

enemies with benefits (not dental, though)

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by [coalitiongirl](#)

Summary

Enemies with benefits. That's all this is, right? It's not like Emma's going to hook up with Regina a few times and promptly fall in love with her, no matter what anyone else seems to think. Probably. Maybe.

Notes

Hello pals!! This has been an exhausting time to write, but I have finally managed to finish this little fic! I did a very cursory edit so apologies if there are any typos I missed. I hope you enjoy it!

This takes place in an alternate S2 in which the purple smoke that Rumpel unleashed at the end of S1 instead re-cast the curse.

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

“You’re going to fall in love with me.” Regina’s voice is sly, amused, and Emma jerks up to glare at her in surprised outrage.

“What?” Of all the things she’s experienced in this room at Granny’s inn today– most far beyond

(or suspiciously close to) her wildest dreams— this one is the least plausible. “No, I’m not.”

Regina snorts unkindly. “Of course you are. It’s what happens when you hero types sleep with someone a little too often.” She stretches lazily across the bed, and Emma watches the shift of her body hazily, unbidden contentment settling over her. “You get emotionally attached and start to think that you can save them. Next thing you know, you’re standing in front of an angry mob and swearing that you see the good in me.”

Emma kicks at her leg, an awkward attempt when said leg is wound around her own. “Shut up.” She does not succeed in shaking off the uneasy feeling that Regina might have pegged her a little too well. “You don’t know me at all.”

“Mm-hm.” Regina’s tone is smug without saying a single word, *naturally* .

Emma feels very defensive. Maybe too much so, but *whatever* . “I can divorce sex from some imaginary *feelings* . I’m not Mary Margaret.” Mary Margaret, who is right back with David after that very messy murder investigation.

Regina rolls over, a smirk curling onto her face. “You mean Snow.”

This time, Emma really does kick her. “Shut *up* .” She doesn’t want to think about *that* , whatever the hell it is. She’s been given a reprieve from all of that curse bullshit and she plans to take it for as long as Henry will let her. (*Adapting her worldview* , he’s been calling it, and he nods knowingly whenever she says she isn’t ready to talk about it.) “Anyway,” she says, clearing her throat, and she means what she says next. “There’s no risk of me falling in love with *you* . I despise you.”

Regina laughs, unbothered. “Strong words from the naked woman in the room.”

Emma blinks at her. “We’re both naked,” she points out. They have been naked for a considerable amount of time, longer than any official lunch meeting would justify. Ruby is a *saint* for covering for them during work hours.

Regina looks down, then up again, her eyes running hungrily over the planes of Emma’s body. “Well,” she breathes. “Now that you mention it—”

They don't talk again for a long time.

See, if this were the first time, then it wouldn't be a big deal, maybe. There's always been a frisson of attraction between them that had been doomed to end as it did— Regina pinned against the wall of her office, Emma attacking her neck with vigor, her hands moving to hook Regina's legs around her as they'd moved furiously together.

If it were the second time, it might've been okay, too, because the whole curse breaking-not-breaking thing had happened already and Emma had known exactly who Regina is. So when they'd wound up half-naked near that well where everything had started all over again, it could have been chalked up to trauma.

Or... *something* .

It's the fact that this is the third time that is why this is becoming a problem. And not just that, but the fact that as soon as they'd scheduled this lunch meeting, Emma had known exactly how it would end. This is becoming a *thing* , which is just... *ugh* .

And the worst part is, she feels more relaxed than she has since Henry had first brought her to town. Her life is in shambles, but it feels kind of okay when she can also get naked with Regina on occasion.

And she really does *hate* Regina. Why couldn't it have been anyone else? Anyone. *Anyone* .

“Fine,” she says when they're finally dressed. She's stretched out on the bed again, and Regina is sitting up beside her, pulling on her boots. *Fuck* , she has nice legs. “Let's establish some ground rules. If we're going to keep doing this, I mean.”

“Oh, we certainly are,” Regina purrs, and Emma feels a little shiver crawl up her spine. Regina's hand splays possessively over Emma's center, and Emma has to force herself not to buck up needily. “Tomorrow at eleven?”

“Yes,” Emma says without hesitation, losing her train of thought. “Wait! Ground rules.”

Regina rolls her eyes. “Yes, let’s. Anything to protect me from the indignity of being loved by *you* .”

Emma scowls at her. “Maybe you’d be the one to fall in love with me. You don’t know that.” To be fair, she isn’t entirely sure that Regina is capable of love for anyone but Henry.

Henry, she’s sure of.

Regina snickers, which is mildly mean and probably justified. “Here’s a basic one. We never do this in our own beds,” she suggests. “And no one stays the night.”

Emma bobs her head, relieved at Regina’s businesslike tone. “Yeah. And no...we don’t talk about anything *real* . Small talk only.”

Regina’s fingers dip under the waistband of Emma’s jeans. “That’s fine. I don’t want to hear your sordid prison stories, anyway.”

Emma tries to glare at her. It’s not easy when Regina’s hand is probing deeper. “And we still hate each other.”

Regina looks amused, which just makes Emma hate her more. “Is that a rule?”

“Y–yes,” Emma pants, and she decides that she’s had enough of Regina looking down at her with that damned superior smirk. She pulls away, seizes Regina’s arm, and flips her onto the bed with a swift movement. Regina is fully dressed, her eyes dilated as she stares up at Emma, breathing hard. Emma swallows, feeling the certainty that comes with control. “No favors,” she whispers. “And no meetings that aren’t business or...or *this* . We’re not *dating* .”

Regina reaches up to palm Emma’s breasts, and Emma lets her for a moment before she pins her arms down beneath her, too, trapping Regina in place. “Deal?” she demands, and Regina jerks her head in silent agreement. Emma surges down to her, kissing her desperately, and *dammit* , they’re never going to make it out of this room, are they?

“Whatever spares me the insipid experience of a *Charming* defending me against an angry mob,” Regina mutters in her ear a few minutes later, and Emma’s nails dig deep enough into her skin that she lets out a ragged gasp.

The curse had broken just fine. That's the thing Henry points out whenever Emma tries to shrug off Operation Cobra. Emma had kissed him after the apple turnover and the sleeping curse, and a wave of rainbow light had spread across the town. Mary Margaret and David had wrapped their arms around Emma like she'd really been their *daughter* and Emma had been dazed and overwhelmed and desperate for a reprieve from this impossible truth. And then, she'd gotten it.

A purple cloud of smoke had billowed in the distance, growing larger and faster as it had poured through Storybrooke. And when it had cleared, everyone in Storybrooke had forgotten again. Mary Margaret had let go of Emma and said dubiously, "Was that a *tornado*?" and then she and David had looked goofily at each other and forgotten Emma again.

It had nearly been a relief to see Regina at the hospital when Emma had returned there, interrogating Dr. Whale on Henry's post-coma treatment. She'd glanced at Emma and nodded once, and Emma had nodded back. Regina might be some kind of magical despot, but she *remembers* that, and that's comforting in its own way.

Gold has vanished, and Regina's certain that he's the one who had re-cast the curse and left them to deal with the non-aftermath.

Non-aftermath, because Emma goes home every night to her *mother*, who had abandoned her twenty-eight years ago and doesn't know who she is. Because Henry is living with the *Evil Queen from Snow White* and Emma isn't sure if she's supposed to encourage him to talk things out with Regina or to call CPS. Right now, Henry regards Regina with deep distrust and a little fear, and that's reasonable.

If Regina's face when Henry rejects her has started to leave Emma's heart clenching in sympathy, well, they've established ground rules right in time, then.

"Little Miss Muffet," Henry confirms after the complainant leaves the station the next afternoon.

"Sitting on her tuffet?" Emma echoes dubiously. "What, is that restraining order she filled out directed at the spider that sat down beside her-?" At Henry's look, she groans. "*No*."

Henry shrugs, unapologetic. “Now you know what it’s been like to be me for the past year.”

“Come here.” She grabs his arm and tugs him to her, pressing another kiss to his forehead. No glowing rainbow light, no broken curse. Whatever had done it last time, it’s not working now.

“It’s because I’m not cursed,” Henry points out. “You need another apple turnover–”

“*No*,” Emma repeats, taking a step back. Sometimes, she remembers that apple turnover and she wants to strangle Regina, to kill her for what she’d done to their son. It’s a strange comfort to know that the turnover had been meant for Emma instead, but it stops the bloodthirsty thoughts from getting too intrusive. “Look, this curse is fine. Everyone might have forgotten again, but they seem happier now. We can just...leave things as is.”

Henry gives her a reproving look. “That’s not what a hero does, Emma,” he reminds her.

“So you’ve said.” She has to remind herself that he’s ten years old and has been living the *weirdest* life in order to keep her expression blank at that. “Look, let’s just...regroup for a little while before we brainstorm, okay? Talk about something other than this curse? Maybe get some pizza? Your mom said that I could take you out for dinner if you eat at least one vegetable, and there’s definitely tomato on the sauce–”

“Tomato’s a fruit,” Henry says, and *dammit*, sometimes the resemblance to Regina is uncanny.

Emma gives him a look. “Would you prefer a salad?”

“Pizza it is,” Henry says meekly, and it’s a good five minutes before he brings up the curse again.

This new... *thing* where Emma and Henry sometimes get Regina-sanctioned time together is a happy effect of the curse breaking and then unbreaking. There’s a grudging alliance between them now. They might loathe and distrust each other, but they are the only ones who know the truth, and it gives Emma a foothold with Henry that she’s never had before.

So okay, everything she’s ever believed is in shambles, but she has Henry around for a couple of hours a day, and he’s worth *everything*. Henry is why she hadn’t hightailed it out of town after the curse had broken and she’d realized that her parents are younger than she is. Henry is her whole life right now, even if he can’t stop talking about the curse.

She walks him back to Mifflin after dinner, and he points out houses along the way. “That’s where Rapunzel’s family lives,” he says. “She’s not here. I don’t know why. And there’s Cinderella’s evil stepmother’s house– oh, and there’s my evil not-stepmother’s house,” he finishes glumly, stopping in front of the mayoral mansion.

Emma can see Regina through the open curtains, the twist of her head on the living room couch as she turns to see if Henry has returned home yet. Regina– for all her proclamations of power and the perpetual too-busy-for-you attitude– doesn’t seem to do all that much at home but wait for Henry to arrive, and it makes Emma shift uncomfortably. “Hey,” she says, squeezing Henry’s shoulder. “How is it going with the two of you?”

“She made me think I was crazy,” Henry says, and his voice is hollow, too raw for a kid so young. “She’s evil. How is it supposed to go?” There had been a time when it had all been venom and fury from him, righteous anger in the face of the Evil Queen’s machinations. Since the turnover, he’s only seemed lost.

“Yeah,” Emma says uselessly. “I…” She searches for the words to make it right and draws a blank. “I guess it’s gonna be rough for a while. Is she…she isn’t doing stuff like that anymore, right?”

Henry just shrugs.

Regina tires of them standing in front of the property and opens the door. “Henry,” she calls, and there’s a hopeful light in her eyes, a smile touching at the edges of her lips. “How was your day?”

Henry shrugs, slinging his backpack over his shoulder and walking slowly toward the front door. “I have homework,” he mumbles, and he passes Regina without a look up.

Regina staggers in place, a hand coming to steady herself against the doorpost. Emma swallows, uncertain of her place in this.

Regina closes her eyes and takes a long breath. When she opens her eyes again, she’s the picture of composure. “Tonight,” she says coldly, her back straight and her gaze opaque. “After ten. I’ll be in the study.”

Emma gives her a thumbs-up. Regina stares at it, her eyebrows raised in polite disdain, and Emma

lowers her thumb.

“Look,” she says later, when Regina is slick and naked against her on the study chair, her head pressed to Emma’s shoulder in exhaustion. “About Henry—”

Regina doesn’t respond at first, just grips the ends of Emma’s jacket and exhales. It’s nearly midnight, and they’ve been at it for a while. Emma is content and loose-limbed, too relaxed to think about what she’s saying. “I don’t think he hates you. He’s just confused and hurt and—”

Regina’s fingernails dig into Emma’s bare thigh. “Don’t talk to me about Henry,” she bites out.

“Right. Ground rules.” Emma remembers them abruptly, *small talk only*. “Sorry.”

“I don’t need your pity. It was only a matter of time,” Regina says coolly. “I’ve been prepared for it for years.”

It’s curiosity that has Emma ask, “Prepared for what?”

Regina closes her eyes, the movement of her eyelashes tickling Emma’s neck. “My son to hate me.”

“He doesn’t—”

“Oh, he does,” Regina says blandly, and she slides off of Emma and walks across the room, putting distance between them. She snatches a light blanket off of the study couch and draws it around her shoulders, shivering in the chill of the night. Like this, she doesn’t strike her usual imposing figure. Instead, she seems small and defiant, a woman fierce in her vulnerability. “But it was always going to end like this. Henry has— he has a strong grasp of what is good and what is evil. And we both know exactly where I fall.”

Emma stares at her, still struck by the tremble in her shoulders, the hard resignation in her eyes. “Why wouldn’t you...” She stops.

Regina's voice is commanding. "What?"

Emma shifts. They've fallen into forbidden conversation, and she doesn't want to push it any further, to provoke Regina into fury. "I don't know. I just...I don't understand why you would raise Henry to...why you wouldn't just make him like..."

"Like me?" Regina finishes, and she laughs sharply. "I thought I did. Maybe I just made him unforgiving."

But he isn't unforgiving, even if he can be rigid. And he's *good*, a kid who believes in fairytales and heroes and all the things that Regina seems to eschew. Emma doesn't understand it, doesn't understand how Regina could have taken a child she could have corrupted and made him her nemesis instead. "He doesn't hate you," she tries saying again, and it hits her in a flash of clarity exactly what Henry might need. "He's just...have you apologized to him? He likes it when people are upfront with him. Maybe he just needs..."

Regina stares at her, and Emma realizes too late that she's overstepped. "I will not take parenting advice from *you*," she barks out. "I think we're done here, don't you?"

"Regina—"

"Get out," Regina says, and she twists around and strides out of the study.

They still wind up making out against the bars of a cell at the station the next morning, Regina pinned in place while Emma dots her neck with breathless kisses. "You left a hickey last night," Regina says accusingly, yanking at Emma's ponytail. It's the only time she'll mention last night at all. "My *son* thought I'd been attacked by bedbugs."

Back to my *son*, of course. "He's really never seen a bedbug bite, huh," Emma gasps.

Regina gives her a snide laugh. "Living in my house? Never. Now *Mary Margaret Blanchard*'s apartment might—"

Emma's phone buzzes in her pocket, and a hand slides into her jeans before she can grab it. "Speak of the devil," Regina purrs, looking down at the name on the phone.

"Regina—" Emma says warningly, but Regina's already hit the answer button.

"Emma?" Mary Margaret's tinny voice sounds over the phone, and Emma snatches it from Regina.

"Hey," she says, forcing her voice to even out. Regina bites hard on her shoulder. "What's u—uh—what's up."

"Everything okay?" Mary Margaret sounds concerned. "You sound strange."

Emma swallows. Regina licks her pulse point when it moves. "Yeah. I'm fine. What's going on?"

She can practically hear Mary Margaret's shrug over the phone. "I just wanted to check in and make sure it's okay if David came over for dinner. He claims that he's some kind of pasta savant and he's going to rock my world." She lets out a little laugh, a girlish giggle. "I think he's just going to put some ketchup and mozzarella on spaghetti, but I humor him."

"Idiot shepherd," Regina mutters against Emma's skin.

Mary Margaret pauses. "What?"

Emma jabs Regina with her elbow and contemplates the sheer discomfort of spending a meal with her amnesiac abandoner parents flirting in front of her. "I said, I can just...make myself scarce at dinnertime if you want to have a date at the apartment. I'll probably patrol tonight anyway."

"Oh, no," Mary Margaret says earnestly. "David wants you to be there, too. You two have barely gotten to spend any time together since...well, all the unpleasantness before." She sighs, writing away cheating and murder investigations and a broken curse in a single breath. Emma twitches, and it isn't just because Regina's hands are up her shirt. "You've been working too much. You didn't get in last night until after midnight. Ruby says that the mayor's been driving you hard lately."

Regina's body shakes with silent laughter. Emma mutters, "Ruby *would* say that." Ruby knows too much.

"What?"

"Nothing." The last thing in the world that Emma wants to do tonight is to sit opposite two strangers and try to cope with the fact that they're her parents. "Yeah, of course I'll come."

Mary Margaret exhales. "Great. I've been missing you lately," she admits, and Emma swallows and feels absolutely awful. "I feel like we barely see each other anymore."

Regina's fingers trace patterns up her skin and dig in unexpectedly. "I've just been— *ugh* — busy," Emma manages. "Between work and Henry—"

"Of course," Mary Margaret says quickly. "I understand. I haven't been the most present roommate lately, either." She hesitates, and then says, "Are you sure you're okay? You sound kind of...off."

"I'm fine," Emma says, and it would be a lie even if Regina weren't there.

It's fine, though. That she isn't fine. She's living in a twisted, inverted fairytale where she's the only *normal* one and no one else knows it, so it's perfectly natural for her not to be fine. And that's fine. Emma Swan has survived the worst of the foster system, prison, and years spent alone and traumatized, and she's a pro at compartmentalizing by now. She doesn't break down crying whenever things get a little too fucked up, she gets angry.

And that's the not-fine part of all of this, because she sits opposite Mary Margaret and David at the table that evening and watches them hold hands under the table and share secret smiles and forget that she's there, and she has to bite back unfair, irrational anger.

"It's great that Regina's giving you more time with Henry now," Mary Margaret says over her pasta, remembering that Emma exists. "I guess that coma scare kind of jolted her, huh?"

Emma shrugs. “I guess.”

“It’s been so difficult for both of them until now,” Mary Margaret says to David, her eyes shining with sympathy. “I can’t imagine how hard it must be to see your birth mother after so many years and to still be kept apart.”

“Yeah, it sucks,” Emma says, slamming her fork on the table a little too violently. Ketchup splatters onto David’s light blue polo. “Sorry,” she mutters.

“Don’t worry about it. This shirt was too boring, anyway.” David winks at her, and Emma’s stomach lurches.

The thing is, if not for the pesky fact that they’d dumped a newborn into a tree and sent her into another world to fend for herself, Emma would actually like him. Them. Mary Margaret has been the first adult friend she’s had in years, and David is the kind of steady guy who gives great hugs. She looks at them and she wants to scream, but she also wants to choke out *why* and get answers that will be enough to forgive them.

They were trying to save the world, and she was collateral damage. That’s all. And if she looks deep enough, the real source of her fury is the reason why they *had* to save the world.

Mary Margaret hugs Emma at the end of dinner. “Thanks for trying,” she murmurs. “It’s really important to me that you two get along.”

The last time they’d hugged, Mary Margaret had been Snow White and she and David had held Emma and murmured *we found you* and Emma had been caught between disbelief and desperate longing for it all to be true and a lie at the same time. This time, the hug is quick and Mary Margaret pecks Emma’s cheek before Emma squirms away. “He’s okay,” she mumbles. “I have to— I gotta go patrol.”

“Again?” Mary Margaret sounds disappointed, but she doesn’t stop Emma when she hurries out the door, a bubble in her chest close to popping.

No, it isn’t Mary Margaret and David she has to hate. It’s the Evil Queen.

She sends out a swift text to Regina, her hands shaking. *Backyard*. Regina's backyard is secluded, large enough and well-forested so no one can see in, and Henry's room doesn't overlook it.

Emma ducks around the side of the mansion, and Regina is already there, leaning against the wall by the patio. In an instant, they're kissing furiously, Emma slamming Regina back and attacking her at full force.

Regina's eyes narrow, blatantly hungry, and it infuriates Emma even more. "You're a monster," she growls, lifting Regina up and tearing at her shirt. She pops the buttons, satisfied when Regina lets out a little whine of protest. "You're a fucking *demon* –"

Regina arches back, but she sees too much, knows Emma too well already. "I'm not the one who put you in that tree," she hisses, shoving Emma, and Emma bites down on Regina's tongue.

"*Shut up* ." They're violent today, angry as they push each other and pull at their clothes, and Emma just wants to *hurt* –

"You think your childhood trauma makes you unique?" Regina sneers, slamming Emma against the railing along the side of the patio. Emma feels the pain and savors it, needs it desperately. "You think you're the first little girl whose parents didn't love her enough? Get over it."

"Like you did?" Emma snarls. "Wipe out a few towns instead of going to therapy? Pass." She thrusts into Regina, and Regina cries out. "My parents didn't have a choice–"

"Oh, they had one," Regina snaps, biting down on Emma's breast hard enough to sting. "They just didn't choose *you* –"

Emma lets out a garbled noise and thrusts harder into Regina, in and out until Regina is gasping with it and Emma is gasping with her, too, helpless and furious and heartbroken at once. She doesn't know when her fingers relax– when she starts to shake instead– when Regina's lips graze her skin for the first time tonight–

She doesn't know when it ends like this, shaking against Regina while Regina's arms hold her up, while Regina's lips brush against her temple and she is so unnaturally silent that Emma can map out the sound of her breathing on Emma's hair. She doesn't know, but when she finally stands, she flees the backyard with her jeans still unzipped and runs desperately from Mifflin without looking back.

A mini breakdown is enough to spook Emma out of going to see Regina again for a few days, and she avoids her gaze at Granny's and stays at the sidewalk when she drops Henry off at home. Regina follows suit, ignoring Emma as coolly as she ignores everyone else in town, and Emma pretends not to care.

Not that she *care* cares, anyway. It's just...annoying, seeing how easily forgotten she is. Regina's probably a day or two away from finding someone new, which suits Emma just fine if she wouldn't feel so damned *replaceable* about it.

"Problems with the girlfriend?" Ruby says in an undertone, passing her her cocoa.

Emma glowers at her. "I haven't had a girlfriend in six years."

"Right. Absolutely. You went directly to wife and co-mom with Regina. What is this? Your divorce?" Ruby jerks a thumb at where Regina is standing at the counter, deliberately not making eye contact with Emma.

"Shut up. It's just...sort of over now, okay? Good riddance."

Ruby slides down into the seat beside her. "All right," she says with finality, sliding an arm around Emma's shoulders. "Tell Ruby all about it."

Emma sighs. "It wasn't much of a thing in the first place. But we had...ground rules, right. To make sure I didn't—" She cuts herself off before it gets too embarrassing, but Ruby's onto her.

"Oh, my god. You fell in *love* with her?" Ruby's mouth hangs open. "Emma..."

"No! No, I didn't— why would I fall in love with her?" Emma demands, exasperated.

Ruby shrugs. "It just seems like a you kind of thing to do."

It is *not*. “Maybe she’d fall in love with me! Ever consider that?” Emma scowls and tries not to pout.

“Fat chance. Regina’s like an ice queen.” Ruby shakes her head sadly, patting her arm. “Man, I knew this would end in something sad and unrequited, but I thought you did, too.”

“I didn’t—” Emma grinds her jaw. “I am *not* in love with her. I just kind of...broke down about something in front of her. It was humiliating. And apparently a complete turnoff, because she hasn’t looked at me twice since.”

Ruby leans over. “She seems to be looking pretty hard right now,” she murmurs into Emma’s ear, and Emma blinks and looks up at Regina.

Regina is glaring at her from across the diner, her eyes flickering from Ruby to Emma, and Emma gapes back for a moment before she puts it together. Ruby is still sitting too close, an arm wrapped around Emma, and Regina is—

Regina is *jealous*. Whoa.

Emma blinks and looks at Ruby. Ruby smirks, her arm tightening around Emma. “You’ll thank me later,” she says, watching as Regina’s expression shifts to murderous.

“I really don’t think so,” Emma says dryly. But her phone buzzes abruptly, and the message that pops up is unequivocal. *Back hallway. Now.*

Ruby makes a face. “Come on. I have to *clean* that—” But Emma is already striding away, heading toward the diner’s back hallway.

She’s slammed against the wall mid-step, Regina hovering in front of her with icy, furious eyes. “I don’t care what you do in your free time,” she growls. “But you don’t go from *me* to that— that *girl* —”

“Please,” Emma scoffs. “We’re not even—” She forgets what she’d meant to say when Regina sticks her tongue into Emma’s mouth, and she’s very busy for a while after that.

It isn't until she hears someone's shuffling footsteps that she pulls away, the two of them avoiding each other's eyes while Archie walks past them to the bathroom. "Anyway," Emma mutters once he's gone, "I didn't think we were...doing that anymore. After what happened in the yard—"

She remembers the anger, but that's fine. It's the tears that have her uncertain, that have crossed a line she'd never intended to cross.

Regina looks at her, and there's a flicker of something almost like humanity in her eyes. "It's unreasonable for us to ban any real talk," she says finally. Her voice is smooth, and that flicker is gone. "We're the only two— we're the only two adults who remember."

"Yeah," Emma says, relieved.

Regina sighs heavily. "Besides," she says. "You're so *weak*. You'd probably fall in love faster if you start *pinning* for conversation."

"Hey—!" Emma starts, outraged, but there's a glitter of humor in Regina's eyes that stops her, a tease to her voice that has none of the hostility of before. Emma shivers, frozen in Regina's gaze, and she has to swallow before she can speak. "Anyway," she says. "Tonight?"

Regina kisses her in response, long and luxuriating, and only Archie emerging from the restroom is enough to pull them apart.

So that's one rule broken, but it had been one that had demanded too much. Emma craves conversation that isn't misted over by the curse, and Regina must, too, by now. Henry only wants her to come up with solutions, wants to talk about the curse and its evils, and Emma wants...

"Tell me what it was like before," she says, leaning back against the bed in Regina's guest room. Henry is out for a sleepover at a friend's house, a good sign— he has a *friend* now, he's starting to adapt— and they have the house to themselves tonight. They'd taken the guest room because some rules really must be kept. "In the...you know. Other place."

"The Enchanted Forest," Regina says, her movements languorous. She's resting on the slim expanse of Emma's abdomen, her fingers tracing the muscle visible there. "That's what we called the lands surrounding us."

“Yeah. So aside from the Evil Queen terrorizing the populace—”

Regina scoffs. “My kingdom was wealthy and flourishing. I was born to rule. If Snow White hadn’t turned the villages against me, I would have been beloved and celebrated.”

“I’ve read Henry’s book,” Emma says dubiously. “Like, all the bits about your people murdering villagers.”

“Traitors,” Regina argues. “If I hadn’t killed them, it’d be taken as a sign of weakness. I did what had to be done.” But she sounds perturbed, and Emma lifts her head to look down at her.

“Any regrets?” she broaches, a little tentatively. She doesn’t know what might set Regina off. She has her suspicions about Graham, and that leaves a lump in her throat when she thinks about him for too long. Regina is a *monster*, except when she’s like this— unclothed and unguarded, pensive and silent.

Regina laughs a sharp little laugh. “I don’t think I have the luxury of *regrets*,” she says, but her voice is devoid of the scathing disdain Emma had expected. “Snow White can ruin my life and then apologize really hard, and the world would exonerate her for it. People like me...we live with what we’ve done forever.” Her hand falls onto Emma’s skin, no longer stroking it. She looks away from Emma.

“Okay,” Emma murmurs. It isn’t a comforting response, but Emma doesn’t expect those from Regina. Regina’s honesty brings its own comfort. “What exactly is it that Snow White— that my mother did to ruin your life?”

Regina jerks in place and then goes rigid. “Don’t you know?” she says, her voice lilting like a mockery. “She was prettier than me.”

Emma feels the frustration bubbling anew, a tension at the way Regina dismisses her. “I did the math once,” she says finally. “Mary Margaret thinks she’s twenty-six. And in the book, she’s ten when her mother dies and not much older when her father marries you.”

Regina doesn’t respond. Emma forges on. “But you’re...what, thirty-four? Thirty-five? Which means that you were still a teenager when all of that happened. When you married the king—”

“You had a baby at seventeen,” Regina says, her voice strained. “I hardly think that I was too young to marry.”

Emma watches her, sees the way her fingers dig into the mattress. “Did you— was this some kind of plan you’d hatched to gain power?” she ventures. “To take the kingdom from Snow? I can’t imagine you were in love with some old-as-balls king. So you meet him and seduce him and take the crown before you kill him—”

The words seem to rip themselves from Regina’s throat, so tightly constrained that they emerge in a hoarse croak. “I wanted to run away,” she whispers, and Emma falls silent. “I didn’t want the crown. Mother... I never wanted...”

Her voice trails off, and she shivers violently. Emma’s hands find their way into Regina’s hair, running soft fingers through them in even strokes, and she remembers Regina’s *you think you’re the first little girl whose parents didn’t love her enough?*

“Okay,” she murmurs, and she doesn’t press for more. “Okay.”

Regina looks up at her, her eyes intent on Emma’s. Emma holds her gaze, and Regina breathes in ragged vibrations against Emma’s skin. Her hand rises to Emma’s left breast, but she only rests it there, over the heart.

Emma remembers the stories from the book— remembers hearts snatched from chests and the Huntsman and Snow White and all the infamous horrors Regina has wreaked, but she doesn’t move. There is no magic in this land since the purple smoke had enveloped Storybrooke, but Regina’s hand still seems to sink into Emma’s skin and close around her heart.

Emma feels a grip around her heart like a warm blanket draped over her body. It doesn’t hurt, doesn’t make her choke or sob like it does in the book. Instead, Regina’s hand only sits there, inside of Emma, and her heart is enveloped by a touch that is soft and gentle.

When the hand emerges— without a heart in it— it’s because Regina has drifted off, her hand still pressed onto Emma’s chest. She’s curled up on top of Emma, limbs wrapped around her, and Emma could probably disentangle her if she had to.

But Emma’s tired, and she doesn’t want to wake Regina. And tonight doesn’t count, anyway.

They'd never clarified if the *no spending the night* means only in each other's bed or in any bed, so there are no rules broken and no harm done. Regina is sleeping so peacefully, and Emma doesn't have the heart to push her off and leave.

She tugs the comforter over them and closes her eyes, one hand resting on Regina's cheek as she falls asleep.

They don't talk about it in the morning. Regina mumbles something about being late to work and escapes the room, and Emma gets dressed quickly and hurries back home.

Mary Margaret is waiting for her at the breakfast table, her eyebrows raised and a grin on her face. "And where have *you* been, Emma Swan?" she drawls, and Emma freezes in the doorway.

"Uh. Patrolling?"

"Who is he?" Mary Margaret demands. "Or she?" At Emma's sidelong look, she says, "I'm not a complete idiot, Emma. Even if I did buy all those late nights as patrolling until now. Who is she? Is it..." Her eyes round. "Not *Ruby*?"

"Not Ruby," Emma concedes grimly. She *really* needs more friends. "No one. Okay? We're not even...we're just screwing around. We don't even like each other."

She heads for the coffee maker in a rush of energy, running a hand through her tangled hair. When she turns, Mary Margaret is gaping at her open-mouthed. "Oh, my god," she says. "Oh, no. I knew this was bound to happen eventually."

"What? Murder-suicide in the loft?" Emma says impatiently, but her stomach is churning at the look on Mary Margaret's face. "Look, it's not a big deal."

"It's *Regina Mills*," Mary Margaret says, looking faint. "That's a pretty big damned deal. Emma, have you thought this through? What about Henry? And she's your boss—"

"She's not actually my boss. She's an elected official." As elected as you can be when a curse

makes you the permanent mayor of a town. “And Henry has nothing to do with this. We both—” Emma sighs, rubbing her eyes. “It’s under control, okay?”

But it isn’t under control at all, not in the way that matters. Because Mary Margaret *knows* . Ruby has always known too much to expect to keep it from her, but Emma is filled with grim certainty now that the curse can never break.

Because if Mary Margaret doesn’t like that this is happening, Emma can only imagine what Snow White, nemesis to Regina and prodigal mother to Emma, might say about it. “It’s not like there are feelings involved,” she offers weakly. “I mean, I’m not an idiot, and Regina’s basically incapable of any real affection, so it’s just...you know. Enemies-with-benefits.”

Mary Margaret purses her lips. Emma says, obnoxiously, “At least she isn’t *married* .”

Mary Margaret ignores that, and Emma instantly feels like a terrible person. “I just don’t want to see you hurt,” Mary Margaret murmurs. “And I don’t want her to use Henry against you. She has all the power here, you know?”

“Does she?” But Emma can’t elaborate, not to Mary Margaret. Regina might be in charge, might have custody over Henry, but she’s balancing on the head of a pin, waiting out the inevitable ending to all of her power and control. If the curse breaks, Regina is doomed, and they all know it. And Henry will flee from her without a look back. Emma holds all the cards, and Regina hates her for it.

And for Henry in particular.

“My mom apologized to me,” he says abruptly the next afternoon, as they walk back to the mansion. “Last night, after I got home. She came upstairs and stood in my doorway for, like, ten minutes, and then she said that she was sorry for lying to me about the curse. It was weird.” But he seems pensive, and Emma remembers a summons last night from Regina that had been retracted minutes later.

Emma says, “What did you say?”

Henry shrugs. “I said it wasn’t enough. It doesn’t change all the horrible things she’s done. And it doesn’t make what happened any better.” He bites his lip. “She’s the bad guy. I’m not going to forgive her.”

Henry still thinks in black-and-white, in good and evil and nothing in between. But his steps are a little too heavy, and his fists are clenched, trembling with emotion that might be anger and might be frustration. “It doesn’t make you a bad person to love someone who has done terrible things,” Emma says gently. “It makes you human.”

Henry looks away from her. “I’m not like her,” he says.

“No,” Emma agrees. “No, you aren’t.” And she shouldn’t bring *this* up, except that it’s been all she’s been thinking about lately. “Isn’t it strange how that happened?”

Henry looks up at her, very earnest. “It’s because I’m really your son,” he says. “So I’m a good guy. She couldn’t take that away from me.”

Emma puts an arm around him. “Did she ever try?”

Henry doesn’t answer, but his steps are slower, and his eyes are thoughtful as they make their way down the street to the house.

At the house, Regina opens the door when they’re halfway down the path. She looks fragile today, dark circles beneath her eyes and her arms twisting at her stomach. “Hello, Henry,” she says. It’s a defeated tone, the one that comes after a fight with their son, and it’s usually followed by Henry brushing past her with a scathing insult.

This time, he stops and looks up at her, studies her face with that pensive gaze, and Regina meets his eyes. They stand like that, frozen in time, two delicate figures made of glass. Emma is afraid to speak and shatter them, but she drinks in their locked gazes. An unexpected contentment bubbles up within her, a peace that comes with their shared vulnerability.

Maybe it would be easier if they hated each other, if Emma could swoop in and save Henry from the Evil Queen. But they never truly have, and Emma’s heart aches just at the thought of it—

“Hey,” she says, and Regina and Henry both startle. “You guys wanna grab dinner at Granny’s tonight?” They look at her in surprise, and Emma lies, “David’s cooking at home again, and I don’t think I can handle another day of unseasoned pasta—”

Regina sniffs. “And you want to go to *Granny’s* for a reprieve from that.” She waves a hand in the direction of the kitchen. There’s an amazing scent emanating from the house right now, and Emma’s mouth waters. “You might as well come here for dinner.”

Henry’s head jerks up, and his eyes brighten. “Could she?”

There’s definitely a rule about it that Emma can’t quite remember right now. But Regina says, “If that’s what you want,” to Henry and Henry beams, and Emma pushes aside rules and concerns and follows them inside.

It doesn’t count as a date or a non-business meeting because Henry is here, Emma decides. And Henry is so *present*, enveloping the room with his warmth and energy and nearly bouncing off the walls with his enthusiasm. “He’s happy you’re here,” Regina says when Emma manages to get away from the dining room for long enough to help serve the food onto plates. “He’s never this talkative at home.”

“He’s never this talkative with me, either,” Emma admits. “Only when it comes to the curse. Then he won’t stop talking for a second.”

Regina exhales, unbending a little bit as she passes a plate to Emma. “I didn’t know that. He used to be...” Her eyes go distant and sad, dark with regrets she doesn’t express. “It used to be different.”

Emma is only just beginning to grasp that. Today, Henry chatters around Regina as though he’s been doing it all his life, and Regina drinks it in like she’s starved for it. Like she’s had it *before*, and Emma sits back during dessert and observes in silence.

“It’s the coolest project,” Henry is saying, rocking in his seat. “See, we have to build a world from scratch. So it could be in space, or underwater, or in a pool of lava—” His eyes brighten. “Do you think I could build a diorama volcano that really erupts?”

“I think you’d have to check with your teacher, but we could certainly arrange that if she okays it.” Regina’s smile is warm, and Henry grins at her. A shadow crosses his face, his smile faltering as though he’s only just remembered who he’s grinning at, and he looks to Emma. Emma gives him an encouraging smile, and Henry turns back to Regina, excited again.

“Okay. Cool! So what if—” He breaks into a deeply technical analysis of the diorama he wants to build, and Regina offers suggestions and goes to get a pen and paper to take notes. They’re still sitting together, heads bent over the paper, as Emma quietly stands and clears the table around them.

She doesn’t dare interrupt this peace forged between mother and son, but she hangs around, all too aware of the moments when Henry has his doubts and looks to her for validation. It comes as a surprise when she glances at Regina once and sees the same expression on her face. Emma offers the same encouraging smile, and Regina swallows and smiles back.

It’s free of malice, free of anything but pure, simple pleasure, and Emma’s heart clenches just a little bit.

It’s late by the time that Henry has finished his homework, and he shrugs off Regina’s offers to tuck him in. “I’m *ten*,” he says, ducking away from her, and he also avoids her kiss before he heads upstairs. He moves toward Emma as though he might hug her goodnight, and Emma cringes with renewed fear. Of all the things that might shatter the peace between her and Regina and Henry, Henry showing Emma favoritism is at the top of the list.

She can see the moment that that registers with Henry. He takes a step back and gives Emma a little wave, and she waves back, watching him leave.

“He’s calmer when you’re around,” Regina murmurs, pouring Emma a glass of cider. Emma thinks that probably this would count as breaking the rules, if not for the fact that Henry had been there earlier. “He figures that as long as a hero is around to tell him that it’s okay, he can be around the villain of the story.”

Emma laughs uncomfortably. “I’m not a hero.”

Regina snorts. “You will be,” she says, rolling her eyes with the utmost disdain. “Don’t think I don’t know it. Storming in, sticking your nose into everyone’s business—” With careful steps, she stalks over to Emma, her fingers climbing up Emma’s chest with exaggerated motions. “Saving the day...you’re a modern-day Prince Charming.”

But her fingers pause just below Emma’s chin, holding it up as she leans in for a kiss. Emma’s eyes drift closed as their lips brush. It feels nice, even without the fury and the passion that usually follows. “You need to come back tomorrow night,” Regina murmurs against her lips. “It’s good for him. Not the...custody arrangements that we’ve been doing until now.”

“Yeah,” Emma breathes. There’s no denying that Henry is happier around them both at once. “Only if you cook again.” There’s a niggling reason not to say yes, something they’re transgressing, but she can’t place it. “There’s…”

Regina pulls away from her, passing her her drink again. Emma hadn’t even noticed her taking it. “This is for Henry,” she says, her face rearranging into the formal, sharp Madam Mayor expression. “It isn’t as though we’re dating. And as long as our main rule is still in place…”

“Main rule?” Emma echoes.

Regina smiles grimly. “We do still hate each other, don’t we?” She turns away from Emma, abruptly leading the way to the living room.

The living room. Not the study, not a room secluded enough that they can use it in the usual way. These drinks aren’t a precursor to anything more, and Emma hates how content she is with that. “Sure do,” she says, her heart not in it at all.

Whatever. At least she still *dislikes* Regina. Usually.

It soon becomes clear that this is what’s best for Henry. *This*, evening after evening spent at the house with Regina and Henry, eating dinner together and sitting through homework and hanging around until bedtime. It’s ridiculous how easily it all falls into place. Henry is happier when they’re both around, when they’re not at each other’s throats or avoiding each other, and dinners and homework flow into casual conversation and the occasional *real* smile from Regina.

“Don’t read too much into this,” Regina murmurs one night in the study. Henry is already fast asleep, and Emma is perched on top of Regina, hands up her shirt. There are going to be bruises, Emma knows, and she doesn’t care. Sometimes, all this proximity without any touching is foreplay of its own. “I’m only following Henry’s lead.”

“Isn’t that what we all do,” Emma breathes, pressing down onto Regina to kiss her. Regina laughs, tilting her head back as she does, and Emma takes a moment to curse that *goddamned* perfect curve of her jaw. It’s so distracting. *So* distracting. “Henry could tell us to jump into the ocean and you’d do it without a second thought.”

“Not you?” Regina says, eyebrows arched.

Emma considers. “Well,” she says, sliding Regina’s shirt off. “I’d give it at least a *second* thought. You wouldn’t.” Regina hisses in acknowledgement of that fact and also Emma’s teeth on her skin.

It occurs to Emma that it’s kind of unhealthy exactly how much Regina would give up for Henry, but now doesn’t seem the time to bring it up. *Anyway*, if it’s helping Regina reform, then who is she to stand in their way?

Regina writhes beneath her, her own hands shifting to squeeze at Emma, and she pants, “Henry wants you back tomorrow.”

“Shocking.” Emma squirms against her, kneading her breasts until Regina lets out a choked moan. “Does Henry also want me to hang out in the study after he goes to bed?”

Regina pinches her. “I’m sure it’s in his best interest,” she says, a mischievous look on her face, and Emma laughs and has to kiss Regina again.

Mary Margaret just sighs when Emma comes in late yet again, a pained “Be *careful*, Emma,” each time.

“It’s under control,” Emma protests. “It really is. It’s about Henry now, not...you know.”

Mary Margaret gives her a long look. “You’re playing house with Regina,” she says. “Is this really the best way to keep it under control?”

Emma thinks about muttering some things about *married men* and Mary Margaret not being the best judge when it comes to romance, but she suspects that it would be counterproductive. There is a nasty little part of her that still wants to lash out every time she speaks to Mary Margaret, that wants to demand impossible answers from a woman who doesn’t remember that she’s Emma’s mother.

And then she feels guilty and adrift again, and she makes excuses and returns to Regina.

They watch a movie the next night, Henry sandwiched in between his mothers and Emma's fingers brushing against Regina's shoulder from where her arm is slung over the back of the couch. "I still think we should have picked up a Disney movie," Emma murmurs over Henry's head.

Regina gives her a dark look. "If you *ever* bring Snow White and the Seven Dwarves into this house—"

Emma flutters her eyelashes at Regina. "I don't know. I think Snow White is kind of a badass."

"She's a child who shacks up with a bunch of strange men and accepts food from strangers," Regina says haughtily. "Hardly a role model." Emma waits, counting off the seconds before Regina says, "And it's *absurd* that anyone would see that pasty-faced infant as more beautiful than the Queen in the movie, who is—"

"Nearly as hot as Maleficent in Sleeping Beauty," Emma finishes just to be a brat, and Regina's eyes narrow. But to Emma's surprise, a smug, distant smirk curls onto Regina's face, and Emma gapes at her. "*No*," she says. Regina doesn't respond. "You and—"

"Could you two stop talking?" Henry says irritably. "I'm trying to watch *this* movie, okay?"

Emma still gapes at Regina, open-mouthed. Regina lifts her hand to drag her fingers against Emma's knuckles casually, smirking at the television screen in silence.

"You sent me to *kill* her," Emma finally manages once Henry's fallen asleep on the couch, the credits rolling in front of them. "That's cold, even for you."

Regina scoffs. "Please. You think one slaying would take Mal down? She's still down there, biding her time." She looks distinctly fond, and Emma swallows down a bolt of what is *not* jealousy. "I'm sure she'll be back."

Emma grunts in response. It's a little huffy, maybe. "Whatever. I *slayed* her. I can do it again."

"For my honor?" Regina says, a glint in her eye. "I'm touched, Miss Swan."

“Go to hell,” Emma says cheerily, eyeing Henry where he’s slumped over beside her. “I’m gonna bring him upstairs, okay?” She scoops him up without waiting for a response, lifting him into her arms and carrying him to the stairs. Regina flits up beside her, a hand resting on Henry’s side.

“Careful,” she murmurs.

“I’m always careful,” Emma protests in a whisper. True to her word, she makes it up the stairs and to Henry’s bedroom, where she lays him down in his bed. “Night, kid,” she says, and she leans down to kiss his forehead.

For an instant as she bends, she sees Regina rigid with horror, her eyes burning into Emma’s side as she watches her press the kiss to Henry’s side. Emma straightens again, looking down at Henry, and she waits until Regina has taken shaky steps to Henry’s bed to kiss him goodnight before she speaks. “It doesn’t work,” Emma says. “We’ve tried a bunch of times. The kiss won’t break the curse because we aren’t cursed, I guess.”

A quiet breath from beside her. “I see.” Regina’s face is drawn, stiff in a way that it rarely is anymore. “You try that often?”

Emma shrugs. “Henry insists on it. I’d be better off if this curse never breaks.” She means it. There are far too many revelations that come with the curse, too much drama that she’s never wanted. Mary Margaret and David can be her friends forever instead of...whatever they might be to her with a broken curse. The world won’t be consumed by magic and dragons and curses. Storybrooke is *safe* like this. Regina is safe like this. “Good thing there’s no risk of a true love’s kiss between us, huh?” she says sardonically.

She walks out of Henry’s room without looking back. Regina’s safety is...not a personal factor, except for Henry’s sake. Henry and Regina are just beginning to mend their relationship, and if the curse breaks, it’ll be destroyed. And Henry *needs* Regina, so—

She’s thrust against the wall so hard that she sees stars, Regina backing her against a wall and kissing her before Emma registers it. Emma kisses her back, breathless and wanting, and she barely manages to get out a “Henry’s just in there—”

“Get in,” Regina says, licking the shell of her ear, and she shoves a door open and then closed behind them. Emma hits a soft, large bed, and she takes a dazed moment to think *Regina’s room* before she thinks about very little at all but the body pressed to hers.

In the morning, curled around Regina with her arms flung over the other woman's abdomen, Emma reflects on another rule broken. Well. At least she isn't in *love*. That's the only real issue here, anyway. Everything else is just there to safeguard against it. So it doesn't matter.

"It's a question of convenience," Emma points out a few days later. She's picking through Regina's shirts in the morning, searching for something she might get away with wearing. There's the nice blue shirt Henry had once loaned her, and she slides it on and wanders back to Regina. "I'm here pretty much every morning and night. Why bother going home when I'll just take Henry to the bus in the morning anyway?"

"Exactly," Regina agrees, buttoning Emma's shirt absently. "Though Henry has asked how you get here so quickly."

"Oh?" Henry is the one issue with this arrangement. Mary Margaret might roll her eyes and sigh disappointedly, but Emma is used to disappointing *her*. Henry is a whole different problem, and Emma knows that he won't be okay with this. "What did you tell him?"

Regina shrugs. "You have a drinking problem," she says. "You can't drive home after my cider, so you sleep in the guest room."

Emma sputters. "I do not—" But Regina is watching her with that impish, smug grin that she gets, so pleased with her self and so malicious, and it's just... *sickeningly* adorable. *Ugh*. "I'm telling him it's because I have to look after your drunk ass."

"You do do an excellent job of looking after my ass," Regina agrees, and Emma palms said ass as Regina turns for the bedroom door. "We can switch to the guest room tonight so it looks a little more disturbed. Henry might overlook a lot, but there's no way he would believe that you make your bed every morning."

"Oh, wait," Emma remembers. "I can't tonight. Mary Margaret and Ruby are dragging me out for drinks for...Ruby's half-birthday or something." It's a feeble excuse to go out to the one seedy bar in town, but Mary Margaret had looked so hopeful that Emma had conceded. "Tomorrow night, though. Unless you want me to come by after—"

Regina watches her in the doorway, her face unreadable. "Henry will be asleep by then," she says.

“There’s really no point, is there?”

“I– I guess not,” Emma says, at a loss. They’ll find some other time together today, she’s sure, and it’s not like they’ve never gone a day or two without a tryst. Even one night this week, they’d gotten into bed and been too tired to screw around.

Still, it’s a sudden break from their new routine, and Emma can’t figure out how Regina feels about it. She spends a good part of the day dwelling on Regina’s expression, trying to figure out if it’s more *pissed* or *annoyed* or *ambivalent*. Whatever it had been, it hadn’t been good, Emma’s sure.

And Henry hadn’t been pleased to let her go for a night, either. *You need to be there*, he’d insisted when she’d dropped him off at home after school. *You make it better*.

A part of her wonders if she really does, or if it’ll be the same without her. Maybe all it’ll take is one night without her before Henry realizes that he doesn’t need her at all. Regina has always been mother enough for Henry until now, so that hasn’t–

“Hey,” Mary Margaret says, poking at her. “You’re a million miles away.”

Emma jolts back to the present, to the dingy table at the Rabbit Hole where they’re sitting and waiting for Ruby. “Just thinking about Henry.”

“Uh huh. Sure.” There’s a knowing look on Mary Margaret’s face. Emma doesn’t like it. “Anyway, look. Ruby’s here.”

Ruby *is* there, and she’s brought someone with her. Emma knows her by face– an attractive woman, one of Granny’s occasionals. “Hi,” she says, smiling at them. At *Emma*, her eyes glittering. “I’m Jane Porter. Ruby’s told me all about you.”

“Uh,” Emma says, a little bewildered. Mary Margaret elbows her. “Hi. I’m Emma. This is…Mary Margaret?” she says, gesturing to Mary Margaret. Jane’s eyes don’t leave Emma, and Emma realizes with a sinking sensation exactly what’s going on.

And Jane is *sweet*, she really is. She’s a science teacher at the high school, as it turns out, and she talks about conservation with this fire in her eyes that has Emma happy to listen to her, but she can’t shake the feeling of unease at the way that Mary Margaret and Ruby sit expectantly with

them. It's almost like...

She waits until Ruby and Jane go to the counter to get more drinks before she turns to Mary Margaret and demands in a hiss, "Is this a setup? Are you *setting me up* with Jane?"

Mary Margaret doesn't meet her eyes. "She's pretty, isn't she? And smart. I just thought you might—"

"I'm *seeing someone* !" Maybe Regina would disagree with that, but it's pretty much what they're *doing* . "You can't just—"

"What am I supposed to do, Emma?" Mary Margaret says, shaking her head. Her voice is apologetic but unrelenting. "Don't you remember who Regina is? She's going to *break* you. I can't just stand by and let it happen."

Emma stands up. "I'm an adult, Mary Margaret. I can make my own romantic— sexual— decisions. I don't need you— you *mothering* me—" The words sting, and she can't be here anymore. The bar is too loud, the air too heavy, the people too close. She just wants to be back with Regina and Henry in the living room, doing homework and watching movies, and she doesn't care if that makes her a patsy or some kind of *victim* of Regina's. "I'm out of here."

Ruby catches up to her as she makes her escape from the Rabbit Hole. "I didn't think it was a good idea," she says, walking alongside Emma. "I'm sorry, okay? I know you and Regina are kind of... stumbling toward something right now. But I figured it was worth a shot."

Emma refuses to speak to her. Ruby sighs. "You've actually been good for Regina," she admits, and Emma can't look at her. "She's been much less of a bitch to me lately. If Gold hadn't showed up in town again a few days ago, I'd even say that Storybrooke was bitch-free—"

Wait. *What?* "Gold is back in town?"

Ruby shrugs. "I guess? He was in the diner on Monday— wait, where are you going?" she calls after Emma.

Emma takes off, her heart thumping with new adrenaline. Gold is back in town. Gold, the person who'd reactivated the curse. The only one who probably knows how to break it again. The man

who poses more of a threat than anyone else in this town.

She jogs down Main Street to the pawn shop. The doors are still sealed shut and the windows only display a dusty, empty store. There's no sign that Gold is actually back, that he's settled back into town.

Still, Emma bangs on the door for as long as she can, her heart beating in time with her knocking.

"Mr. Gold is back?" Henry's eyes are so bright that it hurts to look directly at him, to see the hope shining in his eyes. "Emma, this is great! If anyone can break the curse—"

"Isn't he the one who cast it again in the first place?" Emma says dubiously. "Do you really think that working with him is the answer?"

Henry frowns at her. "Well, we're not making any progress on our own." He gestures as they walk down the street toward Mifflin. "Everyone's still totally cursed. There's no magic or fairytales or happy endings. We have to bring back the happy endings."

"It seems pretty happy to me," Emma says mildly. "We've reunited families and people have been living in peace. Your mom isn't even meddling anymore." Storybrooke is quiet again, calm in a way that, for a few frozen minutes on a day months before, Emma had been afraid it would never be again. "We don't need magic to be happy."

Henry looks troubled. "I mean, yeah, we've been doing a great job of distracting Mom from evil. But she still cursed *everyone*. They deserve to remember who they are."

Distracting Mom from evil. That's how Henry's justifying this thing they're doing, and Emma sighs inwardly. "And then what?" she points out. "You stand by while they go after your mom?"

Henry doesn't answer, his lips pressed together with the stubborn set of a ten-year-old. For all his certainties about good and evil, he's left at a loss whenever he's confronted with the practical facts about the outcome of a victory over the curse. Emma takes pity on him. "It doesn't matter, anyway," she says finally. "Gold isn't at the pawn shop. Wherever he is in Storybrooke, he's lying low."

Henry exhales, relief mingling with disappointment on his face. “Oh,” he says. “Too bad.”

“Uh huh.” They turn the corner onto the Mills’s block, wandering down the street together. “Hey, I thought your mom was coming home early today. Why is the house so dark?” The living room and the foyer are dark, and Emma pushes the door open with mounting panic. Gold is somewhere in town, and Regina’s house is quiet—

But the kitchen light is on, and Emma notices that the door to the back patio is open. Regina is setting the table outside, an apron tied around her waist, and she turns around when she hears them clatter outside.

Her smile is soft, her eyes glowing with gentle affection for Henry, and her hair is windswept and uncoiffed. She looks younger like this. She looks like a woman who is only a mother and a lover and has never committed any of the crimes that Emma knows she’s guilty of. Emma stands frozen in the doorway, her heart thumping in her chest, and Regina’s gaze washes over her like a cool spring wind.

“I thought we could eat outside today,” she says. “It’s a beautiful day.”

“Yes!” It’s Henry who speaks. Emma is still incapable of saying anything. “You’re the *best* .” Henry leaps out across the lawn, wrapping a carefree arm around his mother for an instant, and Regina’s eyes drift closed. Fuck, she’s so *beautiful*. She’s been scary-hot and an absolutely sex magnet for Emma for over a year now, but there aren’t many moments where all Emma can think about is her beauty.

They happen more and more lately.

Regina runs a hand through Henry’s hair. “Go wash up and put your backpack away,” she says, smiling down at him. “The food’s in the oven.”

He scampers off, brushing past Emma as he darts back inside. Regina glances after him, waiting until he’s out of sight before she moves toward Emma. Her fingers brush against Emma’s cheek, and Emma’s lips part unconsciously. “What’s gotten you so quiet?” she murmurs, a smile dancing in her eyes. “And how can I make it happen again?”

Emma returns to the present. She lifts a hand to hold Regina’s in place, resting Regina’s wrist

against her lips and brushing a kiss to it. Regina's eyes seem to grow darker and softer, and she murmurs, "Henry will be back any second."

"Right." Emma swallows, dropping Regina's hand. But they still walk side-by-side to the table, their hands brushing together as they move.

Henry doesn't notice it, jogging back out with three hard plastic cups and setting them at their places. "We haven't eaten outside in *forever*," he says to Emma when they're finally eating. "It used to be a special surprise when I was little. Sometimes we'd even put a blanket on the grass and make it a picnic. We'd watch the sunset and Mom would show me all the stars." He grins at Regina, who looks as though she might burst with the force of her love for Henry. "I only found out last year that you made up all their names."

Regina shakes her head, and there's a strange timidity to how she speaks next. "I didn't make them up," she says quietly. "They were the names my father taught me."

A pause, a reminder of where Regina comes from. Of where they're all from, truly. "Oh," Henry says, and Emma tenses, her hand moving to Regina's thigh under the table. She holds it there, Regina's own hand resting over hers, and Henry looks up at Regina with a determined crease to his brow. "Will you tell me them again tonight?"

Regina exhales. "I will," she says, and her muscles loosen beneath Emma's grip.

Emma keeps her hand there anyway, long after the conversation has shifted to what Henry's studying in school and who he's been playing with at recess. Regina's hand doesn't move, either, except for the tips of her fingers to curl beneath Emma's palm.

Despite Gold's presence somewhere in the town, everything is *normal*. Kind of, enough. Regina dismisses Emma's concerns and is silent, brooding, when Henry suggests finding him while in her earshot. "He may have some remaining...gripes with me," she says one night, curled around Emma.

Emma's hands run up and down her skin in an absentminded movement. Regina's body has become as familiar to her as her own and yet remains a delightful mystery, capable of surprising her in new ways just when Emma thinks she's figured it all out. Just like the woman herself, she thinks vaguely, and she says, "What'd you do, run over his dog?" At Regina's look, she winces.

“Oh, god. You did, didn’t you?”

“Substitute dog with *true love* and substitute run over with *locked away in an asylum for twenty-eight years* and you’ll have that one,” Regina says dryly. There’s a note in her voice that might be discomfort. Or maybe Emma’s just imagining it, seizing excuses for Regina as easily as Henry does. “I went by a few months ago to let her out,” Regina says. It’s a mumble, self-conscious, and Emma looks at her in surprise. Regina is more easily embarrassed by any sign that she’s changed than she is by the past. “But she was gone. Gold pulled her out before he left town. I expect he’s returned to exact vengeance on me.”

“Shit,” Emma says articulately. She processes that for a moment, and she’s left with one glaring question. “*Gold has a true love?*”

Regina barks out a laugh. “Even villains are capable of love, Emma. This isn’t a Disney movie. I might think he treated that girl like yesterday’s trash,” she amends. “And she was his captive, too. But for some reason, she was still besotted with him.”

“That’s not love,” Emma says, wrinkling her nose. “That’s Stockholm Syndrome.”

Regina shrugs. “I suppose,” she concedes wryly. “But she didn’t fall in love with me when I took her prisoner.”

“Her loss,” Emma says, flippant, and she doesn’t think about what she’d just said until she’s drifting off in Regina’s arms, Regina’s even breathing against her cheek. It’s something to worry about in the morning, she decided drowsily, and she succumbs to sleep at last.

“*What?*” says a voice, sharp and disbelieving. Emma is tugged from a very pleasant dream in which she’s floating down a river, Regina and Henry beside her.

“*What?*” repeats the voice, and Emma blinks, struggling to rouse herself. Beside her, Regina jerks, *jolts*, the blanket yanked to her as she sits up.

In the doorway, Henry stares at them in betrayed horror. “No,” he says, shaking his head vigorously. “No! Emma– Mom–”

In Emma’s mind, this conversation, when it would happen, would be somewhere nice and neutral.

It would begin with Henry saying something about their *family* and end with him hugging them both and pronouncing something about happy endings or fairytales, probably, because eleven-year-olds aren't going to see enemies-with-benefits in quite the same way as Emma and Regina do. This conversation was supposed to be *productive*, not Henry gaping at Emma in Regina's *bed*, without *clothes*, as though she'd just murdered the entire town.

In Henry's mind, this is about the same. "You...you and my mom?" he stammers finally.

Emma grabs her shirt from the floor next to the bed and tries to slide it on as discreetly as possible. "Henry—" she starts, and Henry bolts.

They don't talk. They get dressed as quickly as they can, and Emma races down the stairs after Henry. "Look, I know this isn't what you imagined—"

"I *imagined* we were making Mom better!" Henry says, spinning around in the foyer. While they'd been getting dressed, he'd grabbed his backpack and the old fairytale book and run for the door. His eyes flash, hurt and furious. "I *imagined* we were the good guys! I didn't imagine that my mom was...was working her evil on *you*!"

Emma stares at him, at a loss. "Working her evil on me?" she echoes. "Henry, this isn't— this is just...I like your mother, okay? That's all. Is it really so bad?"

"Yes!" Henry says, and his eyes flash as they focus on something behind Emma. "She's evil! She's trying to corrupt you to save her curse! And you've just been...all along, I thought you were on my side, but you're one of *hers* now. She's going to turn you into a monster like her! Or kill you!" He clenches his fists. "This was all part of her evil plan—"

"Kid!" Emma says sharply.

"Henry," Regina says in a strained voice. She's standing behind Emma, at the top of the stairs. "Henry, please—"

But Henry is crying now, is shaking with anger, and he doesn't listen to Emma, his gaze fixed on Regina. "I thought you could change," he says. "But you'll never change. You'll just take away everything good I've ever had."

He jerks the door open and flees outside.

Emma freezes, caught between panic for an angry, confused child, and the nagging sense that she can't leave Regina right now. Regina stands at the top of the stairs, her arms wrapped around herself, and she seems very small. "Go after him," she says wearily. "He won't listen to me."

"He's being a little shit," Emma says fiercely, and this might be a casual thing between them, but she still can't stop herself from reaching for Regina, stepping up the last few stairs to draw Regina into her arms. "He's being—"

"He's being eleven," Regina murmurs, and she sounds sad and resigned. "He doesn't know what he's being. Please. Go to him. I'll take care of this." She pulls away from Emma, averting her gaze, and Emma shakes her head, frozen, and takes off after Henry.

He hasn't made it far. He's stumbling down the block, still in tears, and he clutches the book like a lifeline. "Henry," Emma calls after him, and she doesn't know what she's going to say until he turns around, his face so young and devastated that she reconsiders his harsh words. He *is* eleven, caught in grand notions of heroes and villains, and so deeply out of his depth. "Henry," she says again, and she clears her throat. "You can't just run off like that. Gold is on the loose, remember? And if he wants to hurt Regina, he knows that the best way to do that is to go after you."

Henry refuses to respond to her. Emma sighs. "Okay," she says. "Let's just...let's sit here for a little bit, okay?"

Henry still doesn't answer, but he does sit down on the sidewalk. Emma sits silently beside him, picking up the storybook and flipping through it. "It sucks that this is the only book you have about your mom," she says finally.

Henry looks at her, his eyes wet and narrowed again. Emma shrugs. "Well, it only gives us one perspective, doesn't it? The Evil Queen is the bad guy and everyone else is a hero. But you know your mom. Is she all bad?"

Henry doesn't answer. Emma nudges him. "Not just when she makes us eat asparagus," she says. "The rest of the time. Does she act like a monster?" There are monstrous moments, of course, terrible things Regina's done that can never be undone. But Regina is *human*, most of all. She laughs and she gives and she cares so much about Henry that it makes Emma's heart leap in her chest. "I wish...I can't tell you how much I used to wish for a mom who loved me like yours loves you," she manages, and she *can't* think about Mary Margaret right now, about what those few minutes before the purple smoke had been.

She'd hated them. She'd never wanted them. She'd only wanted to break free of Mary Margaret and David's embrace.

Except that she hasn't been able to stop longing for it again since that moment. "I wish..." She swallows past the lump in her throat. "I wish I had a mom who would have put me before *everything* like yours has. And I know that Regina has done some terrible things, but she's also capable of change. Isn't she? Is that the Evil Queen who kisses you goodnight and helps you with your homework? Who...who..." Henry is listening, his eyes fixed on the ground.

Emma stands up. "Let's go back to the house," she says. "I can't make you see things the way that I do. But you've got to go inside. And you need to stop being so cruel to your mother," she adds, because the thought of Regina, curled into herself at the top of those stairs, is something she can't shake. "Being nasty to Regina isn't going to make you a hero, either."

She doesn't wait for a response. Instead, she leads the way back into the house. The door is still ajar, and Regina isn't at the top of the staircase anymore. "Regina?" she calls, Henry beside her.

No answer. "Regina!" she says again. The house is silent.

Henry shouts, "Mom!" his voice raw with tears and his eyes filled with fear. When there's no response, his face crumples.

I'll take care of this, Regina had said before she'd sent Emma away. "Take care of what?" Emma says aloud, hanging up the phone disgustedly when Regina's cell phone rings somewhere in the house. She'd left it behind.

"Mr. Gold," Henry says dully. "She went to Mr. Gold. Didn't she?"

"I don't know." They search Town Hall and Granny's and the pawn shop, her father's crypt and a cabin where Regina had once met Emma in the woods. They search where Henry's castle had been and the station and a dozen other places, but Regina is nowhere to be found.

Henry is red-eyed and desolate, shivering as they drive around town. "It's because of me," he says.

“Mom...Mom left because I called her...” He sticks his hands under his knees. “I didn’t *mean* it,” he says, his voice pitiful. “I was just...I got mad.” He looks up at Emma, pleading. “It was another secret—”

“Look,” Emma says grudgingly. “It’s not like any of this comes with a map. You think I don’t look at Regina sometimes and worry that I’m slee— I’m in cahoots with the bad guy? That I’m not crossing a line every time I *like* her?”

“I don’t,” Henry says. His voice is low, barely audible, and Emma looks at him askance.

“You’re telling me that you don’t even *like* your mom?” That she finds hard to believe, after weeks spent in the Mills house every evening. Henry adores his mother, is happy to find any excuse to be around her, and—

“I don’t think about any of that,” Henry snaps, his voice rising. “When I’m with her, I don’t *think* about her being bad or all the terrible things she did. I don’t remember them at all.” He turns anguished eyes to Emma. “Sometimes, I even make myself stop thinking about it. Because I just want my *mom* .” He’s crying again, tears slipping down his cheeks. “You keep telling me it’s okay to love her no matter what she’s done. But I don’t even *think about it* anymore—”

He’s quivering with guilt and remorse, carrying far too much on his shoulders, and Emma takes a breath. He’s really just a kid, a kid who loves his mom and hates himself for it, and she pulls over down the block from the hospital and pulls him into a hug. “It isn’t your job to punish your mom,” she murmurs. “And you can’t punish yourself for it. Regina has to make up for the things she’s done on her own.”

She remembers the wry admission of what had happened to Gold’s girlfriend, and something clicks in her mind. “Come on,” she says. “I think I know where your mom is.”

No one stops her when she flashes her badge and heads down to the asylum. Eyes follow them, cold and knowing, and Emma feels a chill as she peers into the doors in the hallway. Sidney had been in one of these for a while, she remembers, but the asylum is empty now. Maybe Regina really had gone down here and freed its undeserving occupants. Maybe Regina has been quietly atoning, in her own way.

The last door down the hallway is bolted with a rusty lock, and Emma yanks at it until the mechanism breaks and she can push the door open. Regina is seated on the bed in the room, her eyes glazed over and unseeing. She doesn’t seem to see them.

“Regina?” Emma murmurs, her heart clenched and her throat wet. “What did Gold do to you?”

There is no answer. Regina is still as a statue, cold and unmoving as she’s never been before. Henry is crying again, blinking back some tears with little success, and he stumbles forward to his mother.

“She’s been cursed,” he says hoarsely. “Mom’s been...it’s a curse, isn’t it?”

He doesn’t wait for Emma’s response. Instead, he presses his forehead to Regina’s frozen temple. “I’m sorry,” he whispers. “I’m so sorry.” And with just the barest touch of his lips to Regina’s cheek, a rainbow light washes over them once more.

There is a crowd growing in front of the mansion. Emma isn’t quite sure how they’d *gotten* to the mansion, except that Regina had flicked her wrist and a cloud of magic had enveloped them and brought them back here. Now, she stands in front of the living room window, watching darkly as a mob of angry townspeople spills down the street toward the house.

Someone throws a rock. It’s small enough that it bounces off the glass of the window, but it makes Regina flinch back, angling herself in front of Henry. “You need to go,” she says, her voice still small. “Emma, take Henry and cross the town line. Come back in a few weeks. Give them time to...to adjust to this new world and to calm down.”

“Give them time to execute you, you mean,” Emma says, ignoring the way that Henry makes a choked noise. “I’m not going anywhere.”

“We’re staying with you,” Henry says loyally. He hasn’t left his mother’s side since the curse had been broken, and he holds onto her hand now, leaning against her. “We’ll tell them you’ve changed. That you’re the one who *broke* the curse.”

Regina smiles down at Henry, her eyes bright with love. “That was you, sweetheart. I didn’t think...” She takes a breath. “I’m so grateful to you for saving me. But this next part...I don’t want you to see me like this.”

The roar outside is getting louder, and Regina snaps a finger. The curtains at the windows snap closed as well, blocking them off from the mob. “Go upstairs,” she says, pressing a kiss to Henry’s head. “Pick out some clothing. I promise I’ll be waiting for you when you come back.”

But it’s a lie, and they both know it. “I’m not leaving,” Emma says once Henry has scampered upstairs. “They’ll kill you—”

“I expected no less,” Regina murmurs. Something crashes through the window, shattering it behind the curtains. “This is it, Emma. You need to take Henry and go far away from here. For as long as you can.” She closes her eyes. “I need to know that you’re safe.”

Emma’s heart thumps. “Henry will be safe. I promise.”

“Not just Henry,” Regina whispers, and she lifts a hand to caress Emma’s cheek. “Never just Henry.” Emma stares at her, frozen in place, and Regina’s eyes shine with something warm and unspeakable, something that sends a shiver up Emma’s spine. “I broke all the rules, didn’t I?”

Oh . “Oh,” Emma whispers, and it emerges as a sob. “I...”

She pulls Regina close, presses their foreheads together until their breath mingles and their hands are intertwined. “I will go to my fate,” Regina murmurs. “If I know that you two have each other. The past few months have been...more than I’ve ever deserved. And I owe you everything for this quiet paradise. I’m sorry I won’t be here to give it to you.”

“Regina,” Emma says, her heart raw. “Stop. Just...stop—” She pulls away from Regina, sees the resigned pain in her gaze, and doesn’t dare turn back.

She can’t turn back now.

She pushes the door open to face the angry mob, and she winces as she picks out the wild faces, the furious expressions, the rocks and the spades and the weapons poised to attack. “Fuck,” she says unhappily, because it’s occurred to her suddenly that here she is, standing in front of an angry mob, prepared to swear that Regina’s changed. “I wasn’t supposed to do this.”

“*Stop!*” The voice comes from behind the mob, and the group is parted by Mary Margaret’s frenetic run through it, pushing people aside to stand beside Emma. “Stop!” she shouts. “Back

down! This isn't who we are! This isn't even who Regina is anymore!"

"Fuck," Emma says again, because Regina's *never* going to forgive her for this. Regina stands behind her, her jaw grinding as though she's enduring something far more painful than Snow White's defense.

Mary Margaret gives her a quick, tearful smile. "Oh, Emma," she says, "I can't tell you how much it means to me that we're going to all be a family again—"

"Oh, that's *enough*," Regina growls, and she shoves past both of them, glowering out at the mob. "This is trespassing!" she bellows out at the crowd. "Town Ordinance Eight Point Two Three forbids trespassing, invading—*trampling on my peonies*—" she throws out, sending a fiery look at Leroy, who takes a step back. "And you are all in violation!"

The mob looks uncertain. Emma finds her voice. "Right," she says, stepping in front of Regina. "And I'm the sheriff."

"Don't you dare," Regina says, jabbing a finger at her. "You do *not* get to stand between me and the angry mob. I put safeguards in place!"

"You also told me it was pretty much predestined to go like this," Emma reminds her. "That I'm a hero-type and I'd get... *emotionally attached* or fall in love with you or whatever—" At the first mention of *love*, Mary Margaret's eyes have gone shiny. "So you started this."

"I didn't make you this way!" Regina says, outraged. "That's all you!" She throws up her hands. "Idiotic Charmings—"

"Excuse me," Marco says from the crowd, holding up his hammer. "Can we get back to the angry mob-bing, please?"

"No," Henry says fiercely from behind them. "No one's attacking my mom." He charges out in front of them, hands on his hips. "I broke the curse!" he says. "I gave back your memories. You owe me." The crowd shifts, frowning at Henry. "And I want my mom to be kept safe. She's done bad things, yeah. But I love her. And I see the good in her—"

Regina's eyes are getting watery. Emma mutters, "Oh, sure, it's fine when *he* does it."

“He’s *eleven*,” Regina says, but the crowd is beginning to dissipate, the people murmuring in uncertain discontent as they turn away under Henry’s Mills glower. Emma puts her hands on her hips, too. Dr. Whale gives her a dubious look, then quails when Henry turns his attention to him.

“Go find your families!” Henry orders them. “My mom built you a *great* town. *My* town. Go enjoy it instead of attacking her for stuff she can’t change anymore. She’s going to take care of Storybrooke, just like she always has. Okay?”

A mumble of assent. Henry beams out at the crowd. Mary Margaret puts a hand to her mouth. “He’s really one of us, isn’t he?” she breathes.

“Fuck off,” Regina says sourly, but she doesn’t complain when Emma pulls her into a hug, or when Henry wraps his arms around her waist. She closes her eyes and leans into their touch, and she stands there until the last stragglers have left the yard.

Mary Margaret gives Emma a knowing look, a gaze that Emma’s seen a thousand times before from her best friend and roommate, from the woman she *knows*, who may not be all that far off from the mother she doesn’t, maybe. “Why don’t David and I take Henry out for pizza?” she suggests delicately, and there is a space to her now that there hadn’t been before the purple smoke, a careful distance where she doesn’t push Emma too hard.

It’s possible that months of Emma pulling away from Mary Margaret have somehow managed to convey to Snow White what Mary Margaret could never have understood, and Mary Margaret’s smile is warm and asks nothing more of her. “Thank you,” Emma manages, and she lurches forward before she can overthink it, wrapping her arms around Mary Margaret in a quick, needy hug.

Mary Margaret hugs her back, holds her just like Emma had remembered it, and Emma sucks in harsh, raspy breaths beneath her embrace. “We’ll talk later, all right?” Mary Margaret murmurs, and she sticks out a hand to Henry and leads him down the steps.

When everyone is gone, Emma takes a few quick steps into the foyer and presses Regina to the wall, kissing her soundly. In here, with the curse broken, it should feel different; but it doesn’t. It’s still *them*, caught together and hopelessly entangled, and Emma’s heart still beats in time with Regina’s.

Regina gasps against her lips, a harsh little chuckle that is breathless and makes Emma’s stomach

swoop. “You really love me, don’t you?” She says it like a tease, like a mocking *mm-hm* that had once annoyed Emma a little too little. “How *humiliating* .”

Her lips brush against the shell of Emma’s ear, then to her jaw, and Emma says, “You, too. Aren’t you embarrassed?”

“Ugh.” Regina sighs heavily. Emma kisses her temple. “Don’t remind me.” Her lips meet Emma’s, trap them for a moment until they’re both panting and neither one of them can think to say much more. This is as it should be, in Regina’s arms in the foyer, no worries about magic or curses or feelings, and Emma is alight with joy at it.

“Yeah,” she says, pressing another kiss to Regina’s lips. “Me, too.”

End Notes

You can read a bit more about my writing [here](#), as per usual. Thank you so much for reading! Please let me know what you think!

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