look persecuted and played up her exasperation as she turned and stomped off – to where, she didn’t know yet.

Emma snagged the arm and pulled her back in. “Not so fast!”

“You talk too slow! In fact you shouldn’t be talking at all, Miss Swan!”

“Aww, come on with the formal titles now. And I was leading up to my idea! I wanted to set the stage.”

“What are we? Writing a script for a television show? I don’t need to be wooed, buttered up, or tempted. You already have me so take me!”

“Jeez, well when you put it like that…”

A squeal of laughter, a wicked cackle, two pairs of underwear down, and lots of kissing later the two were settled in the top bunk. They couldn’t decide if it was uncomfortable or satisfying as both were felt simultaneously. The idea hit Emma when she was sleeping in the top bunk, staring at the crack in the ceiling only five inches from her face. It struck like a prophetic lightning bolt from god, but alas
she and her cabin mate had yet to become intimate which later Emma couldn’t imagine such an unfortunate time. Such an idea suggested at that time would have been taken with spite and thrown back with flaming brown eyes too aroused for their own good.

Yes, now was the perfect time, Emma mused as Regina slid up her body with those plump blushing lips, peaked nipples, and thighs already damp for the brilliant plan at hand. After a giving a few instructions about the mechanics of how it would work and warnings of getting splinters and the like Emma proceeded to take advantage of the cramped space. It was never ideal for sleeping in, anyway.

Wedged between a naked blonde and the ceiling, Regina felt a wetness between her thighs that was definitely not her own. Once Emma had stammered through the specifics of her idea Regina met her with skepticism. She was by all means an adventurous lover, but this idea in particular, and coming from Emma, threw her off. Her doubts waned, though, as she was spurred on by a sly grin and insistence that could have rivaled a mere puppy.

There hips aligned, Emma grabbed hold of a waist and clashed their bodies together. Twin groans sounded at the sensation of rubbing clits. Emma swallowed Regina’s more deafening moments with a kiss. Her hips kept a pace that had them both shuddering in ecstasy and wanting more still.

Pressed deliciously from both sides, Regina gasped erratically. She couldn’t decide where she wanted more of that luscious pressure, from the ceiling pressing into her clenching backside or from between Emma’s legs, the liquid heat painting strokes to her own. The whole decision making process seemed so superfluous. She had both, and at the same time. What more could she ask for?

Writhing from below without a single conscious thought but ‘beautiful’ and ‘fucking hell’ on her mind, Emma sneaked a hand between their sweat stained bodies. She caught the object of her desire and rolled the bud between the pads of her fingers. She squeezed and pulled at the other, eliciting a broken cry from its owner. Emma looked at the face mere inches from her own. Regina was twisted in pleasure, her mouth sagging around moans and sighs, the lines framing her bolted shut eyes. She was so close and Emma wanted to take her so much closer. Between the provocative moans of her lover, Emma’s thrusts became stronger, more insistent. One thrust became a shy too robust and sent Regina into a fitful yelp of pleasure, her back arching into the ceiling with a resounding thud.

It certainly brought a whole new significance to banging.

“I hope no one is upstairs,” Emma said with a chuckle.

Regina groaned loudly and gripped Emma’s shoulders. “Who the hell cares?”

“Well my parents for – oomph!”

Regina’s tongue got in the way. Those insufferable Charmings had ruined her life quite enough. The last thing she wanted was for those idiots to ruin her sex life. Let them hear. By no means was she going to be silent for anyone. Because damn, this was a really good idea.

“You’re a genius.”

“I’m a what?”

Regina blinked and then shook her head. “Nothing.”

“No, no, go on. I think I heard something of importance.”

“More important than this?” Regina punctuated the question by rolling her hips. If Emma ever heard her say crazy things like praise for her intelligence she wouldn’t hear the end of it. The woman’s ego
did not need any more assistance. Regina tried to shut her up with a classic.

Emma was immune. This time.

“Don’t think that Regina Mills Kiss of Sexy Doom will work on me.”

“And Regina Mills what?”

“Uh, on second thought – never mind. Don’t need you knowing that I know about your super-secret operation to divert me from what you don’t want to talk about.”

Regina blinked. “How do you have friends?”

“Why don’t you ask yourself? You’re my…”

“I’m not –“

Emma gave a look.

“Well, I guess I am. However there are times – many times – where I do not understand the words coming out of your mouth.” Brown eyes shifted to the side as her cheeks reddened further. “I suppose it’s endearing.”

“Suppose?” Emma choked out in a chuckle. “I should hope so, otherwise I’d have to reexamine why your body is so nakedly grinding on top me.”

“You are amusing.”

“Is that one of my endearing qualities?”

Anyone else wouldn’t have believed it. Anyone else would have thought it a ruse to exact her revenge. But Emma knew well enough. That smile was one hundred percent genuine and paired with those ultra-soft chocolaty eyes promised warmth and love and forever. Emma wasn’t even capable of holding back the giggle. It was strange: Emma Swan giggling. Just what alternate universe had she been dropped into? Whichever it was, she was happy as long as it meant being on the receiving end of that smile. Wherever she was, it must have been heaven.

Bound up with enthusiasm and that bubbly feeling called love, Emma launched her mouth against Regina’s. The force of the kiss sent the brunette’s head slamming to the ceiling and a sharp hiss resulted.

“Sorry!”

Regina’s pained face made way for light laughter as she brought her hands under Emma’s neck. “It’s perfectly alright, dear.” Their smiles met in a soft, languid kiss.

Using the ceiling as leverage Regina pushed herself against Emma, eliciting a loud moan from her mouth. The breathy laugh came so easy against Emma’s arched throat as Regina nipped the extravagant flesh.

Regina tried to sling the milky white thigh over her hip, but there was just no room. She wanted to be closer to Emma, and feel every part of her quivering against her, into her, around her, everywhere. She released the waist and collapsed back onto Emma with a groan, her arms sore but everything else aching with a welcome exhaustion.

Turning an ear to the frustrated sounds of her lover, Emma found enough steam to satisfy them both.
Thanks to the daily five mile runs, Emma used her thighs in leveraging them both into a gratifying angle. Again their heated sex came in contact and sent rivers of pleasure along their spines. Panting through more than her fair share of morning runs (and late night escapades) she thrust and rolled, pitched and pulled her all, listening to the highly audible responses of Regina and joining in when her throbbing clit called for it.

Regina came with a smile on her face. Her giggling became infectious as her partner came too with a breathy shout which quickly turned to a gasping chuckle. When their roving hips settled and their lips slowed against skin to a mere graze the two lay side by side beaming at one another.

“That was…” Emma paused to ease her breathing, “… that was awkward. But… hot.”

“And really sexy.”

“Really, really sexy,” Emma agreed as she half climbed over Regina to get a kiss.

“Mm, you have your moments.”

“Yeah, and I’m a genius.”

“I said no such thing!”

“It’s funny the moments you forget in the heat of things.”

Regina rolled her eyes as Emma’s adorable giggling turned to laughter. It was definitely infectious.

After only a few minutes of quiet resting and occasional snuggling (snuggling that Regina would still not admit to fancying), Emma grew antsy.

“Want to have another go?”

As if she was waiting for that exact request Regina responded without pause. “Please.”

The blonde wiggled her brows. “This time I’m topping.”

***

Gold and Mary Margaret were the first two up that following morning. Apparently, some were more fitful sleepers than others and needed the extra time to rest.

Alone in the silence of the galley they had breakfast. Gold drummed his fingers next to his bowl of oatmeal while Mary Margaret held her head up with her chin, searching in vain for a suitable icebreaker.

Following a liberal sigh Gold finally put words to express what had irked him since the night before. “It’s strange, isn’t it?”

“What’s strange?” Mary Margaret inched up in her chair, tipping her head curiously.

“After four weeks on this ship, living and working together, we’re finally making port. By noon today our feet will be on solid ground again, on Neverland.”

“You don’t sound thrilled.”

“Oh,” he asserted, shrugging and mouth twisting doubtfully, “don’t mistake my lack of adventure for unwillingness to arrive at our destination. No, I’m… “ he squinted at his bowl of soupy oatmeal,
perfectly seasoned with a bit of fresh nutmeg. He searched for the term within the warm cereal, a dull pang growing in his heart. “… I’m despairing,” he murmured, nodded as if that was the perfect word to describe his pain, “yes, despairing. I’m afraid when I leave this place and set my first step on those sandy shores I will not be able to cook for everyone anymore. There won’t be a point.”

Mary Margaret grinned sympathetically to the sunken shoulders. She should really push David to talk to him; they have so much in common. They grieve so similarly and would find a great deal of camaraderie through their pain – Gold with having to abandon his galley and David with his unrequited rolemodel affair with Hook.

“I wouldn’t despair, yet. As far as I know we haven’t lost the necessity to feed ourselves. An island has very few resources when it comes to sustenance. I’m sure your skills of improvising ingredients will be in high demand.”

The scraggly chin rose to reveal watery eyes, widening to the admission.

“We need you just as much as everyone else,” Mary Margaret affirmed. “David has his sword skills and rugged good looks. Emma and Regina are Henry’s parents and if anyone has an idea of where to find him – if anyone has a connection with our grandson it is them. Hook… he may not be pleasant company with all his come ons and stab happy hook, but he knows the layout of the island.” She patted Gold’s hand, soft enough not to infuriate, but stern to show her support. “You, Gold, will be and forever shall be our sous chef, master of the culinary arts, and connoisseur of soup!”

Gold broke out into a snicker. “Don’t tell Regina you said that.”

“I don’t plan to,” she insisted wryly. “So chin up. You have an island feast to organize!”

That seemed to brighten his mood. Now set on a new path that demanded more challenging obstacles in the form of papaya and coconut, Gold smiled and whipped out his trusty notebook.

After scratching a few preliminary ideas he looked up suddenly with a frown. “Not to be a blabbermouth, but did you hear that racket last night? I woke up from a constant banging through the walls and I swear I heard the faint echoes of screams.”

“Oh,” Mary Margaret frowned, “oh, that might have just been the aftereffects of the storm.”

At least, she was hoping it was just the storm.

Gold snickered behind his notebook. He could already hear the rusted wheels of her brain turning. “Must have been some storm, then.”

***

“Were you really serious about what you said back there? Am I really quartermaster? Or were you just making fun?”

Hook rolled his eyes to the seventh inquiry. David really was a dog with a bone. And he had the tendency to beat a dead horse. The propensity to use animal metaphors with these Charmings was astounding.

David trailed behind him like a golden retriever (again with the metaphors) while Hook inspected the ship for the last few leagues of their journey.

“What makes you think I would ever make fun of you?” Hook cackled and struck an arm around David’s shoulders. “The sea is a calling. You have to want it with everything you’ve got – every
fiber of your being. And you know what? You do. I could see it when you climbed that bird’s nest.”

“I was just thinking of my family. That’s all.”

“And that’s what makes you the right man for the job. You believe in protecting family. You know, a ship’s crew is not so unlike a family. I know now that if you have the cojones to face your fear of heights in order to save what’s precious, then I can certainly trust you with my crew.” His hand stretched out. “What do you say… quartermaster?”

David scratched the back of his neck bashfully. “I’ll have to check with the wife…”

“Ah, of course, mate. What’s a real man who doesn’t have the lady’s permission?”

David joined in the laughter.

Hook gave a roll of his eyes.

“Say,” David stuck a finger to his chin, “what are the chances of getting awarded with an authentic pirate’s hat?”

“What happened to the one you wore at the movie screening? That flick with Jack Whatshisname?”

“Captain Jack Sparrow,” David corrected severely. “And I did have in my possession a pirate’s hat, but when Regina found me out she banished it to some infernal realm – or so she says. I overheard Emma mentioning she wanted to put it to use.”

“Nice,” leered the pirate, nodding slowly before an oblivious David. “Anyway, about you earning your pirate’s cap… I will take it into consideration.”

“And perhaps I should grow a beard? You know, to make my new employment official.”

“By all means, go crazy.” Hook clapped him on the shoulder in a show of brotherly affection. “After all, what’s a real pirate without one?”

David beamed in rapturous delight.

***

And so her story ends… as it should… at the beginning of a new story.

Emma stands on the shores of Neverland more confident than before she embarked on this journey. She is far from home and in the company of people who certainly brought the right hook out of her. She traveled close to a whole month on the high seas with these people, this family and these less than pleasant individuals, and a surprising guest librarian. But no longer is the company unpleasant. Enemies they are not. Friends? Perhaps. The winds of time will tell.

They went through a special kind of hell to get to this beach, yet something told Emma it was worth it. Kissing Regina for the first time, even if it was to shut her up, was worth it. Punching Hook after he slipped a hand on her woman was almost as satisfying. Experiencing her first heart-to-heart with father dearest was consoling despite the hangover. And the first few seconds of being named the love of Regina’s life… well, that she wouldn’t trade for anything. And those hours after, of making love and unrestrained affirmations of the fact… she could die a happy ending.

Emma wouldn’t change anything about these past few weeks. Not when it brought her and Regina closer. And if this sandy beach ends at the feet of their smiling, beautiful boy then she owes a great
debt to the Jolly Roger and its motley crew.

“Emma!”

Head pulling from the clouds, Emma looks up to see Regina waving her to the tree line beyond the beach. Behind her Hook is holding up a chuckling David on his shoulders and reaching up into the island tree’s branches. An authoritative Gold stands off to the side, pointing them to a bundle of hanging coconuts (one of the ingredients for his coconut-lime tilapia). Mary Margaret was pulling her hair out in consternation.

Regina gives her a look that says, ‘I like these idiots but please don’t leave me alone with them.’ She quirks a smile. “Coming along, Princess?”

Emma laughs, rubbing a sweaty palm on her thigh. It’s now or never.

“Sure thing, Cupcake.”

Boots kicking up sand, she races up the shore towards the wiggling fingers stretching for her hand.

Emma Swan was never good at telling stories, but she definitely knows how to live one.

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