Summary

Emma's annual family reunion at a ski resort is coming up and she's sick of having to go alone. Family rules says you can only bring along someone you're dating and Emma's mom might have bothered her enough that Emma said she'd be bringing someone this year. The problem is Emma isn't dating anyone. What else is there to do but beg her best friend Regina to come and pretend to be her girlfriend for the trip? Family drama, uncomfortable conversations, and bed sharing abound.

- Inspired by Complex Relations [Art] by hollysparrilla
- Inspired by Complex Relations (ART) by RegalLady36
Chapter Notes

Technically Noise Compliants, a one-shot I wrote literal years ago, is the prequel to this story but it doesn't need to be read to enjoy this story at all. Just if you want to know how they met.

Major thanks to my wonderful artists and everyone on Discord for their support and cheering on. never would hve gotten this done with out the sprints and ability to complain.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

“Hey, Regina,” Emma said, as she walked right past the other woman and into Regina’s apartment without waiting for her to greet her.

“Please, come right in,” Regina’s voice was heavy with sarcasm, but lacked any real protest.

“Thanks,” Emma replied, seemingly not noticing Regina’s tone.

Regina frowned, as she shut her front door and followed Emma back into her apartment. Normally, Emma relaxed on Sunday nights, catching up on laundry and the like, and she always texted if she was going to swing by after eight at night. Not that Regina wasn’t always happy to see Emma, but this was not usually how Emma’s visits went. Everything had seemed fine when they were texting yesterday or had dinner a few days ago.

Emma threw herself face down on her friend’s large leather couch with a loud groan, pulling the blanket Regina kept thrown over the back of it on top of herself.

Regina rolled her eyes at Emma’s dramatics. “Come on, I’m sure it’s not that bad. What happened? Work? Or something else?” Regina moved her laptop off the couch, where she’d left it on while she answered the door to the coffee table before sitting down next to Emma’s feet.

“Something else,” Emma mumbled into the couch before sighing and rearranging herself into a more normal seating position against the arm and facing Regina. Regina grabbed part of the large blanket and pulled it over her lap as well as she mirrored Emma, sitting against the other arm of the couch.

Regina propped her head on her hand and waited, knowing Emma would tell her whatever it was soon enough. Emma stared at the ceiling, opening her mouth a few times, but shut it without saying anything. Regina’s curiosity was beyond piqued, but she vowed to give the blonde another few minutes before she started insisting on Emma explaining what was going on.

“So...” Emma began, just before Regina was about to start demanding answers as to what was making her act so off tonight. “Here’s the thing, I did something stupid.”

Regina merely raised an eyebrow in response as a smirk spread across her lips.

Emma rolled her eyes and tossed a throw pillow at the other woman, which missed completely, “Oh, shut up. Look, my family always has this big family thing every year, right?”
Regina nodded, she remembered the exaggerated stories of family drama Emma liked to regale her with at times—normally whenever her mother called.

Emma shifted anxiously on the couch before she threw off the blanket. She began to pace on the other side of the coffee table in front of the seated brunette. Regina’s head turned to follow Emma’s movements.

“Right. Well, this year’s is coming up in a couple of weeks and MM called.” Emma continued speaking without pausing and used hand gestures to convey her frustration, “And she reminded me that a few weeks ago I said I was going to bring someone with me—something I’d said because she had been so sure I wasn’t and was being so sweet about how I was all alone but that it was “okay, sweetie” and I, I just couldn’t take it.” Regina’s heart ached for her in empathy of mothers and expectations that were so different and yet had such similar results.

Emma ran her fingers through her hair, “So I told her, back then, that I was seeing someone and while I wasn’t sure, I was hoping they would come. And she was so stupidly skeptical, but she’d said alright and I, more or less, forgot about it.” Actually, the blonde had screamed into her pillow in frustration and forcibly blocked the conversation from her mind so she didn’t have to deal with it.

Regina was starting to guess where this was going.

“Then she calls an hour ago and reminds me that the trip is in a couple weeks and I’m coming by myself like usual, right? Unless that person I’d been seeing was still in the picture, of course. And I just can’t take it when she’s like that so I said they were and we were probably both coming. And she agreed so obviously skeptical that I doubled down and promised we’d be there and then I made an excuse and hung up the phone,” Emma finished hurriedly, wringing her hands together.

“Wow,” Regina replied, almost impressed by the mess Emma had managed to make for herself. “You really did do something stupid. Hm. You could call back and say that your significant other is out of town and blame bad timing? Hold them off with some staged pictures?”

“I thought about that,” Emma admitted. “But I’d rather actually bring someone. If there wasn’t that stupid rule about only bringing people you’re dating, I would have started bring along a friend years ago. This trip always ends up being way too much quality family time for my liking and I always wish I had someone else with me, just to complain to. But only SOs has been the rule since my parents starting coming—and no one’s been able to get grandparents or parents to budge. They just complain about not wanting strangers in our family photos.”

Regina nodded, “So, how long do you have to find someone to bring to your family reunion as your pretend date?” Regina began trying to think through all of Emma’s friends that she knew that Emma might want to pretend she was dating, while shoving anything that might seem like jealousy or wistfulness very far from her mind.

“Two weeks,” Emma admitted reluctantly. She sighed and ran her fingers through her hair, “I’d been hoping I could get Lacey to come, but she’s really too straight to pull it off and she’s not coming back from Australia until like two days after I leave.”

Emma sank back down onto the couch in dejected silence. After berating herself for putting it off, Emma glanced at Regina from the corner of her eye. Regina’s brow was furrowed as she tried to think of a way to help her friend. Emma swallowed and began, trying for casual and probably missing the mark by a mile, “So….” Emma purposefully looked away as she tested the waters, “You have some vacation days saved up, yeah?”

“Hm? Oh, yes. Almost three we—,” Regina replied before cutting herself off. She turned and gave...
Emma a narrow-eyed stare. “Why do you ask?”

Emma coughed, “I, uh, I was thinking, maybe, you’d come with me?” A hopeful and pleading expression grew on her face. “Please?”

Regina held up her hands in protest, surprised that Emma would ask her of all people, “I don’t think —.”

Emma pouted, “Come on, please?”

“I don’t really think I’m the one you want to bring home to your family.” Regina looked profoundly uncomfortable. “I’m not sure I would fit in or make a good impr—.”

“No, no, no,” Emma was quick to reassure her. “You’d be perfect. They always look at me like I’m lesser or something than them.” Emma frowned and then shook herself from the downward spiral that took her on, “And you’re better than, like, anyone—perfect to show them up. And I don’t really want you to like, make friends—I want to show them I have my own life, that I don’t need them and their opinions and their judgments and you’re so great at that ‘mightier-than-thou’ crap.”

“Thank you ever so much,” Regina replied sarcastically, but there was a smile curling the edges of her lips because Emma just called her ‘perfect’ and nothing else really mattered, especially not with Emma’s earnest green eyes pleading with her to understand.

“Sorry,” Emma smiled sheepishly. “That was supposed to be a compliment.”

She shifted on the couch cushions, studying Regina’s unsure expression and decided to admit the other truth she hadn’t been saying, “Look, forget what I told my mom, I just… I could really use someone there who I know is on my side, before anyone else. I always end up feeling like an outsider, at least a bit, and it be really great to have someone there for me. Please?” Emma automatically tried to cover up for her previous words with some bargaining, “I’ll make it up to you however you like.”

“I—” Regina started before trailing off, not sure how she wanted to end that sentence. She would do anything to make Emma happy, but could she handle something like this? It was so far outside of her comfort zone.

Emma took a deep breath and reigned herself in, “I don’t want to guilt you into doing this, but it’d make me feel so much better about the whole trip if I knew you’d be there with me.”

Regina knew she wanted to do this for Emma, she even wanted to meet the younger woman’s family, to a degree, but did she think she could handle a fake relationship when she desperately wanted a real one? One more look at Emma’s face gave her her answer. “Alright.”

“Really?” Emma blinked in surprise, not having expected Reina to actually agree. “You’ll do it?”

Regina felt her resolve strengthen in the face of Emma’s disbelief. Emma who, never asked for favors since she never expected to receive help—too used to being on her own, even after all these years. “I will.” She quickly pointed at Emma, not wanting the mood to get too heavy, “But you owe me, Swan. Got it?”

“Totally. Totally.” Emma agreed as a smile threatened to split her face in two. “Thank you so much. Seriously.”

“Yes, yes.” Regina tried to wave off Emma’s thanks, hoping she wasn’t blushing.
“And you’re really cool with pretending we’re dating?” Emma couldn’t help but double check, since she knew Regina would never actually want to date her.

“Yes, dear,” Regina added her typical endearment with a particularly sardonic twist.

Emma leaned forward and hugged her around the shoulders, “Thank you. Really, Regina. You’re the best.”

Regina put her own arms around her friend as well, “I know.”

Chapter End Notes

original idea for this story was from a tumblr post I saw ages ago: "hahahahahah so my friend told me that she and a friend of hers are faking a relationship right now because she wants to take him to this house in the mountains where they have yearly family reunions but only relatives and partners are allowed and she’s like yeah so we only have to act like we are a couple but we’re not of course it will be fun hahahahaha m8 i have read enough fanfiction to know where this is going"
Regina gave a firm squeeze to the blonde’s shoulders and pulled away. Emma could practically see “serious business” Regina coming out. How were all sides to this woman distinct and impressive? “Now, you’d better fill me in about this trip from the beginning because what little I remember you telling me was not very specific or promising. I need details.”

Regina reached to pick up her laptop once more, opening up a blank document, grabbed her reading glasses, and then looked at Emma expectantly.

“Really?” Emma asked, raising an eyebrow. “You’re gonna take notes?”

Regina lifted her chin. “I enjoy being organized and prepared, Miss Swan. I find it prevents surprises.”

Emma nodded, partly amused, but partly understanding. While she wasn’t crazy about surprises, she knew Regina really didn’t like them. And she was never going to argue against Regina wearing those glasses, not when they made her look so sexy librarian.

Regina nodded in response, “Good then. First off, what day do we leave?”

“Sunday, in two weeks,” Emma began. “I tend to leave middle-of-the-morning-ish. It’s kinda a long drive to Vermont, about four hours? I normally get there in time for a late lunch. My parents get there, at like, butt crack of dawn early, but everyone else gets there throughout the day—but before dark.”

Regina raised her eyebrow as she typed that out, “’Middle-of-the-morning-ish’? Can you be more specific? And you would drive?”

Emma frowned, trying to remember. She was exactly a precise person and generally left once she finished packing the morning of. “I don’t know, like around ten? And yeah, I’ll drive since I know where we’re going.” Then she gave a shrug, “Unless you really want to, I guess.”

“No, that’s fine. We can figure that out later. Continue.” Regina would have to see about leaving a bit earlier and make sure they took her car, not Emma’s death trap on wheels, but she knew better than to have that argument now—they’d never talk about anything else tonight if she let that derail them.

Emma nodded, “Okay. My whole extended family rents out this entire section of condos. It’s not exactly a family reunion but like everyone, from both sides of my family, comes—it helps that everyone knows each other because almost all of the adults still live in the same town and grew up together.”

Emma sat back and pulled up the pictures on her phone, flipping through them to see if she had any she could show Regina from last year, “The condos are really nice—like nice enough I still don’t want to ask how much they cost, especially since we upgraded after everyone started getting older and more people were bringing partners or had kids. We each contribute, but my parents set everything up and pay most of it.”

Regina nodded to show she was following along and leaned forward obligingly when Emma
showed her the white and grey condos covered in snow on her phone, which did look fairly new.

“So, what do you remember about my family?” Emma asked, rearranging herself to sit more comfortably, so she was cross legged and facing Regina on her unfairly large and comfortable couch. She couldn’t remember what frustrated or offhand comments she might have made to her friend in the past.

Regina frowned as she thought—she wanted to show that she paid attention when Emma spoke, but not give away exactly how closely she logged away any facts Emma let slip. Regina started with the obvious, “You were switched at birth and no one figured it out until you were a teenager, by which point the mother you had gone home with had died—when you were quite young—and you’d been placed in the foster system.” Emma nodded.

“And your birth parents were the ones who discovered the mix-up,” Regina recited, remembering when Emma had told her all of this the first time when Regina had asked why she sometimes called her mom “Mom” and other times by her first name. “And you went to live with them once all of this was figured out while you were in high school.”

“Right, regular soap opera stuff.” Emma shook her head—it was her life and she was still surprised by it sometimes. “I was sixteen when I had the weirdest meeting of my life with my social worker.”

“I can’t imagine what that must have been like,” Regina said, shaking her head as well, before frowning in concentration once more. “Your birth family’s name is Blanchard—Mary Margaret and David are your parents. Your adopted sister, who you were switched with, is Elsa. You have a much younger brother named Evan.”

“Yup,” Emma nodded, impressed. Regina had a great memory and always got details right, but Emma still couldn’t help the feeling of warmth that spread through her knowing Regina had thought her family nonsense was worth remembering. “You have a good memory. Evan was born like a month after I moved in, so he’s eight now, which seems pretty crazy. Elsa’s nice—responsible, pretty, smart,” Emma flapped a hand. “All that stuff. She works with MM in the town government. MM’s the mayor. David’s the sheriff.”

“So I’m guessing we’ll be in a condo with them?” Regina asked.

“Yup. In our condo will be my parents in one room, Elsa and her fiancé, Merida, in another, us in the remaining room, and then Evan will get the pull-out couch.” Emma smiled, “Gotta say, looking forward to not being kicked in my sleep by him since normally we get stuck together—Elsa and Merida have been dating for years and she’s been coming on the trip almost as long.”

Despite Emma’s words, it was clear she was fond of her siblings, “Besides, Evan likes sleeping in the middle of the action. Since MM unofficially runs everything with my family and we have one of the bigger condos, everyone tends to hang out and stop by our place so there’s always stuff going on.”

“Sleeping arrangements?” Regina asked, looking for more clarity than Emma’s brief overview.

“Right,” Emma said, as if thinking about the reality of staying together for the first time. “We’ll get our own room to share. One bed. Me and Elsa take turns with the different rooms so we’ll have the one with a queen bed, but also our own bathroom. That cool with you?”

“That’s fine,” Regina answered, writing that down. “Our own bathroom was more than I’d expected—I also wasn’t sure how prudish your parents were about non-married couples sharing rooms. Some of your stories…”
Emma laughed, “Dad’s mostly cool, more ‘I don’t want to see or hear about it’. Mom pretends we’re all innocent babies while also being super pushy about grandchildren and if she catches anything in action, she goes this hilarious shade of red, gives you a lecture about appropriate behavior, mutters something about porn, and then forcibly pretends it never happened.”

Regina snickered, “Wow. Alright then, you’ll have to share some stories later. That sounds like something specific happened. How about packing? Anything in particular I need to bring that isn’t obvious?”

Emma considered it, “Not really.” Emma thought she remembered Regina saying her family used to go skiing, “You have your own ski gear?” Regina nodded. “Great, then bring that obviously. I’ll try not to snowboard circles around you.”

Regina rolled her eyes, but Emma interrupted her by snapping her fingers before she could give a clever retort. “Oh! We have a hot tub, so bring a bathing suit, if you want.” She nibbled her lip in a distracting way, “I think that’s it though.”

“How about, well, act.” Emma furrowed her brow slightly, she knew Regina was referring to the fake dating, but she wasn’t sure in what way.

Regina could read Emma’s confusion on her face and tried to clarify, “I mean, do you want us to act sickly sweet to each other? With ridiculous pet names and that sort of thing? Because I really don’t think I can do that. Do you want me to act like some sort of ideal girlfriend or like some particular character…?” Regina wrung her hands, clearly frustrated and uncomfortable.

“No, no,” Emma reassured her. “I want you to be you, just, you know, a you that’s dating me.” She realized that probably wasn’t very helpful and gave a huff.

“Do you want me to be particularly friendly and try to win them over?” Regina asked, sensing Emma’s inability to express what she wanted as it happened relatively often. “Play nice with your parents? If I was dating you, I expect I would want your parents to like me.”

“No really?” Emma offered instinctively. She hadn’t really thought this far ahead since she’d never really expected Regina to agree. She did know what she wanted, but she wasn’t sure how to describe the impression she wanted Regina to give.

“I don’t want you to be mean,” she said slowly. “But like, I want them to have to work for it a little. Almost like they have to get your approval, if that makes sense. Maybe channel your like, work self?” Emma said, remembering the few times they had gotten dinner right after Regina came home from work. Regina always took some time to switch herself out of her professional mindset, especially if she was annoyed about something from work that day, which was often. If Regina was to be believed, every client she worked with was a moron.

Regina frowned, trying to follow along. “How do you mean?”

“Like, like. I don’t know. I just…” Emma made a frustrated noise, “My parents are always so nice and charming and everyone always loves them instantly. I’d like it if just once someone didn’t immediately fall for them and they actually had to work a bit harder to win someone over,” Emma frowned, she had always wished she had some of that natural charm.

Regina nodded slowly; she began to understand what Emma wasn’t saying. In the beginning, Emma
had said something about having someone who was on her side first. Maybe Emma was used to friends or even people she had dated, getting along well with her parents—to the extent that they would gang up on her. She knew the few people she had brought home, school friends and the like, had always said how nice her mother seemed and how she must exaggerate how strict or angry she could get. Nothing made Regina shut down faster or stop sharing her feelings than people saying those sorts of things.

Truthfully, from what Emma had told her—in bits and pieces and reading between the lines—Regina wasn’t sure she wanted to warm up to her parents. The way they so often seemed to disregard Emma’s…everything… made Regina want to shake them. Emma seemed to keep so much of herself from her parents’, for good reason given how they acted, and it made Regina so sad and frustrated for her friend.

If they really were dating, Regina would have tried hard to get them to like her, but she wasn’t sure she would have been able to put aside her own anger at them if they actually acted the way Emma described. It would be interesting to have Emma’s approval to have them earn a good opinion from her. “Alright,” Regina said, trying to communicate she thought she understood what Emma was aiming for, “I’ll treat them more as a prospective client, who needs to impress me to get my business, than a girlfriend’s parents whom I want to like me, yeah?”

Emma beamed, “Perfect. This is even better than I thought. Someone like Lacey would be giving them what they expected—a fling relationship, no commitment, blah blah blah, but this will be even better.”

“That’s what they expect?” Regina said, interrupting, but unable to contain her surprise that that was Emma’s parents’ impression of her.

Emma shrugged, blushing slightly as she rubbed the back of her neck. “Yeah, I used to be more like that in high school and college, all the moving around in the foster system didn’t help when it came to longer term anything. Not so much anymore, but you know how people hold onto the version of you they know.”

Regina nodded, she had a neighbor from when she was younger that she still saw for dinner sometimes and while she was perfectly nice, she never seemed to recognize that Regina was an adult, not a high school student.

Emma continued, “And I’ve never brought a girlfriend home, only boyfriends. They don’t really hear me when I say I’m bi, they mainly think I’m confused or trying to be shocking or whatever. Plus, they’re kinda the type of people who hear bisexual and think ‘indecisive’ and ‘lots of sex’.”

Regina’s face hardened; she did remember hearing Emma talk about how her parents treated her sexuality—like it was a phase. Oh yes, she was definitely looking forward to making them work for her approval.

“Lacey would have been perfect to sort of, take that stereotype and dial it up. It would have been funny to give them exactly what they expected, you know?” Regina did understand, but felt a moment of doubt creep in that maybe she wasn’t the right choice for this before Emma continued.

“But you,” Emma said, smiling in a way that made Regina’s heart turn over in her chest. “You’re like giving them the opposite of what they would expect. What they would never think I could have. A real relationship. Steady girlfriend. One who’s put together and professional. A serious, adult relationship they can’t just brush off.”

Regina reached out and placed her hand over Emma’s on the couch, “I can do that.”
Emma’s smile broadened, “I know you can.”

“So,” Regina said, knowing she needed to move on from this moment of them staring into each other’s eyes before she did something foolish. “I take that to mean that we’ve been “dating” for more than a few weeks?”

“Yeah, I think so.” A thoughtful expression crossed Emma’s face, “A couple months, at least.” Then she waved it off, “We can figure out those details on the drive up or something. I just feel like I’m forgetting something else.”

“Well, while you think, can you give me some official names of where we’re going and staying and the like?” Regina asked.

“Sure.”

A few minutes later as Regina was looking over some websites for where they were going, Emma suddenly snapped her fingers, “I almost forgot, you’ll need at least one fancy outfit. We always go out to the Bay House and rent out the whole top floor. It’s the only really fancy dinner we have. We do go out to eat a couple different times, just not everyone all together.”

Regina hummed at that, “I think I remember you telling me about this, or rather the dresses your mother made you wear?”

“Urgh, yes,” Emma groaned dramatically. “You know I don’t have a ton of dresses—except for like two summer ones and then some club ones that are “not appropriate” according to my mom when I was 21 and I tried to wear one of those.” Emma rolled her eyes, “So every year MM makes me wear some dress she picks out and it’s always horrible. And then she puts the pictures up on Facebook with stupid comments about how cute I look.”

Regina raised an eyebrow, “Pictures?”

“Come on,” Emma whined. “Do you really need to witness past humiliations? You’ll have a front row seat this year!”

“Show me,” Regina said flatly, and passed Emma her laptop. Emma sighed with resignation; she should have known Regina would take the fashion issue the most seriously of all the others so far. She grumbled as she logged onto her account and brought up her mother’s albums. Sure enough, everything from the past few years was on there, dutifully labeled and sorted.

She reluctantly turned toward Regina so she could see the screen too. “This was last year’s.”

On the screen was an awkward Emma with her hair pulled high wearing a pale pink dress. Regina supposed that objectively, Emma herself looked nice, on her own, and the dress wasn’t horrible on its own either, but the combination just looked so alien and not Emma that Regina could barely keep from cringing the way Emma seemed to be in the picture. “Oh goodness. Is she trying to make you look like you’re getting ready for prom? In the fifties?”

“I know, I know. Trust me, I know,” Emma said as she switched tabs and there was another picture, the background faintly recognizable from the previous picture. This dress was too long, too straight, didn’t fit Emma, and had a giant flower across it.

“What was she thinking when she put you in that?” Regina asked, completely serious.

“No idea,” was all Emma would say as she switched the page again. The next dress was white, had lace in strange places, and a ruffled collar.
“Does she have some sort of visual problem?” Regina was actually rather serious about this question because Emma was a pretty girl and to make her look bad took effort. “Is she doing this on purpose as some sort of passive aggressive punishment? Making you go out in public like that?”

“No clue.” Emma shook her head, she wasn’t very into fashion herself, but her mom clearly had issues. “I do think she genuinely thinks they look nice. I can probably find the others, but that was before she got Facebook so…”

“Don’t bother,” Regina dismissed with a wave of her hand. “I’ve seen enough. Why do you let her keep doing this? Why not just buy your own dress?”

Emma shrugged. “I don’t know. I don’t really care that much. It’s only the one night and dresses are expensive and you know I’m not a huge shopper. It’s just easier to let her play dress up for the night.” She was a masochist was probably closer to the truth, her heart lifting at having a mother to help her dress and sinking as she sees how little she understands Emma.

“Well, not this year,” Regina replied decisively. “I refuse to let such a travesty continue on my watch.”

“Regina—” Emma tried to protest.

“Oh no, I would never let a woman I was with be subjected to this, even if it is pretend. Give me your measurements and I’ll find you something suitable.”

“You don’t need to do that.”

“Of course I don’t, but someone needs to teach that woman.” Regina continued muttering, what Emma assumed were insults against her mother, under her breath.

Emma tried not to find it endearing and flattering. She failed. “Alright. If you really want to.”

“Oh, I do. Now, type your size information here. I’m assuming you don’t want to come shopping with me? Do you want it to be a dress? Or would you prefer a suit? Or a separate top and skirt?”

“Oh, I don’t know.” Emma blinked, “I don’t really care.” Then she actually gave it some thought. She really did hate those dresses and how MM refused to listen to her opinions. And Regina did know her style, “A dress, I guess. Show her up at her own game.”

Regina smirked wickedly, “Perfect.”

Emma stared at the smirk on Regina’s face and laughed, “Wow, you are so competitive.”

“Please,” Regina scoffed. “Like you’re any better. How is that plan to beat all of Will Scarlett’s times at the gym going?” she teased.

“Shut up,” Emma replied, mainly on principle before a sly grin crossed her face, “And I’m totally crushing him.”


Emma spent the rest of the evening regaling Regina with stories of reunions past, and not just the crazy or funny stories. Regina took actual notes as she attempted to keep the truly impressive number of Emma’s relatives straight in her head until far later than either should be staying up on a Sunday night seeing as they each had work the next day.
“I think that’s everything I can think of to ask,” Regina said with a sigh of relief, her eyes flicking over the document with her notes.

Emma placed a hand on Regina’s upper arm to get her attention, “You don’t really have to do this, you know that right? It’s a huge favor and I know it’s not exactly fun…” Emma even felt better, just having talked all this through with someone.

“You say that now, after we’ve already stayed up this late and I’ve gotten all the information?” Regina asked mildly. Emma smiled sheepishly and opened her mouth to apologize but Regina held up her hand. “Emma, I know I don’t have to do anything. I don’t mind, really. If the situation was reversed, wouldn’t you help me out?”

Emma nodded without needing to think. “But it’s not the same because you don’t really…” Regina had some extended family members that she wasn’t close with, but her parents had died sometime in the last few years. A half-sister she hadn’t meet until she was an adult was not the same as the amount of family Emma was having her help out with.

Regina gave her a look, “It’s exactly the same, so there you go. It certainly won’t be boring, now will it? I’m happy to help, really.”

“Alright. Alright. Thanks,” Emma gave her a small, but very sincere smile.

Regina smiled back reflexively before a wicked glint appeared in her eye, “Don’t be so grateful. This favor now makes you fair game to drag to my many, many corporate functions.”

Emma groaned, falling back on the couch dramatically, “Come on, that’s not fair. You always go on about how boring those things are.” Regina just smirked triumphantly until Emma threw the remaining throw pillow on her side of the couch at Regina’s face. “You’re evil.”

Chapter End Notes

AU: are hard to make Emma have her personality and still have MM and David as her birth parents. Soap opera tropes to the rescue.
“Here we are,” Emma announced as they drove under the large archway. “We’re looking for the “Enchanted Forest” campground.”

Regina raised an amused eyebrow, “Really?”

They’d spent most of the drive discussing their fake backstory, which was more or less the same as their actual history as friend, except that they’d started dating a few months ago. It was only the last hour that they’d switched to a casual on and off chat/music commentary.

“Yup, don’t get me started,” Emma replied, keeping an eye out for their turn off. She was finally used to driving Regina’s SUV—it had only taken the entire trip up. She’d planned to take her Bug, but Regina had strongly vetoed driving a car like that anywhere up north in the snow. Emma realized she should have expected the argument—Regina didn’t even like that she drove it just outside of Boston occasionally. Emma usually tried to avoid driving around Boston at all.

Regina’s SUV was more practical and fit more of their stuff, so Emma had caved. Plus, Regina was the one doing her the favor. At least, she got to drive.

“It certainly is very pretty,” Regina said, looking out the window as they turned left. It had been a while since she’d taken a vacation in the mountains. She hoped she hadn’t lost all of her skiing skill.

“Yeah, almost lets the off the hook from calling it “Enchanted”.” Emma said, rolling her eyes. “Almost.”

Emma pulled into one of the spaces marked for building three and shut off the engine. She took a deep breath and Regina reached over to put her hand on Emma’s upper arm. Regina smiled as she gave Emma’s arm an encouraging squeeze, “I’ve got your back, Swan.”

Emma grinned at that, “I know you do. Let’s go.”

Regina nodded and pulled her hand away to undo her seat belt. Emma shook her head to clear her thoughts, both about her nerves over the weekend in general, her worries if they could keep their fake backstory straight, and disappointment that Regina had let go of her arm. Stupid thought, Emma scolded herself, you can’t get out of the car if Regina’s holding your hand like a little kid.

She threw herself out of the car and went around to the trunk, trying to ignore the sudden chill she got from leaving the heated car. As she was debating what to pull out first, a small form ran towards them, half tackling Emma in a hug, “Hey, Emma!”

Emma laughed and ruffled the boy’s brunette hair, “Henry, what’s up? God, you’re tall,” she said almost reflexively. The twelve-year-old wasn’t taller than her yet, but he would be soon—it was crazy.

Henry scowled at the predictable response, should he have shrunk instead? Of course he was getting taller. Adults were so unoriginal. Still his parents raised him polite and he automatically thanked her before moving on to more important news, “I’m so glad you’re here. Did you get a new car? Aunt MM is checking all the houses, making sure everything’s alright or something. She keeps humph-ing like stuff’s dirty or something even though everything’s fine.” He rolled his eyes in preteen exasperation.

Emma nodded with a bemused smile on her lips, knowing there was no interrupting her cousin once
he got going. He was clearly dedicated to getting her up to speed. Emma got along well with Henry; he was little when she joined the family and had treated her like a hero returning from a mystical quest—it had been hard not be won over by that.

“Aunt Rory and Aunt Mulan aren’t here yet, and we only just got here.” He was about to say more when he heard the passenger door shut. His eyes widened, “Did you bring someone with you?”

Regina rounded the corner at that moment, breath puffing lightly in the air and Emma gestured to her, “Yeah, my girlfriend, Regina.” It was the first time she’d actually called Regina that to another person. It sent a thrill of pride through her, just the idea that she could be with someone like Regina. “Regina, this is my cousin.”

“Nice to meet you,” Henry said automatically, holding out his hand for a hand shake. He was politer and shyer in front of a stranger than he had been seconds ago with Emma.

Regina smiled at the boy, remembering pictures and stories of one of Emma’s favorite cousins. “Hello, you must be Henry. Emma’s told me all about you.” She gave a little wink at the end that made Emma stifle a laugh—Regina’s scrunch when she tried to wink was adorable.

Henry grinned at that too before eyeing Emma slyly. “Well, she’s never mentioned you.”

Emma scowled and swatted at the boy. “Hey, trying to get me in trouble already?” She put her hands on her hips and glared at him. Regina turned around from pulling out her own suitcase to see him stick his tongue out at his older cousin. “And I have told you about her. She lives in my apartment building. We became friends before we started dating.”

“Wait,” Henry’s face screwed up in concentration before he snapped his fingers, “Oh! Is she the angry neighbor who cooks really well?”

Emma blushed bright red at that description and Regina burst out laughing, “Yes, that would be me, dear.”

“Cool,” Henry said with a cheeky grin.

Regina went back to grab her gloves since she just realized she’d left them and Emma glared down at Henry. “I can’t believe you told her that,” Emma muttered, crossing her arms. “Just wait until you have someone you want to bring.”

Henry just continued to grin before his eyes lit up, “I’ll go get Evan, he’ll want to meet her too.”

He turned to run back into the condo. Emma barely resisted the urge to yell after him to watch out for ice as she grabbed their last bag and closed the trunk. Regina had rejoined her at the back of the car. They exchanged secret smiles, that had been the first person they’d had to practice with and it seemed to have gone well. Then Regina turned to look at their bags, “The gear?”

Emma slung her own duffle bag over her shoulder, “We can bring your skis and my board in later—I’d rather get the rest in and like, go to the bathroom.”

“I agree,” Regina replied, pulling on the handle of her rolling suitcase.

They heard the front door open and another male voice, “Emma!”

A good-looking blonde man rounded the mini-van next to them, a large smile on his lips, “You made it, kiddo!”
“Hey dad,” Emma said, returning his one-armed hug around her shoulders. “Of course I made it.”

“Well…” He equivocated as he let her go, eyes twinkling with mischief.

Emma rolled her eyes, “Oh come on, that happened years ago.”

David grinned, “Right.” Then his eyes moved from his daughter to the young woman she’d brought with her, who’d been quietly hanging back. It seemed that despite his wife’s doubts, Emma had in fact brought a guest. “Since Emma can’t seem to remember her manners, I’ll introduce myself.” Even though he was fairly sure the other woman already knew who he was given the way she was watching him, he continued, “David Blanchard, Emma’s dad.”

Regina reached out to shake his hand, an automatic polite smile crossing her lips as she measured the man up. “Pleasure to meet you, Mr. Blanchard.”

Unlike Emma’s mother, who Regina had already decided to dislike, she wasn’t as sure about Emma’s dad. Emma’s stories about him were more mixed, Regina’s impression had been more of a Dad trying his best unlike Emma’s mother seemed to be. “My name is Regina Mills, Emma’s girlfriend.”

“Please, just call me David,” he smiled. “You’re the first, ah, partner Emma’s ever brought along so I’m looking forward to get to know the girl who is special enough to make the cut.” He gave her a wink as Emma pinked slightly, before reaching down, “But first, let me help you two with these bags.”

“Thank you,” Regina said, handing over her suitcase so she could carry her garment bag. She could see why Emma had said his nickname in his youth had been “Prince Charming”. Still, she remembered what Emma had said about that and was sure to remain polite and nothing more. It was going to take more than polite small talk to win her over.

“This way,” David said, gesturing with his head to the condo to their left. “Your mom’s making sure everything’s all set. Elsa and Merida are helping Grandpa and the Knights move their stuff in—the kids were proving more of a distraction than a help, which is why Henry’s running around here somewhere with Evan and Melody.”

“Yeah,” Emma replied as she followed him. “He just ambushed us at the car.”

“Should’ve known he would get to you first,” David said, shaking his head. He pulled open the front door to the blue grey condo labelled #3 and ushered the girls in. “Come in, come in – no sense freezing out there yet – plenty of time for that the rest of the week.

“Mary Margaret! Emma’s here!” He called into the house as he directed Emma and Regina to closet where they could hang up their coats. By the time they’d done so, along with some back and forth juggling of bags, there was the sound of footsteps down stairs.

David nudged Emma further into the kitchen from the foyer so that she could greet her mother, while Regina was the last to finish with the closet as the only one who had a scarf.

“Emma!” the brunette woman who could only be Emma’s mother swept her up in a suffocating hug. “How was your drive? Please tell me you didn’t take that beat up car up here again.

“Hi mom,” Emma gasped from the hug, “The bug is perfectly fine and in perfect working order.”

“Emma…” Mary Margaret said, disapproval evident in her voice. Regina already didn’t like the way this woman was talking to Emma, like she was a child. It was grating on her nerves so much she felt
retroactively guilty for voicing similar concerns about Emma’s precious bug. “I just worry about you and that car is too old.”

“Well, it doesn’t matter,” Emma cut off the familiar lecture, one she’d been getting from MM since she’d shown up with the bug years ago. Deciding there was no better opener, Emma tilted her head back toward David and Regina, “We didn’t take my car up.”

Mary Margaret’s brow crinkled as she peered around Emma and actually jumped a little in surprise when her eyes moved past her husband to Regina standing behind him. “Emma…” She looked sharply at her daughter, but mostly sounded confused, “Who’s your friend?”

Emma tensed and Regina tried to remember that Emma had in fact already come out to the woman. Still, Regina felt the game face she normally only reserved for the court room coming on, her whole body stiffening and straightening like it used to whenever she saw her own mother. She wished David wasn’t in the between her and her friend. Emma gritted her teeth a bit as she began, “Regina, she’s—

Mary Margaret put her hands on her hips as she finally let Emma go from the world’s longest hug. “You know you can’t bring friends,” Mary Margaret admonished. She turned to Regina with an overly apologetic look on her face that Regina wanted to slap off. “I’m sorry, Regina, but Emma shouldn’t have invited you.”

She reached out a hand as if to comfort Regina from the devastating blow that Emma had invited her under false pretenses and she wouldn’t be able to stay for the wonderful Blanchard family vacation, “I’m sure it’s not your fault.”

Emma couldn’t believe how far Mary Margaret was taking this—she had told her she was bringing a guest, plus she could see the fire building in Regina’s eyes. “Mom!”

Mary Margaret looked at her daughter with surprised disappoint that she would yell in front of a guest, “Don’t be rude, Emma.”

Emma made an exasperated noise in the back of her throat, “I’m not, I’m just trying to ex—”

Now Mary Margaret was scowling at her daughter and forgetting their audience of one in the form of Regina, “Interrupting me is rude. You shouldn’t—”

“MM—” David tried to cut in to help his daughter out. He only succeeding in making it to his wife’s side before she rounded on him as well.

“She is,” MM protested, sounding like a spoiled child to Regina’s ears. “You know her friend can’t stay.” Then her eyes narrowed as she eyed him suspiciously. “Don’t tell me you said she could stay because—”

“Excuse me,” Regina said, her clear voice cutting through all of the nonsense. She rested a hand in the small of Emma’s back in an attempt to offer some comfort to her visibly distressed friend, but her eyes never left Mary Margaret’s. “Mrs. Blanchard, I’m afraid we,” she purposed used the collective pronoun to refer to herself and Emma, “Have not been clear. I’m not her friend, I’m her girlfriend.”

Mary Margaret froze at that and her brows drew together. “What?” She didn’t sound angry, just patiently confused—as though a small child had just told her that the grass was purple.

Regina raised her eyebrows, she could play this game if Mary Margaret wanted to. “Her partner? Significant other?” Regina listed, as though the word “girlfriend” was what was giving Emma’s mother trouble, which to be fair it was.
“We’re dating,” Regina said, somehow managing to give the impression she was looking down at Mary Margaret from over the top of glasses she wasn’t wearing. “I’m sorry, I’m not sure how else to make it any clearer than that.”

Mary Margaret finally bristled at that, “I understand what dating means.”

“Wonderful.” Only her supporting hand on Emma’s back kept Regina from clapping her hands together in triumph. She gave the older woman a frigid smile, “Then we’re all the same page.”

“Emma…” Mary Margaret said, turning from Regina to stare down her daughter.

Emma had finally regained her equilibrium after Mary Margaret had thrown her off from acting as though they’d never had that conversation just a couple weeks ago about this trip. “What, MM?”

Emma crossed her arms and leaned back slightly against Regina’s hand. “I told you I would be bringing my girlfriend, remember?”

“No,” said Mary Margaret firmly. “I would have remembered if you’d said g…” She shook her head slightly before trying again. “You said you’d been dating someone, I thought he, you never said, said it was a, a…” She started to get more and more flustered as Emma just stared at her expectantly.

“Well, alright. It’s fine.”

She brushed her hands on her pants and turned to give Regina what had to be fake smile, “Delightful to meet you, Regina.”

Regina smiled just as stiffly back, “Of course.”

Emma just wanted to get away from this situation, “Great, we’ll be going up to our room then.”

Emma started to make her way passed the kitchen when Mary Margaret, reached out to stop her after she’d taken a few steps. “Wait, I hadn’t realized… I’ll need a moment to finish getting it ready.”

Emma frowned at her mom, her brow wrinkling, “Um, o-kay.”

The mildly awkward silence between the three left in the kitchen was broken by the sound of scratching at the door. David went to answer it while Emma and Regina shared look.

A bark was all the warning they got before a dog came in through, tail wagging excitedly at the new people.

He went right up to Regina and began sniffing her. Luckily Emma recognized the Dalmatian as her cousins. “Pongo,” she said, mild exasperating in her voice. Archie had always recruited her for her ability to find the dog, if not actually catch him. “What are you doing here by yourself? Don’t worry Regina, he’s friendly.”

To her surprise, Regina knelt down and began petting him, “I can see that. Aren’t you a handsome boy?”

Emma was a bit surprised; she hadn’t actually realized Regina liked dogs so much. It made her smile to see her rather formal friend play with the dog. Emma did make sure to grab the end of the leash that was still attached to his collar while Pongo was distracted—Archie should be by soon.

“In here, Archie,” David called to someone outside and a minute later, a thin be-speckled man came in through the door.

“Hey, Uncle David, did Pongo…?” Archie asked, slightly out-of-breath, before spotting his dog in
the kitchen. “Oh, good.”

“Hey Archie,” Emma greeted, waving a hand that held the end of the leash. Archie gave her a relieved smile.

Archie came further in to take the offered leash from Emma, “Hi Emma, does that mean the Blanchards are all here?”

They exchanged a brief one-armed hug. He was one of the cousins she got along well with, even if they didn’t have a lot in common. He knew how not to ask too many questions and just let her be—must be the therapist in him, even before the degree. “Yup, we were the last to arrive.” She gestured to herself and Regina.

“Oh, sorry,” he seemed to just now realize a stranger was with Pongo, so unexpected was the sight. Emma had never brought anyone with her to the lodge. He looked the woman petting Pongo and held out his hand with a welcoming smile, “I’m Archie Nolan.”

Regina looked up and realized she’d remembered this man from some of the group photos Emma had shown her. She could only remember Emma saying he was a lot nicer than his brother. She gave Pongo one last scratch before standing up and shaking his offered hand, “Regina Mills.”

“Nice to meet you,” Archie said with clear sincerity. He gave Emma an approving smile, before tugging Pongo away, “Sorry to run so soon, but we were heading over to Ella and Tom so I could watch Alexa for a bit—she’s a little fussy after the drive.”

“That’s alright,” David said, clapping Archie on the shoulder. “I’m sure they need the help. We’ll see you tonight?”

“Of course,” Archie said with a smile, everyone came to dinner tonight. He waved goodbye and then pulled a clearly regretful Pongo away from his new best friend.

Mary Margaret came down the next moment, looking only mildly flushed from going up and down the stairs. Emma saw her with what looked like Evan’s Pokémon suitcase and put it behind the pullout couch. Emma scowled, realizing that of course her mom had never believed her and had gone so far as to put all of Evan’s stuff in the room Emma would be sharing with Regina since that’s where he would have been staying if she’d come alone.

“Your room’s all set,” MM told Emma and Regina with forced cheerfulness. “It’ll be the one to the left of the top of the stairs.”

“Perfect,” Regina said, another polite smile her lips. “Shall we?”

“Sure,” Emma said easily, loving the obviously false politeness Regina was exhibiting. David was frowning a little in confusion, likely because while Regina had been a bit formal with him and Archie, it hadn’t rang so stiff. Mary Margaret seemed to not be understanding why someone would have such an attitude with her.

Regina held her garment bag over her shoulder and took her suitcase from David, before heading straight past Mary Margaret without looking her. “Emma?” she called behind her as she started up the stairs.

Emma blinked and realized she’d been frozen, watching Regina dismiss everyone else so effectively. “Coming.” She grabbed her own other bag from David and hurried after Regina.

Regina led them both into the room and Emma closed the door behind them, dropping her bags
down with a thump as Regina laid her garment bag down on the bed.

The room was painted a light grey with touched of green for the bedspread and curtains. She could see a door to her right that was likely a closet, a dresser, and an open door on the other side of the room which led to the in-suite bathroom. Regina stared at it all blankly as she went through what just happened in her head.

“So… I think it’s going pretty well,” Emma announced to the room in general, watching Regina out of the corner of her eye.

“I’m going to set your mother on fire,” Regina deadpanned.

Emma laughed loudly at that and went to sit down on the bed, “Yeah, I noticed. Lucky I didn’t ask you to play nice, right?”

Regina glared at her before smiling ruefully, “That would not have worked.”

Yeah, no shit.” Emma flopped back on to bed, staring up at the ceiling. Her mind wandered to how different this vacation was already turning out to be from what it usually was. It was funny how bringing someone else was both making her feel more like part of the family and as if she was a stranger too, looking from the outside as she tried to see how everything must seem from Regina’s perspective. God, maybe this was a mistake, Regina was going to think she was such a weirdo with an obnoxious family.

Regina hung up her bag and then went back to the bed. She knew Emma had told her not to try to be any friendlier to her family than she wanted to be, but she might not have expected things to get off on such a wrong foot, “Look, I didn’t mean to…”

“Tell my mom off as soon as you met her?” Emma finished for her as she sat up with a smile. Regina looked more unsure in this moment than Emma had ever seen her. It was enough to ground Emma back down. She let the smile stay on her face as she tried to let her casual tone of voice show she wasn’t upset, or whatever Regina seemed worried about. “It’s fine—it was actually pretty funny.” It really was, Emma let her smile grow to a grin, “She always thinks she knows what’s going on, it kinda drives me crazy.”

Regina searched her face for an extra second or two before she allowed herself a small smile of her own, “I can see that.”

“It’s part of why she’s the worst,” Emma pseudo-confided, tilting her head to the side.

Regina nodded, before venturing, “Your dad seemed fine though, although he really wasn’t much help with your mother.”

Emma sighed and the smile slid from her face leaving her looking tired, “Yeah, he never is.” She shook her head a bit and cut him some slack mentally, she knew he at least tried to understand her and not just assume he did. “Mary Margaret’s basically a living steamroller.”

Regina chuckled, “I’m certainly not going to disagree with that assessment.”

Emma laughed lightly at that and then looked for something to change the subject. Her eyes landed on the garment bag now hanging in the closet. “Hey, am I gonna get to see my dress for dinner?”

Regina narrowed her eyes, “Not until tonight, you said you wanted it to be surprise.”

Emma sighed overdramatically, “I did, didn’t I?”
“No one to blame but yourself, I’m afraid,” Regina replied, teasing glint evident in her eye.

“Oh, shut up,” Emma said, sticking her tongue out.

Regina didn’t even dignify that bit of childishness with a response, instead starting to sort through her bags and put away clothes.

Emma pouted at the lack of reaction and then ducked in to use the bathroom. When she was done, Regina went in to put some of her own stuff away. Eventually, both of them were quickly and efficiently putting away clothes or hanging things or putting toiletries in the bathroom, working around each other without a thought. Both of them wanted to think about what had happened and mentally prepare for the rest of the trip.

Regina had thought it might be hard not to try to get Emma’s parents to like her, after all she cared about Emma and wanted to get along with her family. Instead, she could barely stop herself from laying into the woman Regina knew caused Emma so much heartache. Even Emma’s father reminded her of her own in all the wrong ways—like failing to stand up to a stronger-willed wife for his daughter’s sake, even if it wasn’t as bad as her Papa had been.

Her eyes darted to where Emma was putting some shirts away, a worried frown on her face. She was here to support her friend in any way she could, not vent her own frustrations. Still, the uncharacteristic furrowed brow concerned her more than she would have liked. She’d just have to pay extra close attention and make sure to support Emma, one hundred percent.

Everything had felt so natural with Henry, even her dad had gone alright. Emma found that she did want them to know Regina, after all, she was the closest friend she had. And then with MM… How blatantly she hadn’t believed Emma could get a SO to bring with her that she hadn’t even waited to put Evan’s stuff in there. It was worse knowing that Emma wasn’t actually dating Regina, but still MM could have at least pretended to believe her.

The girlfriend thing was another issue entirely. Emma hadn’t thought MM would be so obvious about her continued belief in Emma’s sexuality being a “phase”. She was so tired of MM acting like she was trying to get attention or rebel or something by saying she liked girls too. Like she trying to act like Elsa. Like MM knew Emma better than Emma knew herself. She’d hoped having a guest would make MM back off, but it didn’t seem to have worked. Emma supposed it had been a long shot after all.

Before Emma could get lost in still more thoughts, her stomach spoke up to distract her.

Regina grinned at the typical Emma Swan appetite. “Hungry?”

“Hey, it’s totally justified,” Emma protested, it wasn’t her fault half the time they hung out it was right before dinner and her stomach was so vocal. “It’s been forever since the rest stop we had breakfast at.”

Regina held her hands up in protest, “I’m not disagreeing.”

“Good,” Emma said resolutely. “’Cause you only had a coffee and it’s like 1:00 – we need to refuel if we’re gonna survive this week.”

Regina rolled her eyes, “Well, if our very survival is on the line…”

Emma nodded decisively, “And it is.”

Regina gestured to the door, “Then all I say is, after you, honey.”
It was Emma’s turn to roll her eyes, “Ha, ha—very funny.” Nevertheless, she opened the door and led the way out of the privacy of their room to face the rest of her family once again.
Emma eyed the way Regina had switched her focus to coaxing the lodge’s contrary ragdoll cat, Duchess to sit in her lap, while ignoring everyone around her and figured it was probably time to retreat for the afternoon. They were in the living room of her parent’s condo where they’d been since they finished their light lunch. Various relatives had come and gone, saying “hi” and needing to be introduced to Regina each time.

Unfortunately, it looked like no one else new had come this year, which left Regina the sole focus of that sort of familial attention. Merida had been coming with Elsa for years now, the wedding was more of a formality to everyone—she was already family. Ella Lucas and Thomas were married last year, although they certainly suffered all the baby attention. Viktor never brought anyone ever. Archie had a bad break up months ago he was obviously still dealing with. Even August, who tended to bring a new girlfriend each year had come stag—apparently his last girlfriend had done a number on him and he was mining his sadness for a book or something.

Ruby was as opaque as always about her dating life in front of everyone, she could go from bringing someone new each year to bringing no one for years in a row, but Emma knew her cousin would talk more freely when they were on their own.

Everyone else was either too old or too young to be bringing someone new. Emma silently vowed she wouldn’t put up a single word of protest when she found out what crappy corporate event Regina dragged her to in revenge for this—she would deserve it.

“Wow, really?” Emma replied automatically to her uncle Leroy as he continued to tell her about a trip he’d taken with her aunt to Europe. She glanced around for a clock, knowing if she tried to look at her phone her mother would appear to scold her for ignoring family, and hoped it was starting to get close enough to dinner that her and Regina could make excuses about needing to get ready so they could have some time to themselves to recharge.

“Yes, Merida was so kind to give us some tips on all the best places to go,” Aunt Astrid said, drawing Merida, Elsa, and Mary Margaret into their conversation.

“‘Course,” Merida said with a wide grin. “Always happy to point family in the right direction.”

The conversation continued for a few more moments before her savior came in the form of her sister. Merida had whispered something in her ear that had caused Elsa to run her fingers through her hair in her typical nervous gesture only to realize she’d forgotten her hair was braided. Her blush at realizing this led to an even larger smirk on Merida’s face.

Elsa sighed and began undoing her hopeless braid, “Sorry, Mom. I think we need to head up to get ready. My hair’s hopeless.”

Merida rolled her eyes, “Your hair is what’s hopeless?”

Elsa didn’t even bother to glance at Merida’s mass of curls. “Yes,” she replied firmly.

Merida laughed, “Whatever you say, sweetheart.”

Emma took that opportunity to speak up, “Yeah, I think we’ll, uh, head up too.”
Her mom and Elsa turned to her in surprise—Emma was notorious for taking the shortest amount of

time possible to get ready, but Emma was quick to reach down and put a hand on Regina’s shoulder.

Emma glanced down, surprised to see Regina had actually managed to succeed in convincing

Duchess to sit on her lap and was even petting the persnickety cat, who looked like she was greatly

enjoying the treatment she was receiving from Regina. Regina looked up at Emma’s hand on her

shoulder with a brief grateful look, before speaking up, “Yes, I’m afraid I hadn’t realized how late it

had gotten.”

Emma nearly laughed at the outraged expression that had briefly crossed her mom’s face when she

noticed the cat—Mary Margaret had been trying for years to make friends with Duchess and had

never been able to touch her, except for the one time she’d found the cat sleeping and had gotten

swiped at for her attempt. She exchanged a glance with Elsa who had noticed too and the sisters

shared a smile at their mother’s need for animal approval.

“Here,” Mary Margaret offered eagerly, reaching for Duchess, “Why don’t I take her—” as soon as

MM got close enough, Duchess reared back with a hiss and jumped off Regina’s lap to the back of

the couch.

Emma could barely keep from laughing at the crestfallen look on her mom’s face. Regina had raised

an eyebrow at Mary Margaret’s behavior and now she brushed some invisible fluff off her lap.

“Excuse me,” she said to Mary Margaret, who was still close from her attempt to pet Duchess and

blocking Regina from standing up.

“Oh, of course,” Mary Margaret finally backed off and Regina stood, moving close to Emma, who

let the hand she’d had on Regina’s shoulder move to the small of her back.

“Thank you,” Regina said with a quick, insincere smile. Regina turned her head to face Emma,

unused to being so close to the other woman, but she didn’t let that stop her from saying, “Let’s retire

upstairs.” Regina winced as soon as she had said that and glared at Emma, daring her to make a

comment.

Emma had once told Regina that whenever she became nervous, her words got more formal—to a

rather absurd degree. Regina had always denied it. The look in Emma’s eyes told Regina that this

would be used as an ammunition against her in the future. “Yes,” Emma said, keeping her laughter to

herself until they got some privacy so she could tease Regina. “Let’s retire for the evening.” Well,
tease her more.

Regina elbowed her lightly in the side and made a beeline for the stairs. Emma let her hand fall to her

side as she moved to follow her, a little behind. She turned to give a little wave to her family,

partially so that she wouldn’t be tempted to stare at Regina’s ass as she went up the stairs in front of

her, “See ya for dinner.”

-x-x-x-

There was a knock on their door that disrupted the comfortable silence that had fallen over them as

Emma played on her phone and Regina read her book. Neither of them had needed as much time as

they’d snuck away for and both were trying to recharge for the socializing still to come.

Emma frowned in confusion before getting up off the bed to answer it. Regina shot her a look that

communicated if she was to spend the next several hours with Emma’s family, she needed to not talk
to anyone until she had to. Emma smiled to say she understood and watched Regina retreat into the

bathroom from the corner of her eye before opening the door.
Mary Margaret’s hair was freshly washed, but she was otherwise not dressed yet for dinner and she was carrying a yellow dress on a hanger. Emma said, “Hey mom, what’s up?”

Mary Margaret smiled at her daughter and held out the dress, “You forgot to stop by our room to pick up your dress.” Emma could feel her face freeze as she didn’t reach out to grab the dress, studying it with a mixture of horror and relief. It was bright yellow, with bits of glitter and sewn beads. Not only did it not belong anywhere near a ski lodge, it also belonged nowhere near Emma. It likely would have looked good on Mary Margaret during the spring, but Emma knew it would not look good on her.

“I…” she stuttered. Sure, she had planned no to where what her mom had picked out, but she’d forgotten she’d have to actually tell her mom that. “I didn’t forget, I—”

Mary Margaret gave her a look of fond exasperation, “Then why haven’t you come to pick it up yet? I know you don’t think you need a lot of time to get ready, but still…” She again, held out the dress to Emma.

“She won’t be needing that,” Regina said smoothly as she appeared out of nowhere behind Emma, placing a steadying right hand on the small of Emma’s back. Emma was glad she’d changed her mind about hiding in the bathroom to come out and help her.

Mary Margaret almost reared back and frowned. Her eyes darted back to Emma’s face, “What does she mean?”

“Emma mentioned this little dinner to me,” Regina replied before Emma could and Mary Margaret’s gaze switched back to the other brunette woman. Regina’s voice was cool and her gaze was sharp as she continued, “And how she never had the right thing to wear for it so I picked up a dress for her.”

Mary Margaret’s eyes went wide, “You bought Emma a dress for dinner tonight?”

“Of course,” Regina smiled with all her teeth as the hand not on Emma’s back latched onto Emma’s right arm almost possessively. “I wanted my girlfriend to look her best.”

“I… see,” Mary Margaret said slowly, clearly angry and yet knowing she had no reason to be. She took a deep breath and drew herself together, “Well, I wish you had mentioned it earlier, Emma. Then I wouldn’t have spent money on this dress.”

Emma frowned, normally she would have just let a comment like that pass, but she hated when anyone implied she was wasteful, “I told you not to bother this year.”

Mary Margaret rolled her eyes, “Of course, sweetie. I suppose the tags are still on and I’m sure I still have the receipt.” She gave a little laugh as she tried to restore her previously cheery mood, “Alls well that ends well, I guess. You’ll be ready in time to leave? We only have an hour or so left.”

“Yes, mom,” Emma replied, beginning to feel her frustration with how Mary Margaret always made her feel like a careless child. “We leave at the same time every year – I’ve never late before.”

“Wonderful,” Mary Margaret said with a false smile. “I’ll see you both downstairs.”

“See you then,” Emma said, hoping she didn’t look as awkward as she felt before she shut the door. She deflated against the door. To her surprise, Regina kept her hold of Emma, although it became a lot less showy and possessive and more comforting.

Regina rubbed a small circle in Emma’s back, “There, that wasn’t so hard, was it?” The look in her eyes clearly communicated that she did understand how hard it was for Emma to even come close to
saying “no” to her mother.

“Right, piece of cake,” Emma replied weakly. She was starting to panic, just a little. It was abruptly all very real, her whole plan to bring a fake girlfriend along. What was she doing, rocking the boat like this, lying to them about a girlfriend? They were just going find out and think she was even more of a screw up than they already did.

“Oh, Emma,” Regina said, pulling her friend into a hug. “Do you want to go home? We don’t have to be here.”

Emma sank into the hug, never understanding how Regina gave such good ones, so warm and safe, but grateful away. After a minute, she shook her head into Regina’s shoulder. “No, no. I’m fine, really. I don’t know why that made me so…” She pulled back and shrugged, putting some distance between them. “She just can make me feel guilty for stupid stuff so easily.”

“I understand,” Regina said, wrapping her arms around her own stomach so that she wouldn’t be tempted to reach back for her friend. Emma’s mother was very different from her own, and yet, she certainly understood the sentiment all too well.

Emma gave her a small smile, knowing Regina really did understand. “I know, really. I want to be here—I happy to see everyone. I’m looking forward to hitting the slopes tomorrow. And I’m really glad you’re here,” she added at the end, suddenly feeling the need to make sure Regina understood that.

Regina smiled, before it shifted to a smirk—confidence replacing concern. “Of course you are. If I wasn’t, you’d be stuck wearing that yellow monstrosity.”

Emma laughed, “Exactly.”

“Would you like to see what you’ll actually be wearing?”

Emma’s eyes lit up, she liked surprise gifts. “Can I?”

Regina’s smirk softened back to a fond smile. “Obviously, you’re supposed to be wearing it soon. The black garment bag is yours. Have at it.”

Emma smiled and went over to the closet to open it up. This was the dress that Regina’d asked Emma questions about and studied Emma’s style before choosing—that she’d paid special attention to and thought about. Emma slid down the zipper, revealing the dress Regina had gotten, just for her—because she wanted to make Emma happy.

“What do you think?” Regina asked.

“I like it.”

-x-x-x-

“Hm, I don’t know what could be taking Emma so long—we’re going to be late,” Mary Margaret fretted, looking between her watch and the stairs.

Elsa and Merida, who’d only come down a moment earlier ignored her. Evan rolled his eyes and pulled at his shirt. David rested a comforting hand on his wife’s shoulder, “We don’t leave for another few minutes.”

“Emma never takes this long,” Mary Margaret repeated. “Maybe whatever she brought to wear isn’t
working out, and I should check and make sure she doesn’t want the dress I brought…”

“Mom,” Elsa said as she finished smoothing down her hair, amused at her mother’s typical fussing—she should have expected this with Emma’s first time bringing someone serious. MM always reverted back to treating her like she was ten whenever Elsa did something that reminded her mother she was in fact an adult now. “Relax, if they don’t come down on time, I’ll go check on Emma. I promise.”

Mary Margaret smiled at her daughter, monetarily distracted, “You’re so sweet, sweetie.”

Elsa barely refrained from rolling her eyes at that, “Thanks, mom.”

The platitude only worked for a few more seconds before Mary Margaret was back to staring at the stairs, “It must be the Mills girl who’s taking so long.”

David raised his eyes brows at that, “Do you not like Emma’s girlfriend? She’s seemed polite enough so far.”

Mary Margaret frowned, “I just don’t think she’s Emma’s type. She seems very stuck up, bragging about her law job earlier with the Knights.” Elsa was surprised to hear genuine dislike in her mother’s voice. Mary Margaret usually loved everyone—even when they didn’t deserve it. It must be another side effect of her nervousness over Emma finally having a serious partner. Mary Margaret had never acted this way about Merida, but then again, Elsa and Merida had been friends before they’d dated and Mary Margaret had first met her back then.

“She dressed impractically for a ski lodge, if you ask me,” Mary Margaret continued, without noticing anyone’s reactions to her words. “And she seemed like she was just pretending to be polite. Like she was too good to be here.”

David exchanged a look with Elsa and knew they were on the same page regarding Mary Margaret’s unusual attitude. “I didn’t get that impression,” he said mildly, knowing how to pick his battles. “And maybe it’s a good thing she isn’t Emma’s usual type—they haven’t always been the best for her in the past.”

Merida spoke up next, “I love these trips now, but they were a mite overwhelming the first time Elsa invited me along—you’ve got more family than you know what to do with. She’d have to be off her head not to be nervous, even if she don’t show it.”

“I suppose,” Mary Margaret allowed reluctantly, not liking everyone already seemed won over by this…this interloper.

“Let’s wait until after we’ve talked to her more before we decide if she’s good enough for our Emma, alright sweetheart?” David said, wrapping his arm around Mary Margaret’s shoulders and giving her a reassuring squeeze.

His wife melted in his arms, “Of course, I only want Emma to be happy.”

Just as she said so, they all heard a door open and shut upstairs, along with footsteps.

“Finally!” Evan said overdramatically as he flung himself down on the couch.

Everyone laughed and Merida ruffled his hair, he reminded her of her own brothers so much.

Regina appeared first, her high heeled black boot touching the floor at exactly 6:30—Regina Mills was always perfectly on time. She fiddled briefly with her red clutch which matched her high-
collared, red dress as she eyed the crowd of Blanchard’s waiting in the living room.

Emma followed in a lovely dress, which consisted of a cream, skin colored underdress with a transparent overlay of black lace designs that made it deceptively appear more revealing at first glance. Her hair was done in cleaned up loose, long curls which were similar to the loose waves in Regina’s own, shorter hair.

Emma was obviously a little nervous and so Elsa spoke up first, “I love your dress.” It wasn’t her sister’s usual style, but then again Emma rarely switched from her usual comfortable style. The few other times Elsa had seen her dressed up in any sense of the word besides these dinners where their mother choose had been when she’d visit Emma.

They’d gone to a couple clubs and bars in Boston over the past few years. For those, Emma either went for a nicer version of her everyday—with tighter pants and more expensive leather jackets or dresses of the little black or red variety. This looked good on her though, more sophisticated and older. It was clear Regina had picked the dress out given what Elsa knew about Emma’s dislike of shopping and Regina’s obvious taste, but Elsa could tell she’d picked it out for Emma specifically. How her mother had never managed to pick something that actually felt like Emma would wear ever again, she’d never understand.

“Thanks,” Emma said with a smaller smile than her usual confident grin. She reached to her waist, pulled out her phone, and waved it at them, “It’s got pockets.”

“That’s always dead useful,” Merida agreed, pushing her hands into her own dress pockets with a grin. “You make a nice pair.”

“Thank you,” Regina accepted graciously, choosing to focus on how nice it was to hear that, rather than on the fact that it was all pretend, no matter her wishes. “You two look lovely as well.” Emma’s sister and her fiancé were in light and dark blue respectively, dresses that suited them very well, although she’d half expected to see Merida in a suit like she had been in some of the pictures Emma had shown her.

David leaned over to give Emma a kiss on the cheek, “You’re as pretty as always, sweetie.”

Mary Margaret was clearly put out by the obvious approval from everyone else and was trying to refrain from mentioning that while Regina’s neckline was more than conservative, the long opening from the collar to under her chest made it anything but. Still, she managed to only say, “Are you sure your arms won’t be cold, Emma?”

“I have my coat for when we’re outside,” Emma replied mildly. She was too pleased with everyone else’s reaction to start arguing when they hadn’t even left the house yet. She was barely able to keep from adding that, if she was remembering right, her mom’s choice of a dress hadn’t had long sleeves either.

“Besides, you know how Emma always runs hot,” Regina added, unable to resist poking Mary Margaret, especially since she was confident she’d won the unofficial dress competition. “And I do confess I enjoy the sight of her arms far too much to pick something that didn’t show them off,” Regina replied with a heated glance coupled with a squeeze to one of the biceps in question. Emma felt unexpected heat run through her at the compliment, the feeling only mildly diminished by the failed wink Regina added which was more adorable than salacious. Regina ignored the shocked look on Mary Margaret’s face as she went to gather her coat.

Evan didn’t care about clothes at all and finally spoke up, “Come on, Em. I’m starving!” He grabbed his sister’s hand to try and pull her faster towards the car.
Emma laughed, “You know you never need to drag me to food, Ev. Let’s go.”

-x-x-x-

They arrived at the restaurant without any trouble and headed for their private room, the approximately thirty family members who came to this vacation necessitated their own room. They were one of the first families to arrive, only the Huas, Grandpa Nolan, and Granny Lucas were there before them. Evan ran over to play with his cousins, PJ and Rose, and Emma decided to introduce Regina to the older folks since they hadn’t come by the house earlier.

She wasn’t particularly close with her dad’s father since he was kind of a dick, but she did hope Granny would like Regina, for all the Lucas’ were not technically related by blood—Granny had been good friends with her mother’s mom and MM and Red had been close friends. When her grandma Eva had died, before Emma was even born, Granny had helped raise Mary Margaret so they had more than earned the right to be family.

“Hi Grandpa George, Granny. I wanted to introduce you to my girlfriend, Regina Mills.”

Regina exchanged greetings with both of them. Grandpa George quickly lost interest when Emma’s uncle and his family showed up. He’d always played favorites with his twin sons that he never seemed interested in hiding. Granny however, was definitely interested in the first person Emma had deemed important enough to bring to the lodge.

“So, how did you two meet?” Granny asked, eyes sharp, but friendly.

“It’s sort of a funny story,” Emma confessed with a laugh. Her and Regina had talked through this in the car ride up. They decided to stick relatively close to the truth for ease of remembering. “The guy in the apartment next to me had been making a lot of noise and Regina had put in some complaints, but about my apartment by accident.”

Regina’s tone was genuinely self-deprecating as she continued the story, “I found that out when Emma came up to yell at me since they weren’t actually about her.” She gave her friend a wry smile, “Luckily, we figured out what happened and managed to fix everything with the building management.”

Emma cut in, “And I was thrilled that the hot girl in 402 didn’t actually hate me and my obnoxious neighbor was gone in, like, a week.”

“I asked her to join me for dinner to make it up to her since I still felt bad,” Regina explained, keeping the pleased flush at Emma’s casual compliment from breaking out.

“And little did Regina know she’d hit on my weakness to good food and we’ve been friends ever since.” Emma was getting into their story, it was pretty cute, even if they weren’t actually dating. They’d told shorter versions to some others back at the Blanchard’s condo, but not a real story. She’d heard her mom, sister, and friends tell stories like this for years, it was fun to be on the other side of it. “A few months later, when Regina started a short relationship with someone else, I realized that I liked her. So when she and Marian broke up, I decided to take a chance and ask her out a couple weeks later.”

“I think Emma was more surprised than I was when I said yes,” Regina said with a little laugh she hoped didn’t sound too fake. It was harder than she thought to tell this story, it was hitting very close to home. Always a glutton for punishment, she slipped an arm around Emma’s waist, unable to help herself when she could. She tried to hide her constant delight at the way Emma leaned into her touch so naturally. “I hadn’t realized Emma was interested in me at all, so that she asked was the surprise
Granny’s eyes had bounced back and forth as they told their story and, for just a moment, both of them thought she was about to call bullshit, when instead she smiled. Whatever she’d seen had pleased her, “Wonderful, I’m glad to see you so happy, Emma. How’s everything else going?”

The three of them chatted until the rest of the Lucas’ showed up, which resulted in an easier time for Emma and Regina of listening, rather than talking. Emma genuinely enjoyed hearing how her cousins and other family members were doing and Regina found she liked the Lucas’ far more than the Blanchard. Perhaps it was because during all their talks to prep for this trip, they were often the people Emma had the most good things to say about.

After an hour of everyone talking as they all arrived, it was time to sit down for the meal. Since the three long tables seated eleven, Emma ended up with her immediate family as well as her dad’s sister’s family, the Knights which consisted of her aunt, her uncle, and their kids.

Evan, Henry, and Melody were quick to tune out the adults at their end of the table, heads bent over either phones or a game as they pointed at each other’s screens. Her dad was talking animatedly about some sports game with Aunt Abigail and Uncle Jim. Elsa and Merida had asked Emma something, which left Mary Margaret focusing in on Regina.

“So,” Mary Margaret said, clearly aiming for casual and missing by a mile. “Are you like Emma too?”

“Pardon?” Regina frowned. She couldn’t tell where this was going, but Regina was sure it wasn’t anywhere good.

Mary Margaret made a vague gesture, “Dating boys and girls, I mean. Elsa only likes girls, but Emma says she likes both. You’re the first girlfriend we’ve meet though.” She clearly expected that to throw Regina off.

“I’m not a fan of labels,” Regina said since it was her standard response and meant to encourage people to stop asking questions. Then she remembered why she was here and clarified, “However, I don’t date men.”

“Oh.” Mary Margaret had figured Regina would also claim to be bisexual. Her brow wrinkled in genuine confusion, “Does it bother you then?”

“Does what bother me?” Regina’s voice was hard and exasperated, wishing the older woman would just get to the point.

“That Emma dates both,” Mary Margaret clarified as though it should have been obvious. “I know I’ve read somewhere that some people don’t like the extra competition.” It was clear she was trying to play it as if she was vetting Regina, but Regina knew from what Emma told her that Mary Margaret believed at least something like this.

Regina’s eyes hardened at the comment before she gave a shrug that managed to appear regal, “No. After all, she’s with me right now. Why should the gender of her previous partners matter in the present?”

MM opened her mouth to respond, “Because you’re not a man and Emma likes men.”

Regina had never understood this sort of attitude towards people who were bisexual and after all Emma had told her about her own experiences and the experiences of some of her friends, she had absolutely no patience for it now. “That’s as senseless as saying I should be jealous or insecure of all...”
blue-eyed people since Emma used to date someone with a different eye color than me. Or was taller than me. Or was in any other way different than me.”

While Mary Margaret clearly didn’t have any rebuttal for that statement, she still looked as if she was going to protest again so Regina cut her off before she could. “I don’t care about anything other than the fact that Emma managed to wise up enough to realize she should be dating me,” Regina punctuated the teasing statement with a half-smile at Emma. “I’m very confident in my ability to keep her interest, regardless of my gender.” Emma silently agreed with that, if she was actually dating Regina, she was certain she wouldn’t even notice anyone else.

The vague hint to sex was enough to make Mary Margaret back off, “Of course.” She plastered on a fake smile, “I’m glad to hear that.”

Emma had tuned into the conversation in time to hear Regina response and was suddenly so grateful that she had brought her. Nothing made her more glad than to have her friend at her side, defending her. Any other anxiety over the fact that she had brought Regina to pretend to be her girlfriend felt justified in the face her mother.

“Glad to hear what?” Emma said.

“Oh nothing,” Mary Margaret said with a wave of her hand. “What was Elsa talking to you about?”

“She was just trying to figure out when it was easiest for me to take time off.”

“You know,” Mary Margaret said, as confiding a secret, “That’s probably since Elsa and Merida’s wedding is coming up next year.”

Emma just raised an eyebrow, why was her mother pointing out the obvious—she knew why Elsa had been asking her.

Mary Margaret gave her a look, as if the question was obvious. “Do you think you’ll be taking Regina?”

Emma stiffened, and snapped without thinking, “They haven’t even picked a date yet.”

Regina placed a hand on Emma’s arm under the table, which helped Emma steady her annoyance at her mother’s inappropriate nosiness. “I’ll decide when I get the official invitation.” She took a deep breath and remembered part of the point of the dinner was to impress upon her mother her commitment with Regina. Emma forced a smile, “But if we did get it today, then yes—of course, I would be bringing Regina.”

“Wonderful,” Mary Margaret replied cheerily while carefully observing Regina’s polite mask to see if Emma’s response affected her. Would be offended by Emma’s initial defensive outburst or would Regina think Emma was moving too quickly to assume they would be going to a wedding so far in advance? She was disappointed either way since Regina remained calmly polite.

Elsa too was surprised her mother had asked, but then again, maybe she wasn’t. Mom was overly protective and, well, nosy. She was probably just trying to make sure Regina was good enough for Emma—that didn’t mean Elsa thought it was okay though. She gave Emma a sympathetic look and tried to redirect the conversation to an actual discussion of specific wedding preparations.

Talk of dates, possible venues, and various other arrangements were able to last all the way through ordering their food and receiving their salads, but the peace wasn’t to last. Elsa and Merida, as the lucky few sitting next to the kids, were drawn into arbitrating some dispute, leaving an opening.
Once more Mary Margaret attempted to catch Emma and Regina off guard to better understand what she saw as an unlikely relationship. To test her theory that Regina was too...too snobby for Emma, she asked, “Doesn’t that all sound lovely?”

“I suppose,” Regina gave a small, noncommittal shrug. Truthfully, the plans did seem nice, although even Regina could already seem that Mary Margaret had her own specific ideas about her daughter’s wedding and didn’t seem to realize Elsa didn’t agree with all of them. “To each their own.”

Mary Margaret’s gaze sharpened on the hint of disapproval Regina had let enter her tone. “Oh, not to your tastes?”

“Not particularly,” Regina replied evenly, sipping at her wine and resisting the urge to order something stronger. She hadn’t had to deal with this much passive-aggressive bullshit since her mother was alive—even networking events for the firm weren’t this bad. At least here, Emma had given her permission to be disagreeable—she could always win these types of games when she wasn’t trying to make someone like her, rather than respect her. She’d had plenty of practice.

“What sort of wedding would you have?” Mary Margaret asked, leaning in for the metaphorical kill. “Let’s say, if you and Emma were to get married?”

Emma coughed a bit as she swallowed a bite of salad, her eyes wide at her mother asking such a question, especially given the story that her and Regina had been dating less than a year. “Mom! You can’t just ask us that.” Emma was suddenly very glad she’d never actually brought anyone she was dating here—a question like that would have sent most of them running for the hills.

“It’s fine, Emma,” Regina reassured her friend, patting her leg. Their eyes met and Emma could see the calculation in them. Regina had something planned. They’d discussed that some wedding questions might come up due to Elsa’s engagement, but Emma hadn’t thought even Mary Margaret would be tactless enough to ask something quite like this.

Regina turned back to Mary Margaret. “Well,” Regina said, as if considering it for the first time. Truthfully, Regina had heard enough stories of Emma’s mother even before they’d started planning this trip and she had expected something like this—not to mention some idle day dreams she’d had over the years. “If Emma and I were to get married, I don’t think we’d have a wedding with so many people in attendance. Likely only a handful, really.”

Mary Margaret seemed taken aback by Regina’s non-reaction and ready answer. She’d expected any girl dating Emma to act uncomfortable given Emma’s dating history, “Excuse me?”

“Oh, come now,” Regina leaned forward, as if they shared a secret. “You know Emma, Ms. Blanchard.” Regina could barely stop from remarking on the irony of that statement. She was determined to force the woman to actually learn about some of the parts of Emma that she seemed unable to notice. “She hates being the center of attention. And it’s such a big fuss over one night—so expensive too. No, I think we’d have, have a destination wedding with only our closest friends and family, around ten people—yourself included of course.”

Before Mary Margaret could respond, Regina continued. “Actually,” Regina made a show of tapping her finger against her cheek as if thinking, now she was just aiming to make Mary Margaret uncomfortable. “Perhaps we’d simply elope—much simpler, don’t you think? So much more fun to skip right to the honeymoon.” She turned toward Emma and ran her eyes up and down her with no small amount of heat in her eyes. Emma gulped and suppressed a shiver for what felt like the fourth or fifth time this evening. “Wouldn’t you agree, darling?”

Mary Margaret had gone from pale with shock and horror to red from embarrassment so fast Emma
might have been concerned for if she wasn’t completely mesmerized by Regina eyeing her like she wanted to eat her up. Also, could Regina only call her darling for the rest of her life?

It took more than a few seconds and muffled chuckle from Merida to realize she was expected to answer, “Right, I mean, I’m not sure, um. I haven’t thought about weddings much. Except Elsa’s, obviously.” She made a sort of nervous gesture with her fork, nearly taking Merida’s eyes out.

“You alright there, Swan,” Merida said, a knowing glint in her eyes.

Emma gave up on eating her salad and glared at her future sister-in-law. “Shut up.”

“Ooooh,” Evan teased, “Emma said a bad word.”

Emma frowned before a glare from her mother made her stick on an apologetic look, “Right, yeah. Uh, be quiet? Sorry about that.”

Merida rolled her eyes, “No problem, I knew what you meant.”

“Very good, Evan,” Mary Margaret told her son. “We all need to remember to speak nicely to people and to apologize when we make mistakes. Just like we need to remember to eat all our veggies.” He was the only kid who’d been ordered a salad and he’d been trying to ignore it.

The next few minutes were full of a childish distraction and Emma and Regina took advantage of it to talk to each other about easy things, without any pretense. Eventually, they were pulled back into the conversation, but for a far lighter topic—Emma was far happier to talk about Mario Kart than weddings.

As the entrees began arriving, Henry asked Merida out of the blue, “What’s your last name again?”

“DunBroch,” Merida said, wondering at his curiosity. “Why?”

“Since you and Elsa are getting married, I was wondering what your last name is going to be,” Henry asked. “Are you gonna be a Blanchard or is she going to be a DunBroch?”

Mary Margaret turned to look at her daughter, a raised eyebrow. Elsa ignored the look, already knowing that she wanted Elsa to keep their last name. “We’re not sure ourselves,” Elsa explained. “There a lot of different ways we could do it. We could each keep our names. We’ve also been considering using both our last names, like Blanchard-DunBroch.” Elsa explained to her cousin.

“DunBroch-Blanchard,” Merida corrected automatically before smiling. “But that’s a mouthful.”

Melody spoke up from next to Merida, her eyes lighting up, “You could make a new last name. Like Dunchard.”

Everyone got a good laugh from that and started coming up with their combinations. Unknowingly, this conversation gave Mary Margaret

“What would you do about a last name?” Mary Margaret asked suddenly, turning to Emma and Regina, and startling them from the light hearted conversation.

The faux couple was actually sort of ready for this question, primarily because they’d discussed the matter months ago when Elsa first mentioned her discussions with Merida to Emma. As women who dated other women, the potential question had occurred to them each before.

On the car ride up, Emma had brought it up as a joke, never actually thinking her mom would really
Emma wasn’t surprised when Regina didn’t miss a beat. She volleyed back confidently, “Oh, hyphens get so messy, don’t they? No, I’d take Emma’s last name.” That did throw Emma off, she turned to face Regina more closely. This wasn’t what they’d discussed.

Regina felt Emma’s gaze but kept her eyes focused on Mary Margaret. “I have no particular attachment to my own last name and Swan has such a wonderful ring to it, don’t you think? I know how much it means to her,” Regina gave Emma a genuine smile that was more tender than any expression Emma seen on her before. It made her breath catch.

“Thanks,” Emma breathed, an answering smile spreading across her face without her noticing. How had Regina known she didn’t really ever want to change her last name? It was all that was left of the woman who’d raised her those first short, but happy years of her life. It was all she’d had when Emma was in the foster system, something to prove she’d had a family once that she’d belonged to.

Maybe Regina had just realized it would bother Mary Margaret, who’d tried to get Emma to change her last name to “Blanchard” once Emma had moved in. It was one of the only things Emma had been confident enough to argue with her about at the time.

When Emma had first moved in, she’d been so glad to have a family and so shocked that she was wanted, she’d let Mary Margaret kind of take over her personality. Emma was too worried that the Blanchard’s would change their mind and send her away. Elsa had seemed like such a perfect daughter already that she’d over compensated. Her name was the one thing she wouldn’t budge on. Luckily, after a few months she’d felt comfortable enough to start acting like herself again, but Emma sometimes wonders if she’d been able act like herself the whole time, maybe her mom would understand her better. Sometimes Emma thought her mom thought the way she’d originally acted was the real her and everything after was the front.

Emma pulled herself out of her thoughts and eyed Regina’s triumphant smile at the offended look on Mary Margaret’s face. Maybe it was a bit of both—Regina was a multi-tasker.

“I see,” Mary Margaret replied, unable to argue with the gratitude in Emma’s voice. “I suppose it’s always good for the whole family to have the same name. It’s certainly less confusing.” She then launched into a genuinely funny story about her time as a school teacher, before was mayor that involved confusing a child’s grandfather for his father and his actual father for his uncle which had resulted in an extremely confused mother. Similar stories from Mary Margaret’s teaching career lasted until they ordered desert which kept the calm nicely.

“Speaking of children,” Mary Margaret asked, eyes bright. She was certain this would throw Regina off and then she’d see her true colors. “Do you think you want your own family?”

“Mom,” Emma hissed, actually angry at Mary Margaret.

“What? I just mean in general,” Mary Margaret tried to play it off as if the question wasn’t a big deal. “I know some people these days aren’t interested in children. I figured you already knew something that important about each other.”

Emma gritted her teeth, “We do. I don’t see how it’s any of your business right now, but both Regina and I would like to have a kid or two sometime in the very distant future.”

“Wonderful,” Mary Margaret clapped her hands together. “Of course, I expect Elsa to give me my first grandchildren, but I’d expect you to be next. Certainly before Evan.” She laughed before
directing her next question to Regina, “How would you plan on starting a family? Hypothetically, of course.”

“Adoption,” Regina said flatly, trying to discourage talking about this particular topic. “I’ve always planned to adopt and Emma feels the same after her time in the foster system. Since we agree, we haven’t discussed much further than that.”

“Were you in the system too?” Mary Margaret was genuinely curious to hear Regina say that as it wasn’t the impression she had received at all.

Regina refused to rise to the bait and simply said, “No.”

Trying to get the tight-lipped brunette to say reveal more, Mary Margaret said, “Elsa’s been talking about in vitro, would you ever consider that?”

“No,” Emma replied, it was her turn to put her hand on Regina’s upper arm. Emma knew from previous conversations that this was a touchier subject for Regina since she couldn’t have children. “I don’t want to get pregnant—especially not when kids already out there who need a home.”

“I—” Mary Margaret tried to continue, since this was the first questions either other them had ever really pushed back against.

“No, mom.” She could stand her mother making her feel uncomfortable and, if Regina had actually been her girlfriend and not her friend she’d specifically brought along to deal with her mother, she would have cut her mother off far sooner in this conversation. Her mother’s nosiness wasn’t allowed if there was even the slightest chance that she could actually be making Regina uncomfortable. Her voice left no room for argument, “New topic.”

Luckily, that’s when their desserts came and they started talking back up with David, leading to an abridged version of their meeting once again.

“So, you two still live in the same apartment building?” David asked. “That must be nice.”

“Convenient,” Merida added, causing Elsa and Aunt Abigail to laugh.

“Yes,” Emma agreed easily, not rising to the bait. “Although it doesn’t limit the arguing over who should pick up who as much as you’d think.” Emma put her hand up as if to shield Regina from her words and said in a loud whisper, “Regina hates my car.”

Regina rolled her eyes, “Only because it’s a death trap on wheels.”

That sparked a car conversation, until Mary Margaret managed another question, “Do you think you two might move in together soon?”

“Perhaps,” Regina replied evenly. “Emma’s lease expires in two months. As long as everything’s still going as wonderfully as it is now, she could move in with me. Then we could move into our own apartment when my own lease is up. Wouldn’t that be nice, dear?”

Emma almost laughed at the falseness in Regina’s voice, “Of course, honey.”

Her cousin Victor, sitting back to back to their table must have been eavesdropping, since he coughed something that sounded like “u-haul” under his breath and she abruptly pushed her chair back into his. Ignoring his muffled yelp, she stalked off to the bathroom.

David had noticed the invasive question this time and managed to draw Mary Margaret into his other
conversation, winking at Regina. By the time Emma got back, Regina, Merida, and Elsa were discussing a TV show they all watched. For the remainder of the night, the conversation was limited to very light topics to Regina and Emma’s profound relief.

-x-x-x-

Closing the door to their room once they arrive back home felt like an immediate decrease in pressure.

“Thank god,” Emma said, leaning wearily back against the door.

Regina set down her purse and sat on the bed, nodding in silent agreement. “Your mother certainly is relentless.”

“Did you mean obnoxious? Who actually says stuff like that? I am so glad I never actually brought anyone to this thing, I can’t imagine how badly it would have gone.”

Regina laughed, “Yes, I’d have to agree.”

“And I know I thought some of our prep was overkill, but clearly not. Thanks for insisting we talk about so much ahead of time,” Emma said, smiling gratefully at her friend.

“You’re welcome,” Regina replied. They both began getting ready for bed, changing into pajamas, brushing their teeth, and all sorts of nighttime routines.

Regina pulled out her book to read as Emma finished up in the bathroom. Regina was surprisingly tired despite not doing much today, but she needed to think about anything else, even corporate team building (her current book) if she ever hoped to get to sleep.

When Emma came out, she immediately got under the covers. She checked a few things on her phone before giving up and deciding to go to sleep, even if it was earlier than usual for her. “Don’t worry about the light,” she said through a yawn. “I can sleep through anything. ‘Night.”

Regina paused from moving to turn out the light, pleased Emma had guessed her actions so well. “Good night, Emma,” Regina said quietly as she tried to focus on the words on the page, hyper aware of how close Emma was.

A muffled, unintelligible noise from the pillow next her was her only reply.

Chapter End Notes

My personal headcanon is both Emma and Regina as bi, but for the sake of this story Regina's a lesbian. Also the dresses are Regina's red one from the show in Season 3 Ep 19 and Emma's is one Jennifer Morrison wore to OUAT Season 4 screening in Hollywood
Chapter 5

Emma wasn’t surprised that Regina’s alarm went off before her own and she had no problem letting the other woman shower first. Even only half awake, she liked knowing Regina was nearby, none of the discomfort or awkwardness she thought might come with sharing a room or a bed seemed to come—or maybe she was just too tired to notice.

When her own alarm went off, she got up with no prompting, only muttering complaints under her breath about the fact that Elsa insisted on going so early—that girl loved the cold and snow far too much.

Both made it down on time to meet an Elsa, practically vibrating with excitement, and a Merida, who looked even sleepier than Emma felt. Emma knew Merida would not be up this early any other day on the trip—first day she always gave into Elsa’s pleading, but the rest of the week she didn’t feel guilty about telling her fiancé to go on without her.

Emma and Regina grabbed their gear from Regina’s car and all four headed over to the mountain in Elsa’s car. They met some of the Lucas’ at the rental shop and everyone picked up whatever they were missing and put on heavier coats. Merida rented basically everything and Emma needed boots since she’d never replaced hers when they wore out a couple years ago.

Once they were on the lift, Regina eyed Merida, who appeared to be asleep. “Should she even be out here?”

Elsa laughed, “Oh, she’ll wake up before we have to jump off.”

Emma nodded, “Trust me, I thought the same thing, but she’s only messed up the jump off once.”

Elsa looked down at her phone and huffed a little impatiently, “Uncles James and Aunt Jackie are already up there.”

Emma rolled her eyes, “I’m sure you’ll beat them up here tomorrow.”

Elsa knocked Emma’s shoulder with her own before saying confidently, “I’ll still beat them down.”

Regina barely kept from asking if everyone in this family was so competitive. She only refrained because its not like she really had a leg to stand on. Instead she said, nodding at Elsa’s feet, “You snowboard too?”

“I do both,” Elsa explained. “I switch it up the different days. Mom and Dad taught me to ski, but Aunt Red has always been snowboarder and so the rest of the Lucas’ have as well.”

“If you’re ever looking for a conversation starter with Granny—just ask her about snowboarding,” Emma added. “She was around when it first started to be a thing.”

“She’s very proud of being an early convert,” Elsa agreed.

“So what’s the plan for today?” Regina asked, curious how they planned their day—she hadn’t gone skiing in over a year or two since she didn’t know many people to go with. After Emma had invited her to come along, she’d had to actually check and make sure all her equipment was still in good enough order and replace her poles.

Emma pointedly looked away from Elsa, “Most of us will take at least one run on a green trail before
moving to the blue ones. Elsa will start on black and escalate from there. Merida will probably stick to green the whole time.”

“I go more often than anyone else,” Elsa confessed. “A bunch of my friends like to go too so I’m more in practice. Mer only goes when we come here.”

“But watch out when we go sledding with the kids,” Emma said.

“Or ice skating,” Elsa put in. “They just don’t really have as many mountains in Scotland and her family was never really into skiing or snowboarding.”

The time to job off came sooner than they expected, although Merida was awake in time to jump off and meet up with the others. Emma was the one who ended up almost falling to the ground in the end. Regina was carefully not to laugh too much—she was the most out of practice of everyone here and the most likely to fall on the actual trail, even a green one.

Sure enough, it took her far longer than her pride would have liked for her to stop falling and to get back into the motions.

Still, she was confident enough by their second run down a blue trail to challenge Emma to a race. She even managed to win by the slightest margin, primarily due to Emma hitting a flatter than expected part of the trail and skis being generally faster than snowboards.

Since Emma and Regina were all part of the early group, they were hungry for lunch before some of the others who had joined them out on the slopes for their second run. About 10 of them stayed down at base camp after their third trip down to get some food.

As they were all eating, Regina asked, “So when did you learn to snowboard?”

Emma swallowed her current bite of food to say, “When I was sixteen—my first time on this trip. Mom tried to teach me how to ski at first, but while I did fine on the bunny slopes, even the easiest green slope was... Well it didn’t go well.

“AKA she fell down constantly,” Ruby cut in with a grin.

“Hey,” Emma protested. “Look, your feet go in different directions and then your skis pop off. Every time I fell I had to track down all my stuff and re-equip—it was sooo annoying. Plus it didn’t help that there were kids younger than Henry flying past me.”

“Aunt Red offered to teach me how to snowboard instead so I decided to try that instead. Balance is a bigger issue, but at least I was stomping around in those obnoxious ski boots to go track down a ski that had slid yards away.”

“Have you ever snowboarded before?” Elsa asked Regina curiously.

“No,” Regina confessed. “I originally wanted to learn when I was younger, but my mother wouldn’t allow it. Which isn’t to say I don’t enjoy skiing, because I do. But I had always wanted to learn. All of the friends I would go to mountains with ski though, so I’ve never pursued it further.” She gave a shrug.

“If you really want to learn,” Emma offered. “I could give you a few lessons tomorrow?”

“Really?” Regina asked, surprised Emma had noticed that she did still really want to at least try it.

“Sure, after all, I’ve taught Evan” Emma gave her a cheeky grin. “It can’t be that much harder to
teach you.”

“Oh shut up,” Regina scoffed.

Emma laughed before saying, “Seriously though. I’d love to teach you to snowboard.”

Regina narrowed her eyes, “You just want to see me fall on my face.”

Emma held up her hands in protest, although the look in her eyes didn’t change. “I have nothing but the best intentions, I swear.”

Regina hummed in response, eying Emma skeptically and weighing her sincerity. “Alright. I suppose I could give it a try tomorrow.”

“Awesome!” Emma said, grinning. “You won’t regret it.”

“I already do,” Regina replied.

“Alright, so who’s heading back up?” Ruby asked to the group at large.

“I’ve fallen enough for today,” Merida said with a grimace. “Your ma said the little ones were off sledding for the first day and I think I’ll go show them how it’s done.”

Aunt Red spoke next, “Your dad and I will probably go once more, then head back.”

“We’re getting to old for this,” Uncle Peter added with a smile.

Red gave her husband a judgmental look, “Speak for yourself.”

“I think we’re with you,” Emma said after exchanging some looks with Regina.

“Once more sounds good,” Regina agreed. Since it was her first day back on the horse so to speak she was a little sorer than she expected. She could handle one more since she’d more or less stopped falling, but anymore and she’d definitely regret it tomorrow.

“Aw come on,” Elsa pouted. “The days only half done.”

“That’s my girl,” Aunt Jackie said, putting an arm around Elsa’s shoulders. “Right, James?”

“Right,” James replied confidently. “We still gotta make sure our boys don’t forget who taught them.”

“I’ll see how I feel after this time,” Ruby said. “I don’t want to be too tired for our cousins night out tonight.”

“Exactly,” Emma agreed.

“Then let’s go!” Elsa said, ushering the group back to the ski lifts.

-x-x-x-

Emma and Regina knocked on the door to Uncle James and Aunt Jackie’s cabin, to be let in by Archie. After greeting them, they followed him into the living room, “We’re still waiting for Victor to finish getting ready and for Ruby and Ella to get here. Thomas is already here though.”

Emma waved at the lounging August and Thomas, “Cool. Elsa and Merida should be here soon,
they were only, like, five minutes behind us.”

“Who’s DD again?” August asked.

“Elsa,” Emma replied, leaning against the wall with Regina beside her. “She grabbed by David’s car so we can fit at least five—six or seven if we use the trunk.”

“Just like college,” August replied reminiscently. “Good times.”

Emma laughed, “Don’t say that like you remember any of it.” Emma had attended a college near her parents’ town for two years, before transferring to out-of-state. It had been enough to overlap with August since he took a few extra years to graduate.

“I remember some stuff,” August replied, half joking, half seriously. “Which reminds me, guess what I found in the basement here?”

“What?” Emma asked.

“Remember that sign we “liberated” from the bar that refused to kick out those rich guys we saw trying to put stuff in girls drinks?”

“No, really?” Emma asked, laughing. “That’s great. I thought that got lost years ago.”

“Nope,” August replied. “I guess I brought it here and forgot about it. It was behind a couch downstairs, what to see?”

“Definitely, I gotta send Lacey a picture,” Emma said, before turning to Regina. “I’ll be right back, kay?”

Regina shook her head, “Sure, I don’t want to hear any more.”

Emma grinned and the two went downstairs while Regina made polite small talk with Archie and Thomas, baby pictures and dog pictures were easy ice breakers.

Unfortunately, such light conversation wasn’t to last when Victor came down.

Regina could feel his eyes on her when he stepped off the stairs and she decided she did not like him.

“I don’t think we’ve been formally introduced,” he said, walking up to her. “Doctor Victor Nolan.”

“Regina Mills,” Regina replied.

“So you’re hear with Emma, right?”

“Yes, I’m her girlfriend,” Regina replied, liking where this was going less and less.

“I guess I heard that, but I don’t know. You just seem to pretty to be gay.” Regina felt her blood boil at that and what he said next did not help. “I bet I could change your mind, if you gave me the chance. There are somethings only a man can do,” Victor smirked, like he’d just made some sort of devastating argument. He even made a weird thrusting motion with his hips, like she might not have understood what he was implying.

“On the contrary, I think you’ll find there is very little only a man can do, do better that is—modern technology and all that.” She made a dismissive little hand wave. “Hard to compete with something more…customizable that you know won’t fall asleep on you. Less disappointing in general really. But I’m sure you understand—I can’t imagine the number of times you thought you were beat out by
another man only to find out your rival wasn’t even animate—so to speak, of course,” Regina replied with a smirk that implied she’d just won this little argument.

Emma, who had just gotten back upstairs to hear this part of the conversation, certainly thought she had.

Victor glared, outraged, but before he could reply, Emma made her presence known by walking back in the room and over to the group. “Is there something you wanted to talk about, Victor?” Emma asked, her hand going to Regina’s back. “Have you forgotten about the last time we talked? Cuz it didn’t work out so good for you then and I guarantee it won’t work out any better now.”

His face somehow got redder, but he saw the look in Emma’s eyes and despite his behavior, he did remember the last time they had a “talk”. She’d broken his nose. “Whatever, it was just a joke. Tom—have you seen my new car?”

Thomas looked uncomfortable, but after a glance at Emma, decided that getting Victor away from them as quickly as possible was the best idea. He remembered the fight too. “No, what’d you get? Is it out front?”

“Yeah, let me show you—I just picked it up a couple weeks ago,” Victor and Thomas headed out the front door, passing Ruby and Ella on the way in.

The tension in the air dissipated with Victor gone and the Lucas sisters proved to be a good distraction from their previous conversation. Emma, Ruby, and August continued the earlier reminiscing about college and everyone was back to looking forward to a night out with no older adult family members by the time Elsa and Merida got there.

Archie fell into step beside Regina as they headed out. “Hey, sorry about Vic. I just wanted to, to reassure you, that not everyone in this family is…. inappropriate?”

“Yes,” Regina replied dryly as she eyed his brother over, wondering what his angle was. “I can see that Victor is unique case. I can’t imagine having grown up with him for a brother.” As far as she could tell, they were very different people.

Archie gave a light laugh, “Yeah, it had its challenges, but I meant Aunt MM too—I heard some of what she was saying that night at dinner. I don’t know why she was… why she was like that. I know I can see that Emma’s really happy around you and that’s all that should matter.”

Regina had meant to breeze past that statement and was mildly surprised to hear herself say, “Really?” Damn, apparently, she did need this sort of extra validation when it came to Emma.

Archie nodded, “Yeah. Not that Emma’s usually sad, but…” He tried to find the right words, “She’s reserved, in her own way, and can seem, uncomfortable at times—like she still feels like a new member of the family or that she shouldn’t be here.”

Archie can remember when Emma had first been introduced to everyone. He could see, when they brought up childhood trips or he and Vic got into particularly brotherly arguments, that she felt like she’d missed out, that she’d look at Elsa and see what she might have had her whole life. He couldn’t imagine how that felt.

He shook his head lightly to rid himself of those thoughts. His eyes met Regina’s and he could see she understood what he meant. He smiled, glad Emma had found someone to truly confide in, “She hasn’t been like that at all this trip. She seems a lot more relaxed and, well, like I said: happy.” Regina smiled at hearing that and Archie just knew that Regina was going to be coming back next
year, “And I think that’s because you’re here. You ground her.”

“Thank you,” Regina’s voice was low and sincere as she looked up ahead at Emma, talking with Ruby and Elsa about who was sitting where. “She grounds me too.”

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“Heeeey, 'gina.”

Regina looked up from her book when the bedroom door opened to see Elsa guiding an unbalanced Emma through the doorway. Regina had come home early from the bar with Ella, Thomas, and Archie, more tired than she’d expected from her day of falling and feeling a slight headache disproportionate to the amount she’d had to drink come on. She’d assured Emma that it was fine that she’d stayed and encouraged her to have fun with her cousins—it certainly seemed like she had.

“Hey,” Regina replied, putting her bookmark in and setting the book aside as she looked Emma over. Emma had a slightly unfocused smile on her face and was bracing herself against both her sister and the door frame. While she did have on higher heeled boots than normal, she definitely looked significantly more buzzed than she had when Regina had last saw her. “It sure looks like you had fun tonight.”

“Yeah,” Emma agreed easily. “Lots. And I won!”

“A speed shot drinking contest,” Elsa supplied as she tried to encourage Emma to wander away from the doorframe and to the bed. Regina came around to the other side to help her. “Her and Victor wanted to see who could finish a couple rounds of shots faster. Emma won.”

Regina laughed, “Of course she did.”

“Aren’t you proud of me Regina?” Emma asked. “Showed that asshole up to his face.”

“Yes, darling. That’s very impressive,” Regina reached out a hand, and Emma let her switch her support from Elsa and the doorframe to both Regina and Elsa. “Why don’t you sit down though?”

Emma looked at the bed and frowned. “But I don’t wanna go to sleep yet,” she whined as she turned impressive puppy dog eyes to Regina.

Regina began firmly leading her anyway, “You don’t have to sleep, but I want you to sit down so I don’t have to hurt my neck looking up at you.”

“Oh, okay.” Emma stumbled the rest of the way herself, flinging herself down gracelessly.

“Thank you, Emma,” Regina said before turning to the blonde’s amused sister. “Thank you, Elsa for helping her up here and driving.”

“Of course,” Elsa said with a shrug. “I still have to go corral Merida upstairs—she’s a bit more active when she’s drunk. I think she’s ended up in the game room downstairs challenging nobody to darts—and losing.”

“I bet I could beat her,” Emma slurred from behind Regina. She reached out and tugged on Regina’s arm, “Don’t you think so?”

“Of course, Emma,” Regina smiled and patted Emma’s hand. “You’re very good at darts.” She turned back to Elsa who was shaking her head. “We’ll be good for now, although I can’t speak to how Emma’ll be in the morning.”
Elsa grinned, a little wickedness in her eyes, “It’ll be fun tomorrow to see who makes it on time—or at all. Night!”

“Good night,” Regina replied as she shut their door before turning around and surveying her drunk friend who was currently frowning while fluffing her pillow one-handed since her other hand was still holding Regina’s arm.

Regina decided to go grab Emma some water and see if she could do what she could to minimize the hangover that might come. After extricating her arm from Emma’s grasp, she headed for the bathroom. She had just finished filling the cup from the bathroom faucet, when she heard Emma calling for her.

“Yes, Emma?” she asked as she came back into the bedroom with the glass.

Emma’s face brightened when she saw her, “Regina! I turned around and you were gone. But now you’re back!”

“Yes, good observation,” Regina shook her head as walked back around the bed. “I went to get you some water. I bet you’re thirsty.”

“Thanks!” Emma said before seriously considering the glass Regina was now handing to her, “I think I am.” She accepted the glass and began drinking greedily.

Regina watched in surprise as Emma downed the entire glass without seeming to breathe. Emma then held the glass back out to Regina.

“Would, would you like some more?” Regina asked, still recovering from the shock of her plan worked so well.

“Yeah! You’re so thoughtful, Regina,” Emma said, looking at her with such plain adoration that Regina actually found herself trying to suppress a blush. Emma sincerely complimenting her was her main weakness.

Regina hurried off to do that, not wanting to miss an opportunity to help Emma sober up a bit. When she returned, she just reached over the bed to hand the water to Emma, who had taken off her tight jeans and leather jacket, leaving her in just her white tank top and red underwear. She was slumped against the headboard, looking sleepier which was likely why she’d decided to get more comfortable. Regina got on the bed and sat next to her as Emma drank more water, although not as fast as she had before. “So did you all have fun after I left?”

“Yeah!” Emma replied nodding, “Although it would have been more fun if you were there. Victor was being an ass, but everyone else wasn’t, so it was good.”

“I’m glad you had a good time,” Regina replied with a smile, warmed by Emma’s plain desire to spend time with her.

“Say cheese!” Emma leaned over, half on top of Regina and took a series of rapid fire selfies of the two of them, that started with Regina being confused, then reflexively smiling, then getting annoyed. She pushed Emma’s hand down, but one look at her friend’s face melted away her anger.

“What did you do that for?” Regina asked.

“So I can remember your face,” Emma replied, scrolling through the pictures with a smile. She didn’t seem to be in any hurry to move from her new position propped up against Regina’s chest, her head just below the other woman’s chin. “You’re so pretty. I’m so lucky to have you as my not-
Regina laughed at the compliments, but decided not to focus on them right now, even though she wanted to hear Emma say more. She knew Emma probably didn’t know what she was saying. “You don’t think you’ll remember sitting on the bed talking to me in the morning?” Regina asked, eyebrow quirked.

Emma shook her head, “I think I will, but what if I don’t? I can’t take that risk, Regina.”

Before Regina could reply, Emma’s mouth opened in a large yawn and she snuggled further into Regina, turning on her left side and putting her left arm behind Regina’s back. Emma’s right arm wrapped loosely around Regina’s middle, resulting in Emma hugging Regina.

Regina found her right arm automatically lifting to let Emma snuggle against her, her hand on Emma’s right side. Regina was looking down at Emma, eyes wide and face flushed as Emma made herself comfortable around Regina.

“You’re so warm, Regina,” Emma said, eyes drifting closed.

Regina nearly snorted—Emma was a furnace. “Thanks. Are you comfortable now, Emma?”

Emma nodded into her, missing the sarcasm, “Yeah, you smell nice.”

Regina didn’t know how to respond to this sleepy, snuggly Emma who just seemed to wanted to compliment her. “We should go to sleep now,” she said instead. “Long day tomorrow.”

“Okay,” Emma replied quietly, letting out another yawn. “You’re so smart, R’gina.” She didn’t seem interested in moving though and Regina could not bring herself to make Emma let go. As smoothly as she could, she carefully got them both under the covers. Emma made a few disgruntled noises as they went, but she was already more than halfway asleep and didn’t protest much.

Finally, they were both laying down with the lights out, Emma still koala-ed onto Regina’s side.

Regina had thought Emma was fully asleep and so she was surprised to hear Emma say, “Night, Regina.”

Regina gave into the urge she’d been fighting since Emma had attached herself to Regina and gave her a light kiss on the forehead, “Good night, darling.”
Chapter 6

Emma woke slowly, feeling very warm and comfortable despite the mild headache she had. Since she could tell it was still early, she pressed her face closer to the pillow, intent on going back to sleep, when a light scent met her nose. She thoughtlessly moved closer and felt her knee lightly touch something warm.

Emma blinked open her eyes, wondering what could be in her bed with her. As soon as she could comprehend what she was seeing, everything came flooding back to her. Vacation, family, Regina. The after scent of Regina’s apple blossom shampoo is what she was smelling since she was laying on Regina’s side of the bed, her head on Regina’s pillow. In fact, she was basically spooning the other woman.

Emma tried to remember falling asleep, but it wasn’t clicking. She remembered the bar—the last round of shots was probably a mistake—and coming home with Elsa. Regina got her some water, right? Was that why her hangover was better than she expected? But she could get from awake in bed to lined up against her. Emma’s knee had run into Regina’s leg and Emma suddenly realized that Regina’s back was only a few inches from Emma’s chest.

Briefly, Emma closed her eyes and thought about moving closer, Regina looked so warm and smelled so wonderful, before her eyes shot open. What was she thinking? They weren’t actually dating. Get a grip, Swan. Emma knew she had a tendency to cuddle in bed with anyone she slept with more than a couple times, but this was ridiculous. Regina wasn’t her girlfriend or family so Emma needed her unconscious brain to get over itself and give her friend some space.

Emma backed up as carefully as she could on a bed she was sharing before flipping over on her right side, putting her back to Regina. In doing so she spotted her half empty glass of water and some ibuprofen. Emma sat up enough to take the medicine. Reflexively, she checked her phone, always paranoid she might send something stupid. Instead she found a series of pictures where she was practically on top of Regina in their bed.

Over the panic roaring in her ears she distantly realized that’s probably why she was on Regina’s side of the bed. She flipped though the pictures, checking Regina’s face for any sign Emma had crossed some sort of line before simply being distracted by her.

After who knows who long, she became aware of what she was doing and put her phone down hurriedly. She closed her eyes tightly and tried to will herself back to sleep, anything to stifle her suddenly racing thoughts.

Emma wasn’t surprised that when Regina’s alarm went off only a half hour later, she was still awake.

-x-x-x-

A couple hours later found Emma and Regina on a bunny slope, Regina with rented snowboarding gear. She’d thought the wrist guards would be overkill—she was wrong. She’d hoped more of her skiing skills would translate. That did not seem to be the case.

-Emma starts to teach Regina how to snowboard

Regina is an impatient student and Emma is an inarticulate teacher

Regina sort of gets the hang of it, but refuses to go beyond bunny slopes—too embarrassed by her
“You gotta remember that your feet are stuck together,” Emma said as she leaned over Regina who was flat on her back on the snow.

“I know that,” Regina snapped before thrusting hand at her to be helped up for what felt like the fiftieth time. She’d already fallen more in the last hour than she had her first day.

Emma heaved her up and Regina tried to get back into a good position. Emma moved to her other side, causing Regina to turn her head and then almost losing her balance. She held out her arms and was able to get it back, bending her knees in the correct crouching position she needed for the snowboard.

“Good catch!” Emma said, purposely overly cheerful in the face of Regina’s frustration.

“I’m going to kill you,” Regina said.

“You’d have to catch me to do that,” Emma replied.

They slowly started off again. Regina only made it a few feet before she fell again.

“You need to lean right,” Emma diagnosed as she helped Regina up again.

Regina frowned in confusion, “I thought you said I should lean backwards.”

Emma winced, “No, you should—well you can lean right if you want—I meant you need to lean correctly.”

Regina could barely keep from yelling at Emma in frustration. This was not working, but she was determined to do this. Because she could.

She couldn’t Regina decided after making it down the shortest slope without falling for the first time. She was sore all over, her back and hips and wrists were killing her and if one more seven year old passed her, she was going to scream.

Even if her considerable competitive spirit didn’t stop her from detaching the board with a vengeance when it was time to stop for lunch. “Thank you for the lessons, but I think I’ll stick to skiing for the rest of the trip. It seems like this will take more than a day to even begin to get the hang of and I want to see less of the sky these next few days.”

Emma laughed, “Yeah, I can understand that. You can always try again next year. Maybe get some official lessons or something.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right,” Regina replied, hoping Emma hadn’t noticed her reaction to the casual suggestion Regina would be coming back. Regina could tell Emma hadn’t really thought about what she’d said, but it still made her heart beat fast at the thought of coming back again.

The thought kept her warm until they were all the way back home.

-x-x-x-

Emma sighed as she came back into the bedroom. It was always nice to talk to Aunt Aurora and Aunt Mulan, but she never felt she had enough news about her life to share with them. She wanted her family to think she was doing good, but she also didn’t want to give them too high expectations, knowing they’d only be disappointed in the end. Once Aunt Abigail arrived with her kids, Emma
had slipped away, too tired from the second day back on the slopes to try an entertain her young cousins.

She collapsed on the bed, before listening—it seemed Regina was still in the shower which meant she’d have to wait a bit longer to take her own. They’d both gotten back a little while ago and had each changed out of their snowboarding clothes. Regina had called first dibs on the shower.

Emma began flicking through her phone, refusing to acknowledge the fact that it was mostly to keep her from thinking about Regina. In the shower. Naked. Wet. Water cascading—she should really play a game or something while she waited since she had no new messages. Maybe she should just wait downstairs.

Just then the water shut off and Emma reconsidered. She could just wait for Regina to finish up in there, couldn’t take more than five or ten minutes, right? Silly to go all the way downstairs.

She had managed to lose a life in her game when she heard the door knob turning. Wow, Regina gets changed really fast, she thought; it had only been a minute or so since the water stopped.

She glanced up automatically as the door opened. “Hey, are you done al—” The words died in her throat as Regina walked into the room with only a towel wrapped around her. She had it fastened with some sort of knot by the top of her chest and her hair was slicked back, darker than usual. Emma’s eyes were hypnotized by a few drops of water that ran down from her collarbone to disappear beneath the towel.

Regina seemed not to notice that Emma’s sentence had ended rather abruptly as she went over to the dresser. “Oh Emma, hey. I’d like a few more minutes, if you don’t mind.” She flashed Emma a small smile before opening a drawer.

Emma’s eyes quickly darted away because she was pretty sure most Regina’s clothes were hung up in the closet which meant that drawer probably had her underwear in it. A light blush spread across her face, she bet Regina wore things with lace, lace and—god, when had she turned into a teenage boy?

“Right, yeah, no problem. I think I’ll go downstairs for a bit, actually,” Emma said, hoping her voice sounded normal, as she jumped up off the bed. “Some of the kids are here so maybe I’ll go hang with them for a bit.” Emma choose to ignore that she’d originally come up to avoid the kids.

“Alright, thanks” Regina replied, still sorting through something in the drawer. “I’ll come down and tell you when I’m done.”

“Alright, thanks” Regina replied, still sorting through something in the drawer. “I’ll come down and tell you when I’m done.”

“Okay, sounds good,” Emma continued, her eyes running down very bare legs. How could Regina’s legs look so long? She was shorter than Emma after all. Maybe it was because the towel was so short and barely covered her—. “Yup. See ya then.”

Regina offered a wave over her shoulder and Emma left just in time to see Regina bending over to reach something she’d dropped.

Emma was relieved no one was in the hall when she practically ran out of the room—opening the door as little as possible so no one else could see in—her face bright red. She took a minute or so to compose her thoughts, trying to get her suddenly raging hormones under control.

Pull it together, Swan. Regina is only your pretend girlfriend. She’s far too good for you in real life. You control your hormones at home, you can do it here. A petulant part of herself noted that Regina wasn’t sleeping in the same room as her at home and she definitely wore more than a single flimsy
towel.

Well, life’s unfair like that, she told herself, not sure if she meant that she had to see Regina like that now, or that she couldn’t at home. With a sigh, she headed down the stairs. She just needed to get her mind off Regina and all of her glistening tan skin. She was normally so good at ignoring and denying and minimizing her feelings for the other woman. She could do this.

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Regina came downstairs to find Emma, hoping the other woman wasn’t annoyed at her having taken long in the shower—she’d left rather quickly earlier.

She found Emma coaching Evan in Mario Kart. He was racing against the older Henry, Melody, and PJ, with Rose, who was Evan’s age, watching eagerly. She walked around the couch, smiling at how enthusiastic Emma seemed. Before Emma had explained that while she didn’t always enjoy it, she did know how to handle kids. Regina had always thought it was because Emma had so much kid still in her, but knew it also had to do with being forced to play babysitter while she was in the foster system.

On a whim, Regina leaned down to put her hand on Emma’s shoulder, “Hey, thirsty?”

Emma moved her head a bit in Regina’s direction, but didn’t look away from the screen. “Hey, sure.”

Regina continued into the kitchen to fix herself up a cup of coffee and Emma some coco. She considered the coffee carefully before regretfully selecting decaf. She knew if she had any caffeine after three o’clock she’d have trouble getting to sleep.

“Pizza’s ordered,” Elsa said, as she passed by Regina in the kitchen. “Emma said you were good with peperoni?”

“Yes, that’s fine,” Regina replied. “Would you like any coco?”

“With cinnamon?” Elsa asked, curiously.

Regina smiled reflexively, remembering when Emma had first told her of how it was one of the things that had convinced her the Blanchards were her birth family. “Of course.”

“Sure, thanks!” Elsa replied with a smile. “Are you enjoying everything so far?”

“Yes, thank you,” Regina replied automatically as she set the kettle to boil. She leaned back against the counter and considered Emma’s sister. Unlike her other family members, Regina knew Emma was close with Elsa, even if she had been jealous over her when they first met. Regina did want Elsa to approve of her. “My family is on the small side, so its been very interesting seeing such a big family, especially since you all get together so often.”

“Yeah,” Elsa laughed. “I know we’re a bit of anomaly, but its really just because we all live so close—majority still in Storybrooke—that we’re still able to do this. Merida talked about how crazy it seemed when she first came—and she had triplet little brothers, so she used to family craziness.”

“Wow,” Regina said and meant it, she’d always wanted a sibling growing up but three little brothers? “That’s a lot.”

“Only child?” Elsa asked, sympathetically. “I went from an only child to having two siblings pretty quickly.” Regina knew that complications with Mary Margaret’s pregnancy with Evan had prompted
the discovering of the birth switch between Elsa and Emma.

“Sort of,” Regina said. “Raised an only child. After my parents passed away, I learned I had an older half-sister. We’re still figuring it out, but its easier and harder than you’d expect.”

“I bet,” Elsa said. “Sorry to hear about your parents.” She couldn’t imagine both of her parents not being around and was sure anything she would say would be inadequate. Aiming to get back onto lighter topics, she said, “And speaking of parents, sorry about dinner last night, by the way. My mom can be a little much.”

Regina lifted an eyebrow at the understatement. “Yes, I noticed,” she said dryly. “Luckily, Emma had prepared me for some of it, I expected a bit of an inquisition.”

Elsa smiled, “Yeah, I could tell. You handled all her questions without batting an eye, it was very impressive. I wish my wedding hadn’t been used as an excuse to bother you though.”

Regina waved a hand, “Nonsense, from what Emma’s told me, she would have found some other way to ask her invasive questions.”

“I guess,” Elsa said thoughtfully. “It was different with Merida because she’d met Mom before she was my girlfriend. Less intense, certainly than all of this.” She motioned to around them.

Regina pursed her lips and considered. Elsa was kind and she clearly loved Emma, but it was just as clear her mother was a bit of blind spot for her. Regina didn’t think she noticed how differently Mary Margaret treated her or how similarly when she shouldn’t since Elsa and Emma were pretty different people. Regina leaned a bit closer, as if confiding in the other woman, “Emma almost didn’t invite me,” she pseudo-confessed. “She didn’t tell me until a couple weeks ago about all this. Of course, she’d told me funny stories about these annual reunions, but not exactly when they were.”

“Why?” Elsa asked, confused. “You’ve been dating for a few months, right? She knows girlfriends can come.”

“She does, but I think she was nervous about bringing someone along. Its my understanding that she’s never brought anyone before and I think she was worried about people making a big deal of it—for both my sake and her own. Like you said, it’s a lot and your mother can be a little…intense. She said that’s why she’d never brought anyone before.” Regina leaned back with a wry smile, “Not everyone can handle marriage and kid questions after less than a year of dating, however serious they are.”

Elsa was nodding slowly, “Yeah, no—definitely. I know Emma likes to keep things private, but I never thought she wouldn’t bring someone because of us.”

“I don’t think she means anyone in particular, but…” Regina frowned trying to find the right words. “Emma’s told me about her past in some detail and I think that weighs on her more heavily than your family realizes.”

Elsa’s gaze sharpened as she met Regina’s eyes. Regina held her gaze steadily and refused to back down. She needed more of Emma’s family to realize they were hurting her, whether they meant to or not, by not giving her space to tell them who she was instead of the other way around.

Their staring was interrupted by the whistling of the kettle Regina had nearly forgotten she’d put on.

Elsa thought over everything Regina had said as the other woman began pouring and mixing the hot chocolate.
When Regina handed Elsa her mug, Elsa said, “You really love her, don’t you?” Regina blinked at her in surprise, but didn’t get a chance to respond. Elsa smiled and continued without waiting for an answer, “I’m not surprised to hear you say that. I know Emma keeps things to herself. She’s forthcoming with easy details, but I mean, I know she doesn’t talk to me much about our parents. I think she doesn’t want to put me in the middle. Like she’s worried I’d chose their side over hers or something.”

“Both of you seem to think I have some rose-colored view of Mom and Dad. I admit I have a soft spot for them, but I’m the one who grew up with them my whole life, I have a more complete view than you’d think. Dad was better about easing into everything, but Mom didn’t know how to handle a grown daughter. She felt like it was her fault that Emma had such a hard life, that she should have known about the mix up, should have been able to tell that she had the wrong baby. And then she feels bad for thinking of me as not her correct daughter.”

Elsa frowned, looking into her mug, “I don’t think she could ever really deal with it so she just pretended everything was fine, that we just were a big happy family and if she pretended hard enough, we would be. She ignored any missteps, especially on her part, to the contrary.” Elsa met Regina’s surprised gaze, “I could see it hurt Emma back then and it still does now, sometimes. But I don’t know what to do and Emma doesn’t seem to want to acknowledge it to anyone else. I’m glad she talked to you though. I’ll work harder to show her, she can talk to me too.”

Elsa stood up and smiled, “Thanks for the coco.”

“You’re welcome,” Regina said, still too shocked to say much more.

The coffee maker beeped and she made her own coffee on autopilot. Ultimately, she decided she was pleased with the conversation—if she could get even some of Emma’s family to pay her more care, this whole endeavor was worth it.

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While Mary Margaret was waiting for dinner to be delivered, she looked into the living room from the kitchen, observing Regina with the kids. Mary Margaret had passed Emma on her way down, with Emma explaining she’d be down for dinner after her shower. Mary Margaret had come the rest of the way down to find Regina on the couch and the kids playing in the living room.

She was trying take this as an opportunity to see if she could learn anymore about Regina. The girl was a mystery and Mary Margaret couldn’t understand why she was here. Emma had never dated anyone like her before. She’d only met a couple of Emma’s boyfriends before, but they tended to be more…rugged. Regina was clearly an accomplished woman, smart, cared for her appearance, and sort of mean, if Mary Margaret was being honest with herself.

Neal and Killian had been rough around the edges, but they’d both tried hard to endear themselves to her and David, even before they’d seriously dated. Not that either relationship lasted more than a year. Regina didn’t seem to want her approval, for all she’d answered all of Mary Margaret’s questions without balking.

Although, in retrospect, she was sure some of Regina’s answers were purposely antagonist. Mary Margaret was surprised that Emma had let her answer the questions, often on her own. Normally, Emma talked for her boyfriends or was more vehement about getting Mary Margaret to stop asking, she supposed it had been years since Emma had brought anyone home.

Mary Margaret had known that Emma had dated since then, but they’d all been short relationships she’d tried hard not to judge Emma for, so yes, she’d been skeptical when Emma said she’d be
Emma had told them she was bisexual the summer before she’d left for college, but Mary Margaret had never met any girls she was dating. She understood that Emma might have felt insecure around Elsa and when she had first moved in with them, had followed her sister’s lead, but that had seemed a bit much. Still, Mary Margaret had tried to be a good mother and listened to her and reassured her whatever she felt was alright.

It was strange seeing Emma with a girlfriend though. Elsa had never shown any interest in boys at all and so she hadn’t been too surprised when she’d come out, but Emma she was used to seeing with boys. Regina certainly was an attractive woman and Emma did seem to like brunettes, but…she was just so different from anyone Emma had ever dated.

Regina seemed to think she was better than them, acting like everything was a business interview or work meeting—even Mary Margaret’s parent questions, she’d answered as if she was trying to win the conversation.

Mary Margaret did not like that. This was a family event, not a work retreat and it was insulting to have this stranger treat it as such. Mary Margaret was pretty sure Regina somehow knew she felt that way and was doing it on purpose. That Emma didn’t notice or didn’t care that she’d brought someone like that along their family trip was unsettling to say the least. If Regina was nervous, like Merida implied, she sure had a bad way of dealing with it.

Mary Margaret narrowed her eyes at Regina on the couch, the younger woman watching the kids, but not joining in their games the way Emma would have. What was Regina’s plan? Why was she here? Why was she with Emma?

They didn’t seem to have much in common, for all they did seem like they got along. Emma was acting more physically affectionate with Regina than anyone else Mary Margaret had ever seen her with. It’d taken months to get Emma to allow her own mother to hug her without flinching, how had Regna managed to get her to open so quickly?

Regina was imperious, and abrasive, and stuck up—and she had Emma wrapped around her finger. But why? Mary Margaret loved Emma, and she knew her daughter was smart and kind and pretty, but she had dropped out of college, worked as a bartender, and was too much of a loner for her own good. Regina was a beautiful, big-city lawyer who didn’t even seem gay, which she apparently was rather than “bisexual” as Emma said she was.

Regina claimed to not have a problem with it, but Mary Margaret didn’t know if she believed her. Why would you date someone who at any moment might decide they wanted someone completely opposite you? Still, she did seem to care for Emma. The only moments she’d smiled had been directed at Emma.

Just then a loud, thud, from the living room pulled her out of her thoughts. Rose Hua was on the ground, evidently after having tripped over the edge of the carpet on the way back from the bathroom.

Regina was already off the couch and kneeling down next to her. “Are you alright, Rose?” Regina asked in as soft and calm a voice she could muster.

“My arm hurts,” Rose whimpered, tears already falling down her face, with her hand covering part of her arm.

Regina reached onto the end table next to her without looking and handed the eight-year-old some
tissues while rubbing the girl’s other shoulder comfortingly. “Could you let me see?” Regina asked before waiting for Rose to slowly show her the scrape on her arm. When she’d fallen her arm had scraped against the bricks of the fireplace.

Regina hissed a little in sympathy, it was almost like a rug burn. “Well that does look like it hurts. Why don’t we go to the bathroom and get this cleaned up?”

Rose nodded, still crying, but clearly finding Regina’s calm soothing. “Okay.”

Mary Margaret hadn’t expected Regina to respond so quickly or so well, she’d expected to have to step in herself. Rose tended not to like strangers, and could be hard to console. Regina had seemed almost maternal, which Mary Margaret hadn’t thought was possible for the serious woman.

The pair came back a few minutes later, a large square white bandage over part of Rose’s arm that looked very securely put on. They were talking quietly, Regina bent over to better hear the quieter girl. Once they got over to the little games table in the corner, Regina pulled out a piece of paper and a marker and Mary Margaret could hear her say, “…so if you draw it here, I’ll do my best to draw it one your big bandaid.”

“Oh, okay,” Rose still seemed sad, but also determined as she picked up the pen.

Regina waited patiently as Rose drew something out, taking a few tissues from her to throw out.

“There,” Rose said, with finality. “Do you think you could draw that?”

“I like it,” Regina said with a kind smile. “Sure. Do you want it to be pink?”

Rose shook her head, “Brown please, Dragon is brown.”

“She certainly looks like a handsome cat, I’ll do my best,” Regina replied, and picked up a marker to carefully draw a cat face onto the large bandage pad on Rose’s arm.

When she was finished, she asked, “How’s that? I hope I didn’t press too hard.”

Rose shook her head, “You didn’t—it looks good. Thanks, Regina.”

“You’re welcome,” Regina gave the girl a very warm smile. “You ready to head back over.” When Rose hesitated, worried that her cousins might think she baby-ish for crying, Regina spoke up, “Would you mind sitting with me on the couch? I haven’t played any video games in a long time and Mario Kart looks different—can you explain it to me?”

Rose’s eyes lit up at being asked to explain something to an adult. “Yeah, I can tell you. You’ll be an expert in no time!” She grabbed Regina’s hand to pull her over to the couch while Regina muffled her laughter at the phrase the girl had used. “Thanks, Rose, I appreciate it.”

Mary Margaret was surprised at how easily Regina had calmed down and treated the girl, especially for someone who didn’t have any family that were kids or a job with kids.

The sound of the doorbell, brought her away from the living room. As, Mary Margaret went to answer the door for the pizza, she thought tentatively, maybe Regina isn’t so bad, after all.
Chapter 7

Emma woke up briefly when Regina’s alarm went off and it was only a minute later that she realized something was wrong. Regina normally began moving almost immediately upon waking up and checking things on her phone before getting up to go the bathroom. This morning Regina had made a little muffled noise of disgust and turned off her alarm as quickly as possible. She’d even left her phone on the table.

The difference was enough to wake Emma up further and turn to look over at her friend. Regina’s face was buried in her pillow, her brow furrowed, and her body curled tighter than normal.

Just as Emma was about to say something, Regina groaned and got up, her eyes barely open, and stumbled into the bathroom. Emma sat up, running her fingers through her tangled hair as she tried to blink herself more awake.

A few minutes later, Regina came back into the room, managing to look less awake than Emma, which was nothing short of a miracle given how long it usually took Regina to look unfairly good in the morning.

Emma yawned, as Regina moved to get back under the covers, “Regina? Wha’s going on?”

Regina turned so she was facing the blonde, “I’m sorry, Emma. I don’t think I can go skiing today.”

“Oh, are you feeling sick?” Emma asked, concern flooding her. “I thought that chicken thing you ordered last night seemed sketchy.”

“No, no—I have a migraine.” Emma winced sympathetically. She knew Regina got migraines pretty regularly. Emma was more familiar with the usual kind that Regina tended to get after hard days at work and resulted in her giving in to getting take out instead of cooking and Emma going home early so Regina could sleep. “I took some medicine that might get rid of it, but…”

Emma could read the truth in her voice. “It probably won’t though, right?”

Regina shook her head lightly, closing her eyes. “Probably not. Sorry.”

“Hey, not your fault.” Emma hated seeing her friend in pain, especially when she couldn’t really help. Regina mostly ended up waiting out these kind of things. She also knew that when Regina’s migraine did go away, Regina would feel guilty for changing their plans so Emma wanted to get out ahead of that, “No need to be sorry, don’t worry. Let’s just go back to sleep. I’ve been itching for a good reason to really sleep in on this vacation.” Emma hoped the truth to that statement got through to Regina so she wouldn’t notice Emma was indeed putting off her plans to join the others on the mountain.

Whether or not it worked, Emma couldn’t tell because Regina only gave a small nod, clearly already half asleep, and sank her head further into her pillow. Emma grabbed her own phone and texted Elsa and Ruby to let them know she and Regina wouldn’t be coming along today and not to wait up for them before going back to sleep herself. If they weren’t going snowboarding today, she was not going to be awake at this time.

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Emma woke up an hour and a half later without any alarm’s help. She silently lamented her inability to sleep in after so many early mornings for work and grabbed her phone as she tried to plan out her
day. Despite all the moving around Emma was doing, including getting up to use the bathroom, Regina didn’t move at all. Emma knew even though she was trying to be careful, normal Regina would have woken up by now since unlike Emma, she was a relatively light sleeper.

Eventually Emma’s stomach pulled her out of bed and she stumbled down to the kitchen to make herself some eggs and bacon. Hers weren’t as good as Granny’s or Ruby’s but they would do.

Her mom found her after Emma had finished eating and had begun looking through the cabinets for something for Regina. Mary Margaret eyed her daughter with amusement as she opened just about every cabinet in their kitchen as she wondered why Emma was still here. Had she overslept?

Soon enough Emma noticed Mary Margaret standing there. “Hey, mom,” Emma asked. “Do we have any ginger tea?”

Mary Margaret looked at her daughter with surprise, Emma didn’t like plain black or green tea, let alone anything more unusual. “Ginger tea? I don’t think so.”

“Shi-oot,” Emma sighed to herself, as she went back to double checking the cabinets.

“Why?” Mary Margaret leaned against the wall, wondering what was prompting the intense search for ginger tea. “You don’t like tea,” she pointed out.

“Not for me,” Emma’s voice was muffled since she’d gotten down on the floor and stuck her head into the bottom of the pantry. She dragged out a bedraggled box only to see it was just green tea. Emma shoved it back where she’d pulled it from and stood back up, dusting off her hands. “It’s for Regina. She’s got a migraine and so I need ginger tea.”

“Is that why you haven’t left for mountain yet?” Mary Margaret asked, only just now noticing that Emma wasn’t even dressed yet, since she was still in sleep pants and t-shirt. While Elsa was always first out the door, Emma normally wasn’t too far behind, even if it was about the only thing that could get her out of bed before nine.

“Yeah,” Emma replied distractedly, scrolling through her phone. “You think the General store will have some?”

“Some what? Special tea?” Mary Margaret was surprised Emma seemed so invested in this tea. “Did she tell you she needed it that badly? I’m sure some Advil will be enough. We might even have Excedrin upstairs.”

Emma was already shaking her head, “Nah, Regina’s still asleep, but I know she always has this tea if she gets a migraine in the morning. She says it helps. Regina has all the medicine or whatever she takes, but she forgot the tea—she said something when we were unpacking. She’ll want that when she wakes up around 10 before she takes some other medicine around noon with her coffee. Hopefully it’ll go away by then, but sometimes her day is just shot.”

Emma finally gave up her fruitless online search and went over to grab her coat. “I think I’ll try the general store first and then a pharmacy after. You need anything?”

Mary Margaret automatically shook her head, too surprised by how focused Emma seemed to be on getting this tea for her girlfriend. “No, no. I’m good. Thank you, sweetie. I’ll see you for lunch? If you’re getting a late start, you’ll probably be having lunch with us old folks, right?”

“Oh, no. Sorry, mom. I’m just gonna stay here today, just in case.” Emma flashed her mom a brief smile as she pulled on her shoes. “I already told Elsa and them I’m out for today.”
“Really?” Mary Margaret had never known Emma to miss a day snowboarding. Even that one time she’d had a fever, they’d had to practically tie her to her bed. “Are you sure? I don’t think there’s much you can do for this kind of thing.”

“Yeah, I know, but I definitely can’t help out if I’m not here, right?” Emma asked rhetorically. She waved over her shoulder as she headed out, “Bye.”

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David came into the kitchen, following a peculiar smell and found an even more peculiar sight: Emma was still here and she appeared to be brewing tea if the package on the counter was anything to go by. More to the point was why Emma was still at home. “Good morning, sweetie.”

Emma jumped a little from where she had been standing over a mug, “Hey dad. Getting ready to head out on your hike?”

“Yup, just dropping off my coffee mug,” He wiggled his blue “#1 Dad” mug that had Evan’s hand prints on it and made his way over to the sink. “What are you still doing here, Emma? Shouldn’t you be carving powder or whatever it is you kids call it these days?”

Emma couldn’t stop herself from pulling the face she did, even though she could tell from the look in his eye he was joking. “Ha, ha. You’re not even that old, Dad. No, I’m sticking around here for today—Regina’s not feeling well.”

“Oh, that’s too bad,” her father frowned sympathetically before rubbing his chin thoughtfully. “I wasn’t going to say anything, but her food last night looked—”

Emma cut him off, “It’s not food poisoning—she has a migraine.”

“Oh, well that’s good.” At Emma’s look, he hastily clarified, “I mean, not that your girlfriend’s head hurts, but you know, that it’s not something contagious?”

“Real compassionate,” Emma joked as she rolled her eyes and turned back to the tea she was brewing. She hoped he hadn’t seen the pleased flush that had come to her face at hearing him call Regina her girlfriend. He’d never purposely downplayed anything like her mom had and she’d never had many relationships she’d told them about in the first but it was still really nice to hear him say that.

To distract herself, she brought the cup to her lips and took a hesitant sip. After making a face, she put it back down and let it continue to steep.

“Why does Regina having a headache mean you’re torturing yourself with strange tea?” David had picked up the tea package and was examining it with interest.

“It’s ginger tea,” Emma replied, taking the box from him. “And she likes to have it when she’s got one. I’m trying to make sure it’s the right strength, but I only tried it the one time before deciding it was nasty.”

“Yeah, don’t ask me to understand tea,” David replied. “Coffee or bust. Is she awake yet?” Emma shook her head in response. “Won’t it get cold if you make it now?”

“I got one of these,” Emma pulled out a metal water bottle. “They keep cold things cold and hot things hot. Regina really uses it for water most of the time, but it’ll work for this tea too. Once its strong enough, I’m gonna leave it on the nightstand and then watch some Netflix down here or try to get back into shape at Mario Kart – I can’t have these little twerps kicking my ass.”
David laughed, “Of course not. At least you don’t have to worry about Evan—he some how always goes off the edge at least once a lap which sets him back.”

“That’s true,” Emma agreed with a smile.

David’s phone buzzed and he saw the text from Mulan and Peter saying they were ready to head out. He smiled at Emma, who’s focus had already been drawn back to the tea, and leaned over to kiss her head, “You have a nice day taking care of your girl.”

Emma returned his half hug with a smile, “I will. Try not to get lost out there again.”

“It was one time!” David protested as he pulled on his coat.

“Still happened,” Emma reminded him with a grin and waved until he headed out the door. Her smile still on her face, she determined the tea was as good as it was going to get. She poured it into the metal bottle and headed up to leave it for Regina.

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Emma looked up she heard the front door open and was surprised to see Granny walk in. Granny spotted her a few seconds after Emma did and froze, before smiling and heading in to the kitchen.

Emma smiled from where she was by the stove, “Hey Granny, what brings you over?”

“Oh, to be honest—I didn’t think anyone would be here,” Granny said with a shrug as she settled down at the kitchen table.

“Yeah?” Emma asked, amused.

“I love all you grandkids, but I need a break from the little ones,” Granny said with a shake of her head. “I can only play so many board games and ping pong before I need some time to myself.” She jerked a thumb over her shoulder, “They’re chasing Leroy around now while Astrid makes lunch.

As the coffee maker beeped and Emma went to grab a mug, Granny asked shrewdly, “What are you still doing here? Shouldn’t you be taking advantage of your youth and risking your life on the mountain?”

Emma rolled her eyes, as if Granny hadn’t only stopped skiing a couple years ago. “Regina’s not feeling too great, so we decided to spend the day home instead. Might as well get in some relaxing on this vacation, right?” She poured out two cups of coffee before half-turning to Granny, “You want any cinnamon coffee?”

“Cinnamon coffee, you say,” Granny raised an eyebrow, but nodded. “Sure, if you’ve got some to spare.”

“Coming right up,” Emma replied, grabbing Granny’s favorite red mug and pouring a cup for her. “I’ll right back, gotta bring this up to Regina. Do you mind stirring the pot while I…” Emma motioned first to the stove and then upstairs with her shoulder.

“Not at all, Emma,” Granny responded, noting the careful way her granddaughter was holding the mug. She went over and accepted the cup of coffee.

Emma flashed her a smile, “Thanks, Granny. I’ll be right back.”

Granny nodded as Emma left, before turning her attention to the macaroni and cheese Emma had
going on the stove. She looked at it closer, taking a sip of the very well-made coffee and was surprised to realize that Emma appeared to making Granny’s own recipe for mac & cheese, not something from a box. She gave both the pot of sauce and the pot of pasta a stir, noting everything was almost done.

Even though Red ran the restaurant now, and had so for many years, Granny still taught all of her grandchildren to cook whenever she had to watch them over a meal. “I’m your babysitter, not your cook,” she’d told all of them. Emma had been older when she’d joined the family, but when she, Elsa, and Ella were finishing off high school, she’d taught them what she saw as the basics so they didn’t live off only instant ramen when they moved away just as she had Ruby and August.

Emma came back into the room, disrupting her chain of thought, “Thanks, Granny. I got it from here.”

“I can see that, I’m glad some of what I taught you stuck in your head,” Granny said, sitting back down.

Emma gave her an overly dramatic exasperated look, “Have you been talking to Mom? Because I swear, she never believes me when I say I can cook for myself. You’d think every time she called, I was eating nothing but take out and beer.”

“I’m sure you still eat more of that than you should,” Granny said with a severe look, before smiling again. “But I’m glad you remember.”

Emma shrugged but a smile crept across her face. She still had all of Granny’s recipes and often made them when she missed her family. The mac & cheese was her favorite though and the one she made most often. Even Regina had asked for the recipe.

“This is very good too,” Granny said, gesturing with her coffee cup.

“Thanks,” Emma said as she began draining the pasta through the strainer over the sink. “Regina showed me when I explained how I like my coco. She said this was the “grown-up” version,” Emma said with a good-natured roll of her eyes. “You add the cinnamon to the coffee grounds—not to the cup.”

Granny nodded, “Very smart.”

Emma had just added the sauce and begun to stir when they both heard footsteps coming down the stairs. Emma frowned and tried to see through the doorway, “Regina?”

Sure enough, the other girl came into view and Granny realized Emma was right—Regina did not look well. The girl was paler and far less put together than the other times Granny had seen her. Once Regina spotted her though she instantly straightened and tried to put on a more polite and distant face. It would have been more effective if she wasn’t still in her pajamas. She squinted a little as she came into the room, holding her coffee mug tightly in both hands.

“Hello, Ms Lucas,” Regina looked profoundly uncomfortable, as if she regretted coming downstairs. “My apologies for interrupting your conversation.”

“Nonsense, come sit down,” Granny replied as she gestured to one of the chairs at the kitchen table.

“Regina, I told you I’d bring our lunch up to you,” Emma scolded lightly, frowning at her friend’s inability to let her help.

“And I told you I’m not an invalid,” Regina protested.
“Uh-huh,” Emma replied absently as she pulled out a chair and ushered Regina into it when all she’d done was stand next to it. She then went over to the light switch and dimmed the main light until Regina removed her hand from her forehead. “Better?”

Regina sent her a grateful smile, “Much, thank you.”

“Lunch is almost ready,” Emma said, returned to stir the mac & cheese while also getting down bowls. “Do you want any Granny?”

“I’ll have a little—just to make sure you followed my recipe right,” Granny teased, before explaining, “I had a later breakfast.”

Emma smiled, “I hope it’s up to your standards.”

“It’s a very good recipe,” Regina spoke up from where she’d been sitting finishing off her coffee with her hand on her head. Most of the times she and Emma hung out, they went to Regina’s apartment and she cooked since her apartment was larger and she loved to cook.

However, on a few occasions, when they didn’t want take out and Regina was tired or just didn’t feel like cooking, Emma had made them food. She seemed more comfortable making breakfast and lunch foods over dinner, but Regina had tried this recipe before and she now remembered Emma saying she’d learned it from a relative.

“Thank you,” Granny said as Emma served them and herself, and then grabbing the coffee pot to top off Regina’s coffee. Granny shook her head when Emma held the pot out to her and Emma returned it. She sat down with her own mug and a glass of milk between Granny and Regina. “When you run a diner, you have to have the staple comfort food down pat.”

Granny took a bite from her own bowl and tried to ignore the obvious way Emma was eyeing her to see her reaction—Emma normally began eating immediately, with a concentration she rarely showed any other time so the slow bites Emma was taking gave her away more than the glances.

It always surprised her how much Emma seemed to pretend she didn’t care about her family’s approval. Only knowledge of what her younger years had been like stopped Granny from teasing her as she might her other grandkids. “Glad to see you do still remember what I taught you. You take a picture of my recipes or something?” She wondered how Emma had been able to follow the recipe without the physical recipe.

Emma smiled down at her own food as she began to eat in earnest. “Yeah, at home I just use the binder, but after the spaghetti sauce incident, I thought I should take some pictures just in case any thing happened to them.”

Originally, Granny had given them all hand written index cards with copies of her recipes, but one year for Christmas, Ruby had helped to laminate and put everyone’s into personal binders instead, with a professional cookbook version for Granny herself.

“Care to share what incident that was?” Regina asked, as she took small, dainty bites of her mac & cheese. She reached out and patted Emma’s arm, “This is very good, Emma. Thank you.”

Emma squirmed at the compliment. She rubbed the back of her neck as she said, “Thanks. And there isn’t much to tell. I’d run out of counter space and…”

Emma ended up spending much of lunch talking to Granny, since she could see Regina was still having trouble concentrating.
Regina finished most of her bowl before pushing it away. “I’m gonna go lay down and wait for the rest of this caffeine to start to work.”

She made as if to bring her bowl to the sink, but Emma grabbed it from her and took all the plates to the sink. She grabbed a glass and filled it up with water, which she passed to Regina, “Okay. Feel better.”

“Thanks,” Regina replied with a smile and a blush. She could never get over how nice Emma was to her when she didn’t feel well.

After she left, Granny interrupted Emma’s thoughts to say, “What are your plans for the rest of the afternoon?”

“I’m probably just going to catch on TV shows or some stuff on my laptop, I can keep it down if you’d like,” Emma said, motioning vaguely to the living room. “I hadn’t meant to steal your hideout.”

Granny laughed, “No, I’m going to head back over to my condo—it’s almost time for the afternoon poker tournament.”

“Oh really? That’s great,” Emma said grinning. She hadn’t known Granny even knew how to play poker, which now that she thought about it, seemed very much like something she would be good at. “Who all is going?”

“Just us old folks,” Granny replied with a shrug and a wink. She pointed her finger at Emma, “You’d think Midas or George would be the ones to watch, but it’s actually Briar Rose. Marco is actually as hopeless as you’d expect.”

Emma laughed, “I’ll try to remember that.”

“See that you do,” Granny said with false solemnity. “It’s been nice catching up with you.”

Emma smiled, “Thanks.” She waved as Granny left, before heading into the living room and sitting back down on the couch. She was happy for the compliment, but it had gotten her thoughts spinning.

Emma didn’t get why everyone kept commenting on what she was doing for Regina, like she was acting weird just because she was helping Regina out. Even if they hadn’t been pretending to date, Emma still would have done this. Emma didn’t have many friends, but the ones she did have, she made sure she was good to. And Regina was one of the most important people in her life, any friend worth anything would be just as nice, wouldn’t they?

Granny had been nice and probably didn’t mean anything by it, but both Mary Margaret and David had been surprised she hadn’t just abandoned Regina for the day.

Maybe it was because it was her doing all this. Maybe they thought she didn’t have it in her to take care of another person. Poor Emma, all on her own. Damaged. Can’t even take care of herself. She was pretty sure that what they thought. It definitely used to be what they thought, she’d hoped after living on her own in Boston for the last few years they wouldn’t anymore.

That was one of the reasons she brought Regina in the first place—to prove she was fine on her own, that she was in control of her own life, and yeah, maybe she had an awesome friend instead of an awesome girlfriend, but it shouldn’t matter. Emma had a person like Regina in her life and she sure as shit wasn’t going to take that lightly and let Regina change her mind about being around Emma.

She sighed, shaking her head: her family always made everything so complicated. Maybe she was
just overthinking. She turned on the TV, and looked for something fun to watch.

As the cold open of an episode of Brooklyn 99 came on, she tried to push her thoughts of her family aside and enjoy a relaxing day.

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Regina joined her downstairs about an hour later, migraine finally vanquished. Still, she was feeling very low energy and was more than happy to join Emma on the couch under a blanket to watch TV.

They continued to hang out for most of the afternoon, with only minor disruptions from various family members as they came home from their days out. Luckily, Mary Margaret, David, and Evan went to have dinner at Aunt Red and Uncle Peter’s condo. Elsa and Merida decided to go out just the two of them for some personal time away from everyone.

Since Emma and Regina turned down the invite to Aunt Red’s, they decided to order Chinese food instead and continue relaxing. Regina had returned to reading her novel, while Emma had taken out her laptop to study.

It was less than an hour before Emma got up to answer the door and grab their food. Regina insisted on grabbing plates, but Emma convinced her that it would be fine if they ate in the living room, something Regina generally avoided.

“How’s the studying going?” Regina asked, dishing her own food from one the containers.

“Alright,” Emma said around an egg roll. She swallowed her mouthful at Regina’s amused raised eyebrow. “I think I’ll be ready by the end of the month, but only if I don’t get lazy.”

“Is the test that soon?” Regina asked with a frown, “I thought it was in 6 weeks.”

Emma shook her head, “No, I decided to go with the earlier date instead. The sooner I’m certified to use the RHR database, the more I can do at work and the faster I can gain the experience I need for my license.”

Regina nodded, frowning as she realized something. “Hey, we never talked about your job before we came up. Do your parents know you’re trying to get your private investigator’s license this year or did you tell them your original two year plan?”

Emma squirmed, “No, they still think I mostly bar tend.”

“What?” Regina said flatly.

“Well, the last time I really talked to them about job stuff, they were kinda…” Emma frowned and tried to find the right words. “Here’s the thing, I wasn’t sure the internship with Hunstman was even going to work or lead to a real thing so I downplayed it when I told them about it. They might know I worked there part-time?”

Regina scowled, hating Emma felt the need to keep something like this hidden from her family; she hated that her family had made her feel like it was something she needed to do. “Why the hell have you let them think that?”

“I don’t know,” Emma snapped, before deflating. “I don’t know, its just easier. Mom freaked out a lot when I told her about some of the stuff I was initially helping Graham out with before I got the internship and she thinks anything bailbonds-related is too dangerous for me. Forget that Dad’s the sheriff, they think Boston’s full of danger as it is. And Dad was very “leave it to the professionals”
and thought it wasn’t something I should be doing since I wasn’t a cop or ex-military or whatever.”

Regina hated that she could see their point—she doubted any parent would be thrilled if their child was doing something with that level of risk to it. Hell, a lot of the private investigator stuff made her worried for Emma, but she did at least acknowledge that Emma knew what she was doing and that she was good at it.

Emma’s stories, even though she never made them out as such, proved that she excelled at and enjoyed her job. Regina crossed her arms, choosing a different angle, “I can’t see how working as an independent part-time bailbonds person would be more palatable to a parent than working full-time at a well-established private investigative agency.”

Emma sighed, “You’d be right except Mom got very good at not asking or talking about the bailbond thing. Easy to for her to pretend it’s an one-off thing that doesn’t exist and refuse to hear about it. And I just stopped bringing it up.” Emma shrugged, “She’s still convinced I’ll give that up, and the bartending, and like, go work in a cubicle somewhere, I think.”

Emma felt the need to keep explaining, because she knew it wasn’t good, to be keeping this from them—especially on top of the whole fake girlfriend thing. “And, I didn’t want to deal with the expectations or having to tell them if it all fell through. It still feels like it might,” she confessed, not wanting to admit how precarious everything felt.

She remembered when she decided to actually try to do what she wanted for a living and how scary that had been, how silly she had felt pursuing it. Even though it had already worked out better than she’d ever imagined, it also still felt like she could just wake up and have it all be a dream or something.

“You know that’s not true. Worst case scenario is you don’t pass everything this year and so you pass next year. You’re going to do this, because it’s something you want and it’s something you’ve been working really hard for.”

“Thanks,” Emma said, unable to say anything else in face of such confidence in her, especially from Regina, who she trusted to call her out on her bullshit.

“I don’t want to…” Regina bit her lip and thought about her words very carefully before continuing. “You say your family doesn’t know you and I think you’re right about that. A lot of that is on them for just not asking the right questions and not realizing how much they’re missing. But,” and Emma could see the focused look Regina was giving her, see that Regina was worried Emma might not like what she was going to say next but that she was determined to say it away. Emma almost smiled, Regina really was her best friend.

“But, if you do want them to know you, you will have to start sharing more.” She held up the hand that wasn’t holding Emma’s to preempt any responses Emma might have to that, “And I understand why you haven’t, really I do. They’ve had frustrating reactions before—your mother’s ability to stick her head in the sand is clearly not one to be underestimated—but I think you’re keeping some of it to yourself, keeping it in, in limbo because you’re so worried about it.”

“I think not saying anything is hurting you more than its protecting you at this point. You’re constantly on guard around them. And while Mary Margaret might not notice or might be pretending not to, I think the rest of them do and they just don’t know what to do about it. I think they might be giving you space and trying to wait you out in deference to your feelings, not because they don’t want to know.”

Regina finished with a significant look and asked, as if she already knew the answer, “Does Elsa
Emma shook her head, “I don’t want to put her in the position of having to keep things from Mary Margaret.”

“I thought that’s what sisters were for? That’s what Zelena keeps telling me anyways—” Regina tried to lighten the mood, “I think she mostly digging for embarrassing childhood stories, but still.” Her face grew serious once more, “We didn’t start to become real sisters until I made the leap of faith and actually started confiding in her about what Mother was really like.”

“I just… I hate seeing you torn between possibilities, I think its worse than knowing they’re assholes—not giving them a chance to react.”

“Maybe,” Emma acknowledged. “It’s habit at this point really, I got really used to not telling them stuff or distracting them or downplaying things. It didn’t used to feel like I was hiding so much. I came out after all, I told them about the bailbonds stuff. But after…that didn’t go so well, I kept more to myself. Lately though, with how everything at work really is going well, there’s been more to keep back. It’s starting to feel really heavy again.”

Regina nodded, having more or less expected that answer. “That’s why you should tell them, not because they deserve to know, but because you don’t deserve having to carry that. But I do hope you know, that you certainly aren’t carrying it alone.”

After a moment of silence, she finished with, “That’s all I had to say so whatever you want to say or not say, I’m behind you—just say the word and I’ll distract them with lawyer stories or pull out a PowerPoint about PI licensure.”

It got the laugh out of Emma she wanted and Emma squeezed her hand in thanks. “I’ll keep that in mind. How about for now, you help by asking me questions from the study guide?”

“Sure. Hand it over.”

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They were in the middle of studying when the heard the door open and the sound of people coming back home reached their ears. Emma tensed slightly but otherwise gave no reaction when they recognized her parents’ voices. Emma was momentarily confused before she remembered Evan was staying with the Huas for a sleep over tonight, which was good news for them since they’d have to give up the pullout couch if he had also come home.

Regina shot her a questioning look, one that clearly asked if she should keep asking questions or switch back to reading her book.

Emma thought briefly, before nodding and Regina resumed her quizzing of Emma. Mary Margaret and David made it into the room soon enough and they put aside the laptop to listen as they talked about how their dinner had gone.

“So, what have you two been up to today?” Mary Margaret asked curiously. “Did you enjoy your day in?”

“Yeah, it was nice,” Emma replied truthfully, making sure to make eye contact with Regina and let her see Emma didn’t feel inconvenienced by her migraine, something she’d been trying to convince the other woman of all day. Emma gave a shrug, “TV, reading, studying—all that type of stuff.”

Mary Margaret’s eyes narrowed as she latched onto the important word, no matter how casually
Emma had said it. “Studying? Studying for what?”

“I’ve, uh, been working more at Huntsman, that PI agency I told you guys about? Just brushing up on some of the databases they use.”

“I thought your internship ended a while ago,” Mary Margaret asked with a frown.

“Uh, yeah, it did, but they hired me on when it finished,” Emma replied, trying to be as nonchalant as possible.

Regina could see David realize, at least to some extent, that his daughter was nervous and trying to be casual. Before Mary Margaret could say anything more, he cut in, “Well, that’s wonderful, sweetheart. I’ll bet you’re already more up-to-date than I am on some of the tech—I leave the databases and online stuff to my deputies.”

“Thanks, Dad,” Emma said. “It’s interesting work.”

“I’m sure it is, sweetie,” Mary Margaret said and opened her mouth to say something that looked like it was going to be a “but” before she actually closed her mouth. “I’m glad you’re doing something more challenging than bartending, although I wish you would find a job with more normal hours.”

Emma rolled her eyes, but some of the tension did bleed from her shoulders when she realized that was all Mary Margaret was going to say for the moment, “Yeah, well—you know how these things work—newbie gets the crappy hours. It’s fine though, a lot less drunks, that’s for sure.”

Mary Margaret’s lips quirked up at that, “Well, that’s something at least. We’ll leave you girls to it then.”

She and David bid them a good night and made their way upstairs. Once their door shut, Regina reached over and gave Emma a hug. Emma returned it gratefully and they stayed like that until Emma yawned loudly causing Regina to laugh, “I think that’s enough studying for tonight.”

“Well, if you think so then it must be true,” Emma replied with a smirk. “Let’s at least head up.”

“Sounds good,” Regina replied as she began to gather her things.

“Hey,” Emma placed her hand on Regina’s upper arm and smiled, “Thanks.”

Regina couldn’t get over that Emma was thanking her, after how wonderful she’d been all day. She hadn’t even jumped in to help Emma talk to her parents. Still, she knew Emma didn’t need an argument right now so she just replied, “Thank you.” And hoped Emma understood.

Emma’s eyes sparkled and the warmest smile was on her face so Regina was sure, that as always, she somehow did.

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Emma slid into bed, after changing into her pajamas and using the bathroom, next to a reading Regina. She’d gotten a bit of second wind once they’d gotten back up here, but she could tell she wouldn’t be lasting much longer. So Emma just pulled out her phone, content to slowly sink against the pillows until Regina was ready for sleep too. She could tell by the few yawns Regina had let slip, that it wouldn’t be long.

Only a few minutes later, Regina looked away from her book reluctantly and picked her vibrating phone off of the night stand. She scowled at the message with enough annoyance to make Emma
ask, “What’s up? Work?”

Regina sighed and shook her head. “Just Tina. She keeps trying to set me up with this girl Robin she knows—no matter how often I tell her I’m not interested.”

Emma ignored the pang of jealously that news brought her. “Why don’t you say ‘yes’? Tina has good taste.”

Regina rolled her eyes, “Maybe for her own love life. But she’s terrible with mine. Trust me. I’m sure Robin is nice enough but she seems boring to me—Tina introduced us a few weeks ago. Plus, I’m pretty sure I dated her ex-wife.”

“Wow. You don’t even need my family drama to make your life a soap opera.” Emma nudged Regina’s shoulder with her own and smiled to show she was teasing.

Regina rolled her eyes good-naturedly. “Yes, well, I don’t exactly want to tell her that and she does not like taking ‘no’ for an answer.” She looked at her phone thoughtfully. “She does know I’m on a ski vacation. Maybe I’ll make up a fling to get her to leave me alone—it might work for at least the next few weeks.”

“That could work,” Emma acknowledged. “A hot snowboarding instructor, perhaps?” Emma waggled her eyebrows for extra salacious emphasis.

Regina laughed at the picture Emma made, “So self-assured, Miss Swan?”

“You know it.” Emma struck a pose that involved flexing while still half under the covers, making Regina laugh, if only to distract herself from staring at Emma’s arms. Why did the blonde have to sleep in a tank top?

Regina ended up shaking her head, “Tina just is one of those people who’s always dating someone and doesn’t get that not everyone wants to be dating all time.”

Emma nodded, she’d met the other woman once or twice and could see that being true. “Yeah, a lot of time dating someone you’re meh about is more stressful than not dating anyone—but don’t listen to me. According to Ruby, the real reason she was surprised I brought anyone was because I’m such a loner.”

Regina nodded her agreement, “Yeah, I get that. I’m sure if told any of my friends at work, they’d say the same thing—if I told them I was seriously dating someone, I mean.”

Emma nodded and smiled, “Who needs an SO when I’ve got an awesome friend like you, right?” Once the words were out of her mouth, she almost winced at how…off…they sounded. She had to hold back a frown, not understanding why she felt so weird. Regina was an awesome friend. Emma’s best friend, really. Why would saying that seem wrong?

“Right,” Regina replied, and tried to ignore the sinking feeling in her gut.

The conversation fizzled out soon after that and they turned out their lights to go to sleep, both uncomfortable. Emma didn’t know what was wrong and she hated it, hated that she had managed to ruin the easy atmosphere they’d been enjoying. How did she always manage to mess stuff up? Maybe it’ll be better in the morning and they can just forget whatever got all twisted up tonight?

Regina did know why things had gotten awkward but it didn’t help her fall asleep any faster.
“You want me tie yours?” Regina offered Emma, who was sitting on the bench next her, trying to get her ice skates laced. They were a couple benches over from the rest of the family that had come along to the ice rink.

Emma was glad Elsa and Merida hadn’t come along in the end—Emma was alright at skating but Elsa was a pro and she’d be glad not to be so completely shown up by her sister. Her parents, Evan, and Henry are also alright at ice skating and while Aunt Abigail and Melody were pretty good, Uncle Jim refused to set foot on the ice. Archie was determined to give ice skating another try after the incident last year, but likely would take then entire they were there to work his courage up.

“Yeah, if you don’t mind,” Emma said, releasing the laces she was attempting to pull tight enough. “I’m never good at getting them right.”

Regina hummed acknowledgment and knelt down next to Emma’s boot. “I took lessons as a child— Mother wanted me to be accomplished and that meant any lessons she could sign me up for she did. Getting me out from underfoot was only a bonus.

Ice skating I enjoyed a lot, along with horseback riding, and piano. In high school, she let a number of them drop, figuring I had either made, or failed at making, the connections she wanted me to make. The only ones kept were to make me look well-rounded and engaged for college.”

“Yeah?” Emma said, always eager to listen to anything Regina wanted to share.

Regina set down Emma’s right foot and picked up the left, “Yeah. Horseback riding was my choice to keep. It helped it the only one I ended up competitive in and there was nothing Mother loved more than medals, even if she hated the sport—too smelly and unladylike for her tastes.” Emma nodded along, she’d seen an old picture of Regina on a horse in her apartment and heard her talk about it before. “By then she preferred it when I tutored and was very disappointed I couldn’t get further with piano. I didn’t mind golf itself, but I ended up hating it because it was something she insisted we do together. She made it very clear we were there for connections and networking, not any sort of enjoyment.”

Emma recalled Regina’s frustrations with work events and smiled, “And you hate networking, although I bet you’re good at it.”

“Of course,” Regina looked up with a sardonic twist of her lips. “I was trained by the best.” Then her expression turned into a true smirk, “And now you’ll get to share in the experience.”

Emma groaned, reminded of her promise to get Regina to come would be attending a couple of the aforementioned work parties and professional organization events. “Urgh, I forgot.”

“Good thing I didn’t,” Regina replied, setting down Emma’s other foot. “How’s that?” she asked, as she offered a hand to Emma.

Emma took her hand and stood up, “Great, no wobbly ankles.”

Regina smiled at the compliment and they began heading over to the rink, “Did you do any after school activities?”

Emma shrugged, “Not really. Not much point in joining clubs when I moved so much, besides foster parents were never happy about having to go get one kid later than the others.” Regina nodded and
when their eyes met briefly, Emma could tell she regretted asking and bringing up Emma difficult childhood.

Emma frowned internally, she didn’t mind talking about it and she never wanted Regina to feel back for asking about stuff like that, “So I mostly hung out with my foster siblings or other kids in the neighborhood. Apartment buildings could be good for getting a bunch of us together to go to a park or something. When I was in Phoenix, there were enough kids around my age for pick-up soccer games of four or five on each team.”

Emma saw Regina relax slightly from the corner of her eyes and the tension was gone from her gaze as she smiled and said, “That sounds fun.”

“It was,” Emma replied. It had been, some homes ended up being pretty lonely, but she’d enjoyed her months in Phoenix.

They’d finally reached the edge of the rink and Regina stepped confidently onto the ice with very little adjustment to her balance required. Emma knew she needed to be a lot more cautious and kept her right hand on the edge as she tried to get her footing. She focused on taking small steps, her left arm flung wide as she slowly made her way along the edge. Emma frowned at her feet, she’d gone ice skating just last year, why did it feel like she’d never done it before?

Regina was surprised as she came back around from her first lap to see Emma was barely a quarter around. She slowed down so that she could stop next to Emma. “Emma?”

“Hey,” Emma said, her face set in concentration. She reluctantly let go of the wall and attempted bigger push off. Almost instantly she regretted it, her left foot sliding at an angle she wasn’t expecting, caught in the left behind track from another skater. Her right hand reached out to steady herself and smacked into the edge of the railing. “Shit,” Emma cursed.

Regina saw Emma’s balance take a turn for the worse and so she instinctively grabbed her left hand, putting it on her own arm, hoping to help her friend regain her balance. Instead, Emma nearly pulled her down with ehr. It was only pure luck, both stayed on their feet. “Whoa!” Regina said as she tried keep her own footing. She pulled Emma’s left hand back against the half wall surrounding the rink so that she had two hands on it. “Just because you’re having a hard time, doesn’t mean you need to bring me down too,” Regina teased.

“Ha, ha,” Emma replied, sticking out her tongue. She gave a sudden wobble and nearly hit Regina with her flailing hand. Now she actually did look embarrassed, “Sh-sorry, sorry,” Emma said, trying to remember that there were kids around and so she should keep the cursing to a minimum. She forgot how much she didn’t like the sensation of falling and Emma was trying to remind herself that she did in fact enjoy ice skating.

“It’s fine,” Regina tried to reassure her. “Do you want an—”

“Nah, I’m good. You go ahead,” Emma waved her off. Regina shouldn’t have to babysit her just because she was having trouble finding her sea legs so to speak. When Regina merely eyed her over skeptically in response, Emma smiled, “Really,” she reassured her.

Regina gave a little sigh, but she could tell when Emma was being too stubborn for her own good, “Alright, if you insist.” Emma nodded again in response and flapped her hands at the other woman, ushering her away.

Regina rolled her eyes, but also understood not wanting to have someone fuss or stare at you while you figured out what you were doing wrong. She pushed off, carefully remembering the curve of her
foot, the center of balance she needed. She was glad there didn’t appear to be too many people at this rink and so crowding and sudden people skating in front of you were at a minimum.

Regina was happy they had the radio on, even if it was just the local Top 40 station and she happily fell back into the rhythm of the laps, enjoying the rush of speed.

Despite knowing Emma wouldn’t want her to hover, Regina kept an eye on her whenever she passed by, noting that Emma was now moving more confidently, her right hand close to, but not touching the wall.

Regina began to slow down so she could skate alongside Emma for a bit which meant she saw exactly what happened next. Evan, in a hockey helmet, came out of nowhere and suddenly thudded into the side of the ice rink directly in from of Emma. Emma let out a yelp and frantically tried to grab onto the side to try to slow herself down so she wouldn’t smash into her little brother. Unfortunately, the sudden movements were enough to completely throw off her balance so that she did come to a halt, but not before also falling down onto the ice with a thud.

Regina immediately went over to her just as Mary Margaret caught up to the boy. She arrived just in time to hear the end of a scolding and tried to make sure Emma wasn’t actually injured—she still hadn’t gotten up off the ice.

“…watch where you’re going, Evan.” Mary Margaret was saying now that she had joined them.

To his credit Evan did look guilty, “Sorry Emma, I didn’t mean to make you fall.”

“It’s okay, kid,” Emma was saying from her position on the ground. “Just try to remember everyone else is skating around too.”

He nodded and Mary Margaret led him away with an apologetic glance at Emma, still splayed out on the floor. Her eyes flicked briefly to Regina behind Emma and it must have been enough to give her identity away as before Regina could say anything, Emma said, “You saw all of that?”

Regina moved over to stand in front of Emma, concern in her eyes, “Yes, are you alright?”

Emma waved off her concern, “Just my pride.” She reached a hand behind her, “And my ass.”

“A true tragedy,” Regina said causing Emma to laugh. “I wish your mother would keep a closer eye on him when she knows he races around like that.”

Emma shrugged, “Yeah, but what can you really do?” She rearranged her legs so she was sitting cross-legged on the ice. “I’ve certainly been watching him on dry ground and had him run too fast from me.”

Regina raised an eyebrow at the change in position, “Do you plan on getting up any time soon?”

Emma grinned, “I don’t know, its nice down here—ice is good for bruises, right?”

“I suppose… Are you sure you’re alright?”

Emma smiled, “Yeah, just trying to get together the mental energy to get up. I was starting to get the hang of it again, but…”

Regina smiled and shook her head before reaching a hand down, “Just take my hand, my dear—let me help you.”
Emma was relieved that her face was already flushed pink from cold. She took Regina’s right hand in her left, placing her own right on the wall. Carefully, the two got Emma back on her feet.

“Thanks.”

Regina turned to be next to Emma and placed Emma’s hand on her arm, “Come on, slow poke. Let’s see if we can get you back up to speed.”

Emma laughed, but found she hadn’t been knocked back to square one by her fall after all. Soon enough they were skating around together, Emma having reluctantly let go of Regina’s arm. They stayed close together talking though and whenever Emma wobbled, Regina was quick to brace her.

Mary Margaret watched the pair skate around from her post at one end of the rink while David took a turn trying to keep up with Evan. Regina appeared to skate a little further in front of Emma, showing off by skating backwards and appeared to trying to pull on Emma’s hand to get her to go faster.

Mary Margaret eyed her critically, but found herself softening despite herself at the look in Regina’s eyes. She really did look like she cared for her daughter. It was easily the happiest MM had seen her all trip, a grin across her face as Emma reluctantly let her pull her faster around the rink. Perhaps Regina was more sincere than she’d thought that first night.

It really did seem like she’d misjudged Regina.

-x-x-x-

“Emma!”

Emma turned from her bedroom door to turn around and to see Mary Margaret standing in the doorway of hers and David’s bedroom. “Yeah?” Emma tried to tamp down the urge to tense up. Her mom had backed off these past few days and she felt guilty that instead of thinking Mary Margaret was coming around, Emma just kept waiting for the other shoe to drop.

Mary Margaret motioned her over and Emma walked back down the hall to her. Mary Margaret ushered her into the room and shut the door. “Emma, I wanted to talk to you for a minute in private.”

Emma could barely keep from flinching. Her eyes involuntarily went to the door, which Mary Margaret was now unconsciously blocking her from. “Uh, sure, what’s up?” She sat down on the edge of the bed in an attempt to suppress the instinct to run from what seemed like it was going to an unpleasant conversation.

Mary Margaret clasped her hands together in front of herself as she took a deep breath, “It’s about Regina.”

Emma’s eyes narrowed and she felt her hackles raise in annoyance rather than anxiety, “What about Regina?”

“Well, you know you’ve never brought a date home, not since high school, so I admit I was a bit... thrown off, by the one you decided to break the pattern with.” Emma nodded, still unsure where her mom was going, but trying to give her the benefit of the doubt. “She didn’t exactly seem like your type, but I wanted to give her a chance. I’m sorry if I made her feel uncomfortable, earlier, but it’s my right as your mother to make sure anyone dating my girls is good enough,” she gave a teasing smile, clearly wanting Emma to join in on the joke about overprotective parents.

Emma wanted to say that of course she had made Regina uncomfortable and that she had crossed more than a few lines at dinner, but so far the conversation was going better than she expected so she
just rolled her eyes, “Yeah, of course.”

Mary Margaret smiled, “Well, I’d say she passed. I don’t…” Mary Margaret frowned as she tried to articulate her thoughts, “I don’t understand her really, but I can tell she know what she wants and isn’t afraid to go after it.”

If there was anyway to set Emma at ease, complimenting Regina was it. Emma smiled more naturally and gave a little laugh, “Yeah, she can be very focused when she wants to be. She isn’t who I thought I’d end up with either,” Emma admitted with a slight disbelieving shake of her head. Even if she wasn’t dating Regina, she reminded herself, she was still surprised that Regina had become her best friend. “But I think that’s a good thing. And we’re on the same page when it comes to big stuff.” Regina somehow always figured out how she was feeling and accepted it, understood her even, and that was the most miraculous thing.

She blinked back up at her mom and felt a small niggle of tension creep back in at the almost tentative look on her mom’s face. “About the big stuff…” Mary Margaret started.

Emma furrowed her brow, trying to follow what her mom might be thinking, “Is this about the dinner talk stuff? Cuz you blind-sided her with a lot of those questions so you can’t expect—”

“I don’t think I did,” Mary Margaret interrupted. At Emma’s confused look, she elaborated, “I think she had thought about a lot of the stuff I asked her before that night. And that’s why I’m not sure you are on the same page as her, on “the big stuff” I mean.”

Emma was not at all following what Mary Margaret was trying to say, probably because she knew her and Regina had thought about some of those questions and prepared answers to them ahead of time, but that obviously wasn’t what her mom meant. “I… I mean, we did talk about some questions you might ask before I brought her up, in case you decided to go a bit inquisition on us…” Emma bit back saying exactly what she thought about Mary Margaret going too far with some of her questions because she still had no idea where this was going. Playing things close to the vest seemed like the best plan for now. The pretend dating was too tangled up with all this for her to speak without thinking.

Mary Margaret frowned and shook her head, “That’s not what I mean. Honey, I love you, you know that, but I think… I think you should end this relationship before you two get hurt.”

“What?” Emma said, standing abruptly. Anger filled her voice, “Tat from the outside it’s obvious that she’s too good for me?” Emma hated that Mary Margaret seemed to be saying what she was always vaguely convinced was true, the part of her that wondered when Regina was gonna realized it too and walk away from Emma.

“No, no,” Mary Margaret tried to protest. “It’s clear she’s in love with you and you…”

“I what?” Emma asked, swallowing at the idea that her mother of all people thought that Regina was in love with her.
“You’re not,” Mary Margaret replied with such conviction Emma almost believed her. Mary Margaret shook her head sadly and looked at Emma with pleading eyes, “I just think you’re leading the poor girl on. You know you’re not ready to settle down and I think she is. She looks at you like you’re it for her and that’s not where you are.”

Emma felt like laughing, of all the absurd things for her mother to think about her and Regina, this was about the last direction Emma thought she would have gone in. Didn’t her neck hurt from all the 180 degree turns she did? Also, the idea that if Regina wanted to “settle down”, which Emma as Regina’s actual friend who had known her for more than few days, knew she didn’t want right now, that Emma wouldn’t to be with Regina was ridiculous. If this vacation had taught Emma anything, it was that there wasn’t anything she didn’t want to do to make Regina happy. And her mom thought she was the one who wasn’t all in to their “relationship”?

Emma opened her mouth to say something along those lines, when Mary Margaret said something that made Emma’s thoughts freeze in her tracks.

“Besides,” Mary Margaret continued as if it were something obvious Emma was overlooking. “You know you’re not gay and she is.” When Emma just stared at her in complete disbelief, Mary Margaret frowned. “Come on now. I’ve been more than willing to let you…explore things, but now someone’s going to get hurt because you’re…experimenting. Don’t you think that’s taking things too far?”

“What the hell are you even talking about? You know I’m bi.”

“Emma,” Mary Margaret said in the most condescending mom tone Emma had even heard her use, “You’re straight, you date boys. I don’t know why you think you need to try different things to figure that out, but we both know the truth.”

Emma felt like she was having a stroke, “Oh my god, do you even hear yourself?”

Mary Margaret frowned and actually put her hands on her hips, “Don’t take that tone with me. I can see Regina really likes you and you’re stringing her along. I thought you knew better.”

“I’m not, I’m not stringing Regina along because I’m secretly straight,” Emma finally spit out, in a rather high-pitched tone of voice because couldn’t believe she even had to say that out loud to someone she’d already come out to. She’d known Mary Margaret had issues with bisexuality in general, but this was another level.

“Aren’t you?” Mary Margaret asked, her face filled with sympathy. “You know you can’t return her feelings.”

Emma felt like she was in the Twilight Zone, but this sparked a familiar feeling of anger that she focused on. Why did her mom always think she knew so much better than Emma about herself? “You don’t know how I feel—you never have. You don’t get to tell me that. You can’t decide my feelings for me. And let me tell you, Regina is one of the best things that’s ever happened to me. I’m not throwing that away just because you think I’m not gay enough to date her.”

Mary Margaret crossed her arms and looked at her challengingly. “Are you trying to say you’re a lesbian now?”

“No!” Emma immediately protested, throwing her hands up in the air, unable to understand how stupid Mary Margaret was being. It was like she was trying to misunderstand on purpose.

Mary Margaret gave her a look, one that communicated Emma was the one acting irrationally. She
put a hand on Emma’s arm before Emma could think to move away. Her eyes grew serious as she said softly, “You don’t have to be like Elsa for us to love you, honey.”

Emma felt like she was going to pass out from all the emotions and thoughts that single sentence brought up. Part of her wanted to say that Mary Margaret sure did a bad job of showing that when all she did was constantly expect Emma to act like her. The way every time Emma said something, she felt like she was being compared to the daughter her parents raised and loved her whole life, who wasn’t thrust upon them already broken and messed up.

Emma yanked her arm back, and focused on her anger over the situation at hand, rather than their other issues, because this was something she knew she was right about. “I am not pretending to be into girls since Elsa is, so that you’ll love me. That’s the craziest think I’ve ever heard. And it’s a really fucked up thing for you to even suggest.”

“This isn’t you, Emma,” Mary Margaret said, disappointment in her voice.

And that was the apparently the real final straw. Mary Margaret’s continued instance that she knew Emma and that she was right. “You aren’t listening! Stop telling me who I am!” Emma shouted.

“You don’t get to tell me that my feelings for Regina aren’t real! Because, newsflash, they are!” Emma dug her fingers into her hair in frustration, “God, and you wonder why I don’t bring people home. I finally decided to trust you and here you are, proving you don’t deserve it!”

Mary Margaret finally did seem to understand she’d crossed an important line and was watching Emma with wide eyes. Maybe it was just the fact that Emma had tears in her eyes.

It was enough to bring Emma up short and she took a deep breath. “My feelings are mine and only I know them. And I know I’m in love with Regina and if you can’t see that, then you really are exactly as bad at reading me as I’m saying you are.” Because she was and she was right.

“Emma—"

Emma held up her hands and took a step back, “No, no, I can’t be here anymore.” She walked around Mary Margaret to the door.

“Emma!”

Emma felt a hand on her shoulder and she knocked it off without hesitation as she opened the door. She turned back to give one final glare at Mary Margaret, “Don’t touch me! And don’t follow me—just, just stay away from me, Mary Margaret!”

-x-x-x-

Regina walked through the house, glad that no one else seemed to be around. She was in a good mood after ice skating earlier and they’d had a good early dinner. She liked Archie and had been happy to help him by walking Pongo this afternoon since he’d turned his ankle ice skating.

She made her way upstairs and down the hall to her and Emma’s room. She frowned when the doorknob didn’t turn under her hand. Maybe Evan had been barging in again without warning, as he had while trying to find where Emma had hidden the whistle she’d confiscated from him that he’d snuck into his suitcase.

Regina grabbed the pin Emma had put on top of the door frame so that they could get in if the other had locked the simple push in lock. It was a trick Emma had learned when she was a kid—privacy having been at a premium back then.
As she opened the door, she was surprised that it was rather dark. Thinking Emma might have gone to bed early and had locked the door so no one would wake her up, Regina automatically slipped inside quickly to minimize the light from the hall. She closed the door as softly as possible behind her and relocked the door as her eyes adjusted to the minimal light from the open curtains.

A sound from where she hadn’t expected it, reached her ears just as her eyes registered that Emma wasn’t in their bed. She turned quickly and found her eyes moving down to find a curled up figure leaning against the wall in the corner of the room by the closet.

“Emma?” she whispered, what on earth was Emma doing on the floor in the dark.

Emma raised her head from where it had been leaning against her knees, which she’d pulled up to chest. “Hey.”

Instantly, Regina knew Emma had been crying, her voice was thick with it and she picked up the movement of Emma whipping her eyes with the edge of the blanket she had wrapped around herself. Regina went over to her friend, her mind racing with concern and the beginnings of anger at whoever might have made Emma cry.

“What happened?” She kept her voice quiet and gentle as carefully lowered herself down to sit next to Emma on the floor, despite wanting to go find whoever was responsible and yell at them.

Emma shifted a little, giving Regina some more room to join her and snorted. “Who do you think?”

Regina’s eyes narrowed as her heart ached. “I’m going to kill her.”

Emma made a noise that might have been agreement as she adjusted the blanket around her. “Go right ahead, I don’t even care anymore.”

“What the fuck?” Regina said, unable to keep the thought in or think of anything better to say.

Emma laughed at that, “Right?”

“I will never understand how that woman thinks and I don’t want,” Regina said and meant it. “I thought she hated me, anyways.”

Emma shook her head, “No, she’s come around, I guess. Now she thinks you want to get married and have babies with me, but I’m obviously to immature to be ready for that yet. Plus, too straight for you.”

“What?!” Regina pulled back to make sure Emma was saying what she thought she was. “Are you sure this wasn’t a weird nightmare or that she’s possibly on something?”

“God, I wish.”

“How did she get everything so wrong?”
“Its her superpower,” Emma replied, smiling without humor. Regina was rubbing her upper arm now and it felt so nice. How many times had Mary Margaret made her cry? She’d never really had someone to hold her like this after. It was nice, really nice.

Still, just talking about it made her mind go back to that conversation. All her issues with her mom always came down to the same problem, “How many times do I have tell my mom who I am until she hears me?”

Regina froze, because how often had she thought the same thing. “I don’t know,” Regina replied quietly. “I’m not sure my mother ever did.”

Emma’s knees slowly unfolded as she shifted to sit up straighter. “It shouldn’t be so hard,” she whispered angrily. “It shouldn’t.

Regina let her hand fall to Emma’s back and continued to unconsciously rub in small circles, “I’m so sorry, darling.” She would do anything to make Emma feel better, but she had no idea how to help her with this.

“Stop,” Emma said, almost absently, as she stared at the floor, mind churning with alternating sadness and anger.

Regina drew back immediately, wondering what she had done wrong, “Stop what?”

Emma lurched forward abruptly and stood up slowly, body stiff from her position on the floor. She needed to move and began pacing, all the nervous energy from frustration too much to be still.

“Calling me that,” Emma said, still mostly focusing on other thoughts as Regina cautiously moved to sit on the bed.

Regina frowned, “Calling you what?”

Emma finally seemed to realize what she said and turned her head to meet Regina’s eyes with her own still reddened ones. “Darling and my dear and all of that.”

Regina blinked, it had felt so natural these past few days, she hadn’t even realized she’d called Emma that a few seconds ago. “Oh, I’m—I’m sorry.” She was trying to help Emma, not do more things that upset her. She was a little hurt that Emma hadn’t said anything about it and tried to force that feeling down since Emma was the one she should be focusing on.

“I didn’t know it bothered you. I didn’t mean—”

Emma made a frustrated noise, “I don’t, I didn’t—not in front of people, but you just called me that now and there’s no one else here. We’re not actually dating. So…” Emma tried to articulate what she was feeling without giving too much away. She settled for, “Don’t say things like that unless you mean them.”

Regina thought about that as Emma paced a bit. “I…” she took a deep breath, “I agree.” She met Emma’s gaze squarely and said, “I don’t say things I don’t mean, Emma. You know that about me.”

Emma nodded, “I do.” She did. It was one of the things she loved about Regina. She never felt like Regina was giving her platitudes because it was polite or because she thought that what’s a friend should say.

Regina felt a spike of frustration, Emma clearly wasn’t getting what she was trying to say and maybe it was a terrible time, but once Regina decided to do something, she did it. Regina reached out and grabbed Emma’s hand to pull her to a stop in front of her. “I do care about you, darling.”
Emma tensed at the endearment, but she didn’t pull her hand away. What was Regina trying to get at? Emma did like it when Regina called her things like that, it’d been hard enough to ask her once to stop, stop getting her hopes up, stop making the future harder when they came back from this trip and Regina never called her that again. “Come on, you know it’s not like that.

Regina shook her head slowly, “I... but it is, Emma. I thought I’d been doing a bad job of it this trip, worse than usual, but Emma, I do care about—like that.”

Emma stared at her friend, Regina’s eyes were sending a clear message in the moonlight, but Emma couldn’t seem to make the leap herself. “What are you saying?”

Regina smiled, “I’m saying that I’m in love with you.”

“Are you serious?” Emma blurted out, staring in shock. Her heart was thudding wildly and her mind was trying frantically to put the pieces together. All the little things that she had told herself were just wishful thinking, had they actually been what they seemed all along?

“Yes,” Regina answered, trying to gauge if Emma’s reaction was a good thing or not. “So, if it’s alright with you, I’d like to keep calling you ‘darling’.”

Emma was nodding before she was even aware she was. As a small smile began to cross Regina’s face, Emma found herself leaning down and kissing Regina with everything she had.

Regina responded instantly, elated by this turn of events, burying her fingers in Emma’s hair as she rose up to meet her. Her blood thrummed with sudden heat at Emma, pressed against her, wanting her. Regina was filled with a need to make sure Emma never wanted to let go the way she never wanted to let go.

After they paused for a breath, Emma managed to say, thinking past rushing emotions, “I’d love it if you kept calling me darling.” Her head was reeling from all the emotional back and forth she was having to today but Regina was solid ground. Emma’s arms around her, chests pressed together made everything calmer, like she was in the eye of the storm and she would gladly stay there with Regina for as long as Regina would have her.

“Good,” Regina replied, before pulling Emma in for another kiss and falling back against the bed, bringing an unresisting Emma after her.

By the time they feel asleep an hour later, very few additional words had been spoken, but finally they understood each other perfectly.
Chapter 9

Regina woke up with a warm weight on her that didn’t feel like blankets. Emma’s arm was over her stomach, her hand on Regina’s skin. They’d fallen asleep after making out for what felt like hours, both too drained from the day to do anything more than that.

Regina moved her arm, trying not to wake Emma up, but aware that it had fallen asleep and was the likely reason she was awake. She desperately didn’t want to move Emma’s head from where it was tucked against Regina’s shoulder. Emma’s hold on her the main thing keeping her from thinking it was all a dream.

She finally got her arm in a good position when Emma started to make noises like she was going to wake up. Without thinking, Regina began to run her fingers through Emma’s hair.

It seemed to do the trick and Emma settled back into sleep, her deep breaths even. Regina continued to stare at her in sleepy surprise, still unsure that Emma might vanish if she looked away. Did she really tell Emma how she felt? Had Emma really reciprocated her feelings?

Emma did tighten her hold on Regina, pulling her closer and Regina eventually fell back asleep, to enamored with the sight to look away until she nodded off.

Unfortunately, her next awakening was a lot more abrupt and involved a lot more hair in her mouth. She reached blindly to turn off her alarm as Emma half-sat up in tired confusion.

Once Emma realized what was going on, she fell back down on top of Regina, “I don’t wanna get up.”

Regina smiled at the sleepy petulance in her girlfriend’s voice, “We can stay here all day if you’d like—I’d certainly prefer it—but you’re the one who’d have to explain it to everyone else.

“Urghhh,” Emma groaned in response, half at the content of Regina’s answer and half because Regina’s lower morning voice was way too attractive. “Just give me my phone and I’ll do it. Don’t think I won’t.”

Regina chuckled, “You don’t mean that.”

Emma just groaned again and buried her face into Regina’s chest. All at once she seemed to realize what she was doing and reared back, her face bright red. Regina laughed louder at that.

“Sorry,” Emma blurted out.

“Why?” Regina asked, raising an eyebrow. “You didn’t seem sorry last night.”

“Ha, ha,” Emma replied. Before taking stock of the fact that Regina was only in her bra and shorts and Emma herself was only in her tank top, which was rucked up to just below her chest, and boyshorts. “Right,” she said, dazed. “Guess that wasn’t a dream.”

A little bit of doubt crept into Regina’s mind, “Why? Do you wish it had been?”

“No!” Emma immediately replied. “No, definitely not.”

“Yeah?” Regina hated to sound so insecure, but she found she couldn’t keep it to herself.

“A dream come true, I promise.” Emma desperately wanted to reassure Regina.
Evidently, Regina must have been convinced because she smiled and leaned forward to kiss her. Emma responded without thinking, pulling Regina to her and wrapping her arms around her.

They didn’t separate until Regina’s alarm went off again. Evidently, she’d only hit snooze.

Regina returned to Emma’s lap after decisively turning it off, “Do you really want to stay in today? Because I’m not opposed.” She was drawing pattern with her finger on Emma’s collarbone. It was very distracting.

“Yeah,” Emma breathed before shaking her head a little. “But you’re right, we can’t. I promised David I would go with them, ice fishing. And you have to go shopping.”

Regina let her head fall lightly against Emma’s forehead, “I really don’t want to.”

“I know,” Emma said and pressed a light kiss to her lips. “Do you have to get ready yet?”

Regina shook her head, her hair swishing lightly with the motion, “No, I’d meant to change the alarm. You’ll have to go soon, but I have some time.”

“Good, because I want you to stay right here.”

“Alright, darling. I will.”

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Regina was still in a slightly bitter mood after having to let Emma go this morning. Why was this the one day they had to spend the majority of apart? She felt almost cold without Emma near her. Her thoughts were interrupted by the person she least wanted to see today.

“Alright,” Mary Margaret said, getting everyone’s attention as they gathered loosely just inside the mall. “We’ll all be meeting back here at one o’clock to get lunch and we’ll leave around four when we’re all done. Now, remember, the point is to spend time together so no going off on your own. We should split into no more than two or three groups, I think.”

“Come on, Aunt MM,” Ruby teased. “You’re not even a teacher anymore.”

“You never forget, never,” Mary Margaret joked back.

“I wanna go to Game Stop,” Henry volunteered. They all then began discussing what stores they wanted to go to.

“We need to stop by the shoe store,” Victor said.

“There’s a lovely new jewelry store too,” Aurora spoke up. Soon the who group devolved into everyone saying where they wanted to go and consulting the map for the best route to hit all the locations.

Mary Margaret must have noticed Regina wasn’t voicing an opinion and so smiled at her, “Where do you think we should start, Regina?”

“I’ve never been here so I certainly wouldn’t know,” Regina replied dismissively.

Mary Margaret faltered and frowned. “Alright, I guess that’s true.”

Regina had already turned away from her and so she missed the confusion on both Mary Margaret’s face and Elsa’s.
For the next few stores they went to, Regina seemed to make her mission to stay as far away from Mary Margaret as possible, only turning to glare at her every once in a while, unable to help herself. Mary Margaret did eventually figure out that Regina had learned what she and Emma had spoken about and so was trying to ignore Regina’s looks or return them with pitying looks of her own.

This, surprisingly, only made Regina angrier. Regina was grateful when they got to a larger department store and she could actually avoid looking at the other woman for a time. She could practically feel her blood pressure rising the longer she was in her presence.

“Hey.” Regina looked up from the jewelry case she was looking at to see Elsa next to her, “Can we talk for a minute?”

Regina frowned in confusion, but turned to face her fully, giving Elsa her full attention. “Sure. About what?”

“Did my mom do something?” Elsa asked plainly. When all Regina did was blink back at her in surprise, she continued, “I mean more that the stuff from dinner the first night?”

Regina sized up Emma’s sister carefully. Regina supposed she should have realized someone was going to notice her attitude toward Mary Margaret. Elsa looked worried, not annoyed or defensive and Regina knew while she had issues with her mother that were tied to Elsa, Emma didn’t blame Elsa for them. “Yes,” Regina said bluntly. “She said some upsetting things to Emma the other night.”

“To Emma?” Elsa had thought her mom had asked Regina more insultingly personal questions or insinuated something to her, not to Emma. “What sort of things?”

“Some hurtful things,” Regina replied, her face stern, her eyes angry. “Emma’s still very upset with her. I personally suggested setting her on fire,” Regina made a shrugging gesture as if to “what can you do”, “but Emma decided against it.”

“Geez, what did she say?” Elsa seemed genuinely upset. Regina was glad that it seemed to be at her mother, not at Emma. Everything from this trip suggested Elsa was a smart woman, who loved her sister. She also displayed none of the beliefs her mother seemed to and Emma had never mentioned anything to suggest she did.

Regina weighed her words carefully. “I think you should ask Emma that. It’s not for me to say.” When Elsa looked like she was going to protest, Regina held up her hand. “Really, I’d love to tell you, because I think you’d agree with me—although you seem more like an ice person than fire, but it’s your mother and your sister.”

Elsa’s frowned deepened and she continued to look troubled, but she also seemed to accept what Emma was saying. “All I will say, it was you need to remember that your mother treats Emma and don’t disbelieve that she said what she said.”

Elsa again looked like she wanted to protest that of course she would believe Emma or maybe even defend her mother from someone who had only known her a week, but settled for simply saying. “Okay, I will,” with a decisive nod.

Elsa looked down into the jewelry case and asked, “I was thinking of getting a new watch. Any suggestions?”

Regina half-smiled to herself, noting how Elsa’s “normal talk distraction after serious talk” was so similar to Emma, and let the subject change easily. “For what sorts of occasions?”

-x-x-x-
Leaving to come along this morning had been one of the hardest things Emma had ever done—or so it felt. She tried to distract herself with packing the cars and whatever everyone was talking about, but her mind kept wandering back to imagining what could have happened if she’d stayed in her bed with Regina. Her real, actual girlfriend.

Now that they’d gotten settled on the lake, with a few good spots, she couldn’t believe how much she missed Regina, even though it’d only been a couple hours since seeing her. Emma just kept thinking about things she wanted to talk to Regina about, or ask her, or a joke she wanted to tell her. She’d had Regina on her mind a lot in general, but it was already so much worse.

After all the talking and feelings yesterday, she was in a quieter mood than usual, which suited the ice fishing group, just fine. Emma was more than happy to simply listen to everyone talking and not contribute much herself, still mentally digesting the dramatic turn of events yesterday. And so she was a bit startled when David moved to sit next to her, and said, “Hey, kiddo. Something on your mind?”

Emma wasn’t sure what to say. She’d been able to tell that her dad knew something had happened between her and Mary Margaret, but that he also that he had no idea what they talked about. “Yeah,” she said simply and leaned back, bracing herself on her hands.

“Anything you want to talk about?” David offered, mirroring her pose.

Emma frowned as she thought about it. “Maybe later.”

David was silent for a minute or two, “Alright, sweetie. Just remember, I’m not on anyone’s side by default.” When Emma turned to look at him, he smiled, but his eyes were concerned. “Just because I married your mom doesn’t mean I’m obligated to always think she’s right.”

“Aren’t you?” Emma turned away to look forward and study the horizon. After a few seconds pause, she said, “She always seems to know she’s right.”

David gave a little laugh, “Yeah, she does. Honestly, it frustrates me too, sometimes, but under it all, her heart’s in the right place and she loves you. She just needs to be reminded of the best way to do that. We’re here for support, not to tell you how to live your life. Because we couldn’t—that’s what makes it your life.”

“Thanks,” Emma said and she did mean that. She wanted to believe him, she just wasn’t sure she could. “I want to tell you; I just don’t know what to say yet.” Anything she would say would end up all tangled, between Mary Margaret’s words, all the fake to real stuff with Regina, and the fact that a bunch of their other family members were close by, meant that this was not the time.

“That’s okay.” And unlike Mary Margaret, who would be offended, he wasn’t. “I’ll check in again at the end of the trip and you can always call me too if you don’t want to talk until after the trip.” He added with a teasing glint in his eyes, “I do in fact, also possess a cellphone.”

“You do?” Emma’s widened her eyes and filled her voice with mock surprise.

“Uh-huh,” he replied with a grin before attempting to look forlorn. “But I understand if you’re too busy in your fancy city life with your cool new job and cool new girlfriend for your dear old dad.”

Emma rolled her eyes and knocked his shoulder with her own, “Come on, Dad.”

“No, no, really. I get it,” David held up his hands in mock surrender.

Emma narrowed her eyes, “You know that you can call me too.”
“Ooo, touché,” he conceded. “I’ll have to test that theory out. But only if you promise to answer. Deal?” he held out his hand for a formal handshake.

Emma grinned as she grasped his hand and he pulled her in for a hug. “Deal.”

-x-x-x-

Emma had texted Regina when they pulled back in in front of the house to help carry some of the fish in. They had just finished putting everything away and entered into the living room to find Elsa sitting on the sofa under a blanket. She sat up when she saw them come in, clicking off the TV as she put her blanket aside. “Emma, good—I wanted to catch you before you went to bed.”

Emma’s brow furrowed, “Oh Elsa, hey. I didn’t think you’d still be up.”

“I wanted to talk to you.” Elsa’s gaze was intent and Emma felt a bit of déjà vu as she thought of the other Blanchard who had said something so similar the other night. Her feeling of trepidation was not soothed when Elsa continued, “Regina said Mom said some things to you?”

Emma looked over at Regina in surprise and confusion. Regina had meant to warn Emma that Elsa wanted to talk to her, but they’d barely been alone for a minute since the others had been helping them put everything away. She settled for a grim smile as she said, “She noticed I was attempting to murder her with my eyes.”

Emma reflexively smirked at that, Regina was known for her fearsome death glares. Really Emma should have suspected how bad she had it long ago when she had started finding them hot instead of scary, which to be fair, she’d really thought since the beginning.

Emma’s gaze switched back to her sister when Elsa pressed, “What happened? Please Emma, I want to help.”

“I…” Emma hesitated for a few seconds, but only a few. “Yeah, I guess I should probably tell you.” She turned to Regina. She appreciated her girlfriend’s support, but this was something she’d rather discuss one-on-one. “I’ll see you upstairs, okay Regina?”

Regina eyed her over to make sure Emma really did seem okay with having this conversation before giving her upper arm a squeeze of encouragement and nodding. “Alright. Good night Elsa. See you upstairs, darling.” She punctuated the last goodbye with a kiss on the cheek that made Emma aware of just how lucky she was.

Emma watched Regina head upstairs and then turned back to look at Elsa. Elsa had sat back down on the couch and was patting the other cushion.

Emma sat down heavily where Elsa was indicating and ran her fingers through her hair. She nibbled her lip as she tried to decide where to start.

“Is it that bad?” Elsa asked, any worries she’d had only growing at Emma’s uncharacteristically nervous behavior.

Emma sighed, “Yeah, it kinda is. Here’s the thing, Ma—mom has always been kinda weird about me being bi.”

Elsa wrinkled her nose, “Weird? Weird how?”

“Like very convinced I was just confused and would eventually figure out I really was straight or a lesbian.”
“What?” Elsa had reared back and was frowning. “That doesn’t make any sense, I was there when you told her, you were super clear that you were bi, not just, just questioning stuff.”

“yeah, well she saw me kiss one boy and so she thinks she has me all figured out. But I’d thought she’d gotten over it, at least mostly. And maybe even that her seeing me with Regina would help her catch up the rest of the way.”

“But it didn’t,” Elsa guessed. “And she told you that last night?”

“Yeah, she told me I should break up with Regina so she doesn’t get hurt when I realize I really do want a boy after all,” Emma said bluntly.

“What?” Elsa exclaimed, barely managing to keep her voice from drawing attention from the rest of the family.

“Yeah, oh,” Emma added as an almost after thought, “and that obviously I’m just copying you because you like girls.”

Elsa’s mouth fell open and she began sputtering, “That’s, that’s so stupid. What? Why? That’s the most idiotic thing I’ve ever heard.”

Emma smiled grimly, “Which is what I told her. Loudly, before slamming the door in her face.”

Elsa nodded vigorously, “Good. Because what the hell?”

Emma actually smiled at that. She felt any remaining tension drain out of her at hearing her sister’s support so vocally. Not that’s she’d really thought Elsa wouldn’t agree with her, but part of her, the part that remembered foster care and being thrown away at the slightest provocation, was always afraid of it happening again.

Emma was brought back to the present when Elsa put a hand on her arm. “What do you want to do?” Elsa asked.

Emma sighed, “I don’t know. She’s so off-base and its not just this specifically. She’s really, really bad at listening.”

Elsa sighed and leaned against the back cushions, “Yeah, I know.”

Emma knew Elsa had to deal with some of their mom’s…attitude? Thoughtlessness? Normally from the other direction, with Mary Margaret expecting Elsa to be able to take on more than she had the mental energy for. It was a similar, but opposite problem. “This is as good an excuse as any to try to get through to her, I just have to figure out where to start. And not, you know, just start yelling. Loudly and a lot. All the yelling.”

Elsa looked at her sympathetically, “I can see why Regina’s suggesting murder—it is simpler.”

Emma laughed, “Yeah, she really didn’t take the whole break up suggestion well.”

Elsa snorted, “I bet she didn’t.” Elsa then added quietly, “I’m glad you can talk to her at least.”

“Elsa…I know I can talk to you too, it’s just hard. Hard to talk to anyone. Regina’s just really good at not taking no for any answer.”

“Yeah, Merida’s good at that too.”

Emma smiled. It also didn’t hurt that Emma was wrapped around Regina’s finger months ago. It
helped though, that, given that Regina had even agreed to come on this trip, it was probably mutual.
“Eh, I do alright though—got her to come meet the family and all that.”

Elsa nodded, “Yes, Regina seems like she’s in it, you know?”

“I am too,” Emma said, maybe a bit defensively, remembering her mom’s words.

“I can tell,” Elsa said, seemingly not noticing any tone in Emma’s voice. “She’s different and you’re
different around her—in a good way. You’re good for each other.”

“Thanks.” Emma yawned then, and stretched, god it had been a long day after a long night.

Elsa yawned as well and said, “We can regroup tomorrow. We’ll get Mom straightened out, so to
speak, I promise.”

“Thanks,” Emma said again, not sure what else to say, but feeling it was enough.

Then went up the stairs together and Elsa gave Emma a big hug before she went into her own room,
“I’m here for you.”

Emma smiled, “I know. Night.”

“Good night.”
Emma headed down to breakfast, her stomach rumbling extra loud due to the early dinner of the night before. She froze briefly in the doorway of the kitchen when she realized her parents were already down eating, but opted to ignore them as she grabbed a box of cereal. She’d been planning to make eggs and toast, but now she just wanted something quick.

Both her parents wished her a good morning and she murmured a similar greeting more out of habit than anything else. Emma sat down at the table after grabbing a banana, a bowl of cereal and some coffee.

Emma could sense Mary Margaret restraining herself from blurting something out and just hopped that she could keep whatever it was to herself until Emma was done and could leave.

No such luck. “Did you leave this for us?” Mary Margaret asked.

Emma swallowed the last of cereal and began peeling her banana methodically before looking up to see her mother brandishing some papers at her. Emma frowned, great, now she was being judged for things she had nothing to do with, “I can’t even read what it is that you’re waving around.” Emma shrugged, “So no.”

“Really, sweetie?” Mary Margaret said in a tone so condescending Emma almost stood up and even David winced. “Because I think you did and I just don’t really understand what you’re trying to do.”

Emma whipped her head back to her mom, discomfort being very quickly replaced with annoyance. “Seriously? Whatever, just let me see what we’re talking about so we’re on the same page, yeah?”

Mary Margaret pushed forward a few pieces of paper, some folded up like brochures. Did Mary Margaret think she had literally told her take a hike and provided some helpful suggestions about where? Then Emma spotted a very familiar color scheme.

The pamphlet read “How to be An Ally to a Bi+ Person” and there was a printed out article called “What is Bisexuality?”. On the next piece of paper, she saw the headline “10 Things to Never Say to a Bisexual Person”. The final paper was called “5 Myths about Bisexuality”.

“What… Where…” Emma stared at them in shock. “Where did you get these from?”

Mary Margaret’s brow furrowed, “You really didn’t slide these under my door this morning?”

Emma shook her head. “No, why would I?” She’d thought of something vaguely like this before, to address the more literal biphobia Mary Margaret clearly had, but give her mom reading materials wasn’t really her style.

“Well,” Mary Margaret crossed her arms, obviously defensive of the reasonableness of her concluding Emma had something to do with them. “It’s clearly about you.”

Emma scowled, “Look, I already said I didn’t do this so—”

“I gave them to you.” Everyone turned to see Elsa standing in the doorway, frowning.

Mary Margaret looked bewildered, “What? Why?”

Elsa walked over to the table and stood next to Emma, “Because I finally heard what you were
saying to Emma and I wanted to do something about it.”

Mary Margaret looked completely bewildered and confused as to why Elsa seemed upset. “What do you mean?”

“You’re—you, urgh, you invalidated her identity to her face,” Elsa said.

“What is everyone talking about?” David finally spoke up. “Is this about the other night?”

“Yes,” Emma and Elsa said simultaneously.

David looked back and forth between Emma and Mary Margaret. “I know you two argued, but what does these articles have to do with it?”

Emma lifted her head challenging at Mary Margaret, “Why don’t you explain? Because I still have no idea where you got such shit from.”

“Emma!” Both David and Mary Margaret said, as if she was a little kid who shouldn’t be swearing.

“I don’t know what else to call telling me I should break up with Regina,” Emma replied.

“What?” David asked, turning to his wife in confusion. “Why did you tell Emma that?”

Elsa cut in this time, “Because she thinks Emma isn’t actually bisexual. You even said something about copying me.”

“Honey,” Mary Margaret tried to placate Elsa. “I just think that Emma is, is projecting or—”

Emma stifled a scream, “For god’s sake, not this again.”

“Emma—”

“No.” Elsa cut their mom off this time. She shook her head and her tone was firm, “She’s not. Not that it matters, but when we were seventeen—” a quick glance at Emma got her a tiny nod and she continued. “I found her, ehm, kissing Lily Mendez.”

Mary Margaret actually leaned back in surprise, “What?”

“Yeah,” Elsa said, crossing her arms. “And Emma told me then that she was bisexual, but asked me to keep it to myself because she felt it was private and didn’t want you guys to know.”

Mary Margaret had the audacity to look hurt, “But why did she think she couldn’t have told us?”

Emma was glad Elsa was doing this part of the talking because she wanted to yell “because of what’s happening right now!”.

“She’d only been with us for a year,” Elsa defended her before continuing the story, “A few days later, I came to talk to her. Emma was the first person I told out loud that I was pretty sure I was a lesbian. She accepted me—no questions asked. She told me she wouldn’t tell and she never did.

Before Mary Margaret could saying anything else, Elsa steamrolled ahead, “And then when I came to her a few months later and told her I wanted to tell you guys, Emma encouraged me. She reassured me that you would take me seriously and still love me and look at me as you always did, just with more understanding. And while I felt you probably would all along, it was something I
really needed to hear.”

“I asked if she wanted to sort of, tell you guys together, but she said she wanted to give me my own moment and that she’d let you know when she had a girlfriend to tell you about.” Elsa smiled automatically at her parents, “And she was right and you guys were so great about everything.”

So then, when a year or so later, she told you,” Elsa’s voice got sterner. “I expected to it to go the same. And I thought it had. But now that she has a serious girlfriend, you’re not being good about it. And when I finally realized how bad it was, I thought maybe giving you some more information would help you get that Emma being bisexual is just as real as me being a lesbian and deserves just as much respect.”

“Of course, I respect Emma,” Mary Margaret tried to protest. “And I hadn’t known that Emma had dated girls even back then.”

Elsa frowned, “It shouldn’t matter. Even if, for some reason, me coming out made Emma realize some stuff, that wouldn’t make it less real.”

“I just don’t get all this I guess…” Mary Margaret trailed off, looking confused.

It was that confusion, that continued inability to realize the damage she was doing that pushed Emma over the edge. “It’s more than that!” Emma burst out. “You keep acting like you know me better than I do and the truth is you barely know me at all.”

“Of course, I know you, you’re my daughter!” Mary Margaret protested.

“That doesn’t matter if you don’t listen to me!” Emma cried.

“Listen?” Mary Margaret asked. “Listen to what? I have to pry every little tidbit of information about your life from you since you don’t trust me. I don’t know that you’re dating anyone or where you work. Do you even live in the same apartment building or did you move without telling me either?”

Emma made a noise of frustration, “I don’t tell you stuff because you make it so hard. Every life decision I make I can feel you judging me. When I do tell you things you either ignore me—like with Regina. Don’t even pretend you thought I was bringing someone for even a second, let alone a woman. Or, like with the job thing, you freak out and refuse to talk about except to lecture me about how I don’t know what I’m doing or how to live my life!”

“That’s because you always make such rash decisions!” Mary Margaret said heatedly. “You’re not a cop! Why are you trying to be one?”

“I know I’m not!” Emma clenched her hands in frustration and anger. “I worked really hard and thought about my job a lot and its really shitty of you to think I just decided out of the blue to do it! This isn’t some new flaky whim of mine! Its going to be my future so you need to get used to it! Same with Regina! She’s in my life so grow the hell up.”

“You do not get to tell me to grow up, you’re the one yelling!” Mary Margaret replied just as loudly. “You’re the one who keeps going off in strange directions without telling anyone! Getting into extremely dangerous lines of work, picking up with abrasive women—this isn’t you Emma! You never acted like this until this year, maybe Regina is the problem if she’s turning you against your own family!”

“Mom!” Elsa sounded outraged.

“Everyone needs to calm down,” David said, attempting to use his crowd control voice.
Emma and Mary Margaret fell silent, each panting slightly from the yelling and extreme emotion. Emma blinked first.

“I can’t keep listening to this,” Emma said before pushing out of the room and heading for the door.

“Emma!” Mary Margaret called after her, but Emma didn’t turn around.

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Emma ended up on the back porch, her room had just seemed to restricting, too lacking in escape routes. She knocked some snow off the railing with her foot, wincing at the wet spot on her sock, and resisted the urge to run.

She heard the door slide open behind her and tensed before relaxing when shut just as quietly—if it had been either David or Mary Margaret, they’d have said something.

Warmth wrapped around her from behind as Regina’s embrace enveloped her, her apple scent cementing who it was. Emma leaned back into her arms as Regina pressed her face to Emma’s neck, glad her boots had given her just the bit of height advantage she needed to make this pose work perfectly.

“You catch any of that?” Emma asked, without turning her head.


Emma nodded. “Could have been worse, I guess.”

“Are you mad at Elsa for pushing things?”

Emma shook her head, “Nah, she didn’t mean anything by it. I think she meant to warn me, but I got down to breakfast earlier than usual today. It was as good a reason as any to get stuff going. Honestly, I might have chickened out of saying anything.”

Regina hummed. “Okay.”

They stood there in silence for a little while longer before a noise in the distance made Emma tensed up again, her gripe suddenly white knuckled around the railing.

“Do you want to go for a hike? Just us? Away from here?” Regina asked.

“God yes,” Emma said.

Regina laughed quietly and gently turned Emma around. She gave her a kiss, “Then let’s get out of here, darling.”

“Please.”
Emma was toweling off her hair after her shower and absently rubbing her knee, which was still throbbing a bit from when she’d landed weird on it. She was sure it wouldn’t cause any lasting problems, but it still made more sense to head home about an hour before the others. Regina had offered to come back too, but since this was their last time out on the slopes, Emma didn’t want to cut it short for her.

Initially, Emma had been wavering on whether or not to head in or stick it out, but Regina had come over to. “If you act like a responsible adult who knows when she should stop, maybe we’ll go use the hot tub later.” Emma had sputtered and protested didn’t need to be bribed, but Regina had merely smirked.

Needless to say, Emma had caved. She was rewarded with a kiss and a very promising twinkle in Regina’s eye that would have been enough to make her blush if her face wasn’t already red from the cold.

Emma put down the wireless speaker she’d brought in with her from the bathroom and bit her lip, wondering how to bide her time until Regina’s return. Maybe glance over some notes? She could start to pack, but there wasn’t much to put away.

She was reluctantly staring at her notebook when her thoughts were interrupted by a knock on her door.

Emma’s brow furrowed in confusion—Regina wouldn’t knock. She went over pulled the door open, freezing automatically when she saw who it was. “Mom.”

“Hi, Emma,” Mary Margaret said, a weak smile on her face.

“Um…” Emma had no idea what to say, suddenly one on one with her mother after their blow up yesterday. “What’s up?” she offered, wincing as she said it.

“Can I come in?” Mary Margaret asked, more tentatively than Emma could ever remember her asking before.

Emma hesitated, before stepping back. “Uh, I guess. Yeah.”

Mary Margaret cautiously made her way over to the bed and sat down. Emma wanted to stay standing, but it felt too weird to tower over her mom like that so she reluctantly sat down as well.

Emma refused to say anything or ask why Mary Margaret was here. Her mom seemed to have trouble finding her words, but Emma was determined to wait her out Finally Mary Margaret said, “I talked to your aunt.”

That was not where Emma had thought Mary Margaret was going to go. Emma stared at her in confusion, “Huh?”

“Your Aunt Red,” Mary Margaret elaborated

Emma did not find that as helpful of a clarification as Mary Margaret seemed to be implying it was.
“Okay?”

Mary Margaret could tell Emma didn’t understand whatever she was trying to get at and so she tried to figure out where to start since she’d hoped that would be a clear enough point. “She…she explained some… I… Red is also bisexual,” Mary Margaret finally got the words out and Emma’s eyebrows went up. “And she was…upset, too. With me.”

Emma hadn’t actually known that, although she knew Aunt Red was “cool” with LGBT issues according to Ruby. “Elsa told Ruby who told Red what was going on and Red talked to me. And I read some of the things Elsa gave me and…” Emma was able to follow the trail and, knowing Aunt Red, gathered that she had yelled at Mary Margaret too.

Emma suddenly felt very tired, was Mary Margaret actually going somewhere with all of this? And why did she need ten different people to hold her hand as she wrapped her head around Emma’s sexuality? Emma fixed her weary gaze on Mary Margaret, “Why are you here, MM?”

“I’m not doing a very good job of it, but I came to say I’m sorry.” Emma’s eyes widened at that, but Mary Margaret continued, “I’m sorry I hurt you. I’m sorry I tried to tell you how you feel and that I didn’t listen to you.” It sounded practiced, but sincere and Mary Margaret gave Emma a self-deprecating smile, “I’ve always been bad at realizing when my interpretation of what someone else says or feels isn’t what it actually is and…” She drifted off before getting back on track, “That’s no excuse. I’m sorry, Emma.”

Emma crossed her arms over her chest. She’d never heard her mom apologize for anything big like this before or acknowledge she’d been wrong. “Yeah?”

Mary Margaret nodded earnestly, “I guess I thought I knew how it was, because it had seemed so obvious with Elsa, and I thought you were just slow to realize what I already knew and that was wrong of me. I shouldn’t have done that. You aren’t Elsa. I know that, I do, but…”

“Do you?” Emma asked. Her mother admitting she’d messed up was giving Emma the confidence to voice her own rebukes, “Because you act like Elsa’s the default and I’m like her until I tell you otherwise and then you act like I’m her with some specific differences. I’m an entirely different person, Mom.”

“You are,” Mary Margaret agreed quickly. “You are, I know that…” She trailed off and bit her lip guiltily, “But there’s knowing and there’s acting on that knowledge. I haven’t been doing a good job of the latter,” she admitted.

“When I first came to live with you guys, I did try to copy Elsa and be who you thought I should be, but that wasn’t the real me,” Emma confessed although she was fairly certain they both knew that. “And when I started to feel more comfortable being me, it felt like you…like you didn’t like that. Like you wanted me to stay a mini-clone of you and Elsa.”

“It’s not that bad anymore, but sometimes I still feel that way. And it sucks. So you claiming I like women just because Elsa does is a really messed up thing to say.”

“I’m sorry,” Mary Margaret looked down at her folded hands.

Emma continued since her mouth seemed to be on a roll, “And I want to tell you things, but you make it hard. It’s like you’re trying to finish my sentences for me, like it’s a game for you to prove how well you know me. But when you guess wrong, you don’t want to admit it. It’s like you try to convince me that I was wrong and so I just gave up correcting you.”
Mary Margaret opened her mouth before closing it and seemed to really think about what Emma had said. “I…I never meant to make you feel that way and I’m sorry I did.”

“Have you been talking to Archie?”

“A little,” Mary Margaret acknowledged. “Even I know when to consult a professional. What should I do to move forward? I don’t want to put this on you, but I want to hear how you think we can fix this.”

Emma hadn’t expected that. “Uh, I don’t know. Listen? Better?” Emma shook her head, “Don’t argue with me when I tell you things.”

“Okay, I can do that.”

“And maybe don’t talk to Regina until next year,” Emma added.

Mary Margaret laughed, “Yeah, that makes sense. She really makes you happy?”

“Yes,” Emma said firmly.

“I’m happy for you then,” she patted Emma’s knee. “I do want you to be happy and I’m trilled that Regina makes you happy, really.”

“Thanks,” Emma said with an almost shy smile. “Because she really does, Mom.”

Mary Margaret beamed at her and pulled her in for another hug.

“But, um, I gotta warn you—Regina’s pretty pissed at you. Her mom was a piece of work and some of this brought that back for her. She’s kinda protective of me, with you, right now. I, I forgive you, but I’m still sort of mad to? Like at the same time. And I can’t just stop that.”

“I know, and I know I have to do more than apologize, but we’ll get there. I’ll show you that you can trust me.

“Thanks, I really want to. I just want to feel like you’re interested in what I have to say, as a person, not just your daughter.”

“Oh Emma, I really do what to hear what you have to say, I promise.”

“Okay.” Emma said and then took another deep breath. “Okay.” A silence stretched out, neither of them knowing where to go from there. Emma desperately needed to move past this conversation until later and she searched for a way to change the subject, “Can we… What did you and Evan do today?”

Mary Margaret saw that Emma needed to talk about something lighter. “He wanted to fix up his snow fort before we left, in case the next people visiting wanted to play with it.”

They were both rather stilled at first, but soon gave way to a more normal conversation as they tried to regain their emotional equilibrium.

Then, the door opened and Regina walked into the room. All three women froze in surprise, Emma and MM at someone entering suddenly and Regina at finding Emma’s mother in the room.

“Hey Regina,” Emma said, trying to communicate that everything was alright.

It didn’t seem to work since Regina got a dark look on her face and glared at Mary Margaret.
“Emma.” There was the sense of bitten off words, as if Regina was trying to keep back saying something along the lines of “is she bothering you?”.

“Well, Emma, I’m sure Evan would love if you could make his play. I’d better get ready for dinner with the Nolans. The offer is still open if you’d like to come.”

“Okay, sounds good. We’re probably just going to stay in.”

“Alright sweetie. Bye,” Mary Margaret gave an awkward little wave as she went to leave. Regina did not move much from where she’d frozen upon entering the room and so the older woman had to awkwardly scoot by her in order to leave. The door clicked shut softly after her.

Emma collapsed back against her pillows, some remaining tension they hadn’t managed to diffuse with innocent talk was finally relieved.

“What did she want?” Regina asked, her stance tense, if at Emma’s word she would go hunt her down and make her pay for hurting her girlfriend any further.

“To apologize actually.”

Regina’s eyes brows shot up and she glanced instinctively at the door before turning back to Emma. “What?”

“Yeah.” Emma was staring at the ceiling, lost in thought.

Regina seemed to sense that Emma was still processing and so she grabbed some more comfortable clothes to change into. Once she was out of the bathroom, she carefully laid back down against the pillows, copying Emma’s pose. “Did she really apologize?”

“Yeah, a couple times actually. She seemed to have actually heard what I said the other day. And it sounded like Aunt Red laid into too—apparently, she’s bi as well and a lot of what MM said really pissed her off. Aunt Red’s always been able to get through to her, sometimes even when David hasn’t.”

“That’s big then,” Regina acknowledged.

“Yeah. She didn’t mention the job stuff, but its still more than I ever expected,” Emma said. “I just don’t what to feel anymore. But at least she said most of the right things. I just don’t know if it’ll stick,” Emma said, feeling more drained than she could remember in recent years. She sighed and moved closer to Regina, leaning her head on Regina’s shoulder. “Honestly, I just want to go home,”

Regina nodded as she wrapped an arm around Emma’s shoulders. “Me too.”

They sat together on the bed in peaceful silence for a while until Regina spoke up, “Next time we take a vacation together, can no one else from your family come?”

Emma laughed, “Definitely. I promise.”

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed the fic. Short possible sequel/epilogue to follow, maybe?
Thanks again to everyone at SQ Supernova! I always love doing this event!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!