A Life Lost and Found

by ellacj

Summary

Regina wakes up one morning and finds she's forgotten something.

Notes

This is just a short piece I've been working on in between Guardian Angel. Will update daily until all six chapters are up.

Chapter titles are song lyrics taken from the musical "RENT" because I was listening to the soundtrack and was able to draw a lot of similarities between the lyrics and our lovely leading ladies.
Regina slowly stretches and yawns as she wakes up. She’s just rubbing the sleep out of her eyes when she notices a body next to her. A distinctly blonde body.

Emma groans and turns over, blinding groping in the dark until her hands make contact with Regina’s arm. “What are you doing?” she slurs, obviously still mostly asleep. “It’s early.”

“Miss Swan?” Regina hisses incredulously.

Emma chuckles and sits up, green eyes focusing in on Regina. “Been a while since you called me that. You feeling okay?”

“Yes, I-I’m fine. I just need to use the bathroom.” Slowly, Regina gets up and goes into the en-suite bathroom. She splashes cold water on her face and looks at herself in the mirror. That’s when she notices her hair. It’s long. The ends of it fall just below her breasts in soft, loose waves.

A knock comes at the bathroom door. “You sure you’re okay, babe?” Emma calls.

Babe. Why would Emma Swan be calling her babe?

Regina twists at the ring on her finger as she always does when she’s nervous before she realizes. There’s two rings on her finger. Slowly, she looks down at her left hand and sure enough, a second ring has joined Daniel’s. It’s simple; a silver band with a single green gemstone embedded in it, but it’s unmistakably a wedding ring.

That’s when all the pieces fall together. Sleeping in the same bed with Emma, Emma calling her “babe”, and now the ring on her finger. Regina’s married to Emma Swan.

Emma knocks again, this time more urgently. “Gina? What’s going on? You’re acting weird.”

Regina takes a few deep breaths. “I’m fine,” she replies in a hoarse voice. She squares her shoulders and opens the door. She forces a smile when she meets Emma’s eyes. “Good morning, dear.”

Emma grins, obvious relief washing over her face. “Morning, babe.” She leans in for a quick kiss, which Regina tensely accepts. “I was worried about you.”

“Just a bad dream, that’s all.”

Emma opens her mouth, but she’s cut off by the faint sound of wailing from the room across the hall. She rolls her eyes. “I’ll get her. You can handle breakfast, right?”

“I – yes.” It can’t be… it can’t be a baby. Right? Regina slowly goes down the stairs and finds two people in the kitchen. One of them is a boy of probably seventeen or eighteen, the other a girl maybe three years old.

The boy turns to face her. No. This can’t be him. He grins. “Hey, Mom.”

Regina bites her lip. “Good morning, Henry.”

“So, big night tonight, huh?” He raises his eyebrows.

“Hm?”

Henry tilts his head with a frown. “You and Ma’s anniversary dinner.”
“Oh, of course.” *Their anniversary.*

“Are you okay? You’ve been talking about this for weeks. It’s not like you to forget.”

Regina shakes her head. “I’m fine, sweetheart. Just not quite awake yet.”

Henry smiles and presses a quick kiss to Regina’s cheek. “I’ve gotta get to school. I’ll see you tonight.”

Regina nods absently. It’s strange to see Henry older. The last thing she remembers of Henry is him being ten years old… he can’t have grown up overnight.

Emma comes down the stairs then, balancing a baby on her hip. “Henry leave already?”

“You just missed him.”

“Ma!” the girl at the table cries, scooting out of her chair and toddling over to hug Emma’s legs.

Emma laughs. “Hey, Ellie.”

“Up?”

“I’m holding Tori right now, baby. Maybe Momma can hold you.” Emma turns to Regina, raising her eyebrows in a question.

Ellie grins and runs over to Regina. “Up, Momma?”

In a daze, Regina leans down and hoists Ellie onto her hip. Is this really her daughter? Are both of them hers? Hers and Emma’s?

Emma comes to stand beside Regina. “Hey,” she says with a shy smile.

Even without memory of the things that have clearly developed between her and Emma, Regina can tell when the woman is fishing for something. She pushes aside her disdain for Emma and puts on a smile. “I didn’t forget what day it is,” she tells her… *wife.* “Happy anniversary, dear.”

“I still can’t believe it’s been five years,” Emma murmurs as she adjusts the baby on her hip. “It feels like it was just last week we were at each other’s throats over Henry.”

Regina lets out a humorless laugh, because for her, it was just last week. “Yes, it does feel like that.”

“So, are you finally gonna tell me what you have planned for tonight?”

*It must be a surprise,* Regina thinks. “Not a chance.”

Emma feigns offense. “Why do I even try?” she grumbles. She goes over to the kitchen and grabs an apple, eating it with one hand while balancing the baby in the other arm. “Can you drop off Ellie and Victoria at my mom’s place today? I’ve got the early shift today. Save my free time for tonight.” Her eyes sparkle.

“I… of course.” *Why did you say that?* Regina mentally reprimands herself. “Have a good day.”

“Mm, you too.” Emma kisses Regina quickly on the cheek before going to the table and strapping Victoria into a high chair. “Be good for Momma,” she says to the baby. Then she turns to Ellie, who’s still in Regina’s arms. “You too, munchkin.” Then she looks up into Regina’s eyes. “I’ll see you tonight,” she murmurs. “Love you.”
Regina can’t bring herself to say it. She just… can’t. So she just smiles and hopes it’s convincing.

Once Emma’s gone, Regina sets Ellie on the ground – the girl protests but Regina ignores her – and kneels down to talk with her at eye level. “Ellie, are you ready to go to your… grandmother’s house?”

Ellie schools her tiny features into a grin. “Grandma Snow’s house!” She claps her hands.

Regina clenches her teeth in a parody of a smile. “Yes, Grandma Snow’s house.” She hoists Victoria out of the highchair and carries her to the driveway, Ellie toddling behind them. Thankfully, her Benz is parked there. *At least that hasn’t changed.*

Regina manages to load both girls into their carseats thanks to distant memories of when Henry was this small (it’s a slap in the face to think of him so old already). She places her hands on the steering wheel before the realization crashes over her.

The curse is broken.

That’s the only explanation for Emma’s sudden awareness of her family.

“Momma?” Ellie calls from the backseat. “Why aren’t we going?”

“I…” Regina’s voice breaks. “Momma just needs a minute, that’s all.” So Emma did it. She broke the curse Regina had lost *everything* to cast. And somewhere along the way, Regina married her.

What the hell was she thinking?

“Momma?” Ellie sounds worried now, and Victoria’s begun to fuss.

Regina shakes her head. “Right, sorry babies.” She begins backing out to drive them to Snow White’s house.

Even after the curse is broken, it turns out Snow is still living in that tiny apartment with her precious Charming. Regina takes the girls up the stairs, carrying Victoria on her hip and holding tightly to Ellie’s hand, and knocks briskly on the apartment door.

Snow opens the door, frowning in confusion when she sees Regina there. “Come on in,” she says. Regina follows her inside. “Something wrong?”

Snow shakes her head. “I just thought it was weird you knocked. How come you didn’t just let yourself in?” She takes Victoria from Regina and sets the baby down gently in a playpen in the corner. She then pours two mugs of coffee from the pre-made pot and hands one to Regina as they sit down on the couch. “Did you lose your key?”

*Oh god,* Regina groans in her head. She and Snow White are at the level where they’re exchanging keys? “I... yes. I lost my key.”

“I’ll have a new one made,” Snow says brightly. “So. What are you and Emma doing tonight?”

“Oh, no. I know better than to trust you with a secret.” The words come out more harshly than Regina had intended, and she winces when Snow recoils. “I’m sorry,” she says before her brain catches up with her mouth. “I’m just a bit on edge today. Nerves, I suppose.”

Snow nods understandingly – god, she’s so annoyingly forgiving. Regina’s always hated that about her.
A young boy pads out of the downstairs bedroom. “Mommy?” he says, rubbing sleep out of his eyes.

Snow smiles and hoists him up onto her lap. “Morning, lovely. Are you ready to play with your cousin Ellie today?” Huh. The idiots spawned another one.

Regina smirks. “Isn’t she technically his niece?”

Snow chuckles and raises her eyebrows. “Yeah, I guess she is. We’ve been calling her his cousin just to make things a little less confusing. God, this family is complicated.”

Regina chuckles half-heartedly as she watches Snow’s son crawl out of his mother’s lap and go to greet Ellie.

“Play nice, Neal,” Snow calls after him. She smiles fondly after the boy. “He thinks now that he’s six he’s a big tough boy.”

Regina stands up. “I’d better get going. Thank you for watching the girls.”

Snow gives her a funny look. “Of course.”

Regina flashes her a forced smile and hurries out of the apartment. She has to figure out what the hell is going on, and there’s really only one person she can trust with this. She drives herself to the right building, knocking briskly on the office door.

“Dr. Hopper,” she says when he opens the door.

“Regina.” He sounds surprised.

“I know I don’t have an appointment, but it’s… it’s important.”

“By all means, come in.”

Regina smiles gratefully and sits down on the office couch. Archie closes the door and sits across from her.

“What can I help you with?”

“I… I woke up this morning, and…” she bites her lip. “I don’t remember anything.”

Archie raises his eyebrows. “Anything?”

“Anything. None of this… this life. The one that’s happening around me.”

Archie uncaps his pen and taps the butt of it against his teeth. He squints his eyes, studying her. “What’s the last thing you remember?”

Regina bites her lip. “I remember… Henry went down into the mines and you followed him. And Miss Swan saved you both.”

“Regina… that was seven years ago.”

Emma walks into the station with half a bear claw in her mouth and a to-go cup of hot cocoa in her hand. “Morning,” she greets David.
David grins. “You’re late.”

“Maybe you’re just early.” Emma sticks out her tongue.

David laughs. “So, what’re you and Regina doing today?”

Emma rolls her eyes. “She won’t tell me anything.”

David’s eyes sparkle. “She’s probably got something nice planned. Five years is a big milestone, you know.”

“Yes, I’m aware of that, thank you.”

“Is someone nervous?”

Emma picks off a piece of her bear claw and tosses at him indignantly, but he just catches it in his mouth and winks at her.

“That’s not an answer,” he says after he swallows the bit of pastry.

“Okay, so I’m a little nervous,” Emma admits begrudgingly. “It’s just a big day, you know? And… she was acting kind of weird this morning.”

“How so?”

“Well… she woke up really early. And she called me ‘Miss Swan’.”

David raises his eyebrows. “Seriously?”

“And when I told her I love her she… she didn’t say it back.” Emma swallows hard. She twists the ring on her finger, a nervous habit she picked up from Regina. Something’s definitely bothering her wife.

“Something must be bothering her,” David says, echoing her thoughts. “I’m sure it’s nothing to do with you.”

“Yeah. I hope so.”

“S-seven years?” Regina splutters. “No, it can’t be. It can’t be!”

Archie leans forward with a concerned frown. “You can’t remember anything between then and now?”

Regina shakes her head slowly. “I remember going to bed on that night… and when I woke up Miss Swan was my wife and my hair looked like this.” She flicks one of the ends in disdain. “What’s happening to me?”

Archie chews on the end of his pen. “You were in a car accident about two months ago,” he muses, and Regina’s not sure if he’s talking to her or to himself. “Dr. Whale said there was no brain damage, and you seemed to be fine until now. This might be some sort of… delayed effect of that.”

Regina’s eyes go wide. “My memories will come back eventually, won’t they?”

“I… I honestly don’t know, Regina. If it really is your head injury, it might be too late by now to
treat it.”

Regina grabs her purse and stands up. “I need to speak with Whale immediately.”

“Regina,” Archie calls as she moves toward the door. “I think it would be beneficial if you came to see me again. I could try to jog your memory, or at least help you to adjust to your life here.”

Regina hesitates, then nods stiffly. “All right.”

“Are you free tomorrow at 10:00?”

Regina laughs hollowly. “How should I know?” Then she sighs. “I’ll be here.” With that, she leaves Archie’s office and heads down to the hospital to have a talk with Whale.

Regina breezes into the hospital, eyes scanning for any sign of Dr. Whale’s blond head. Finally, she spots him. “Whale,” she calls as she strides over. “We need to talk. Now.”

Whale raises his eyebrows, but says nothing as he hands his clipboard over to one of the nurses and gestures for her to step into his office.

She sits down on of the hard plastic chairs, struggling to get comfortable.

“So, what can I do for you today?”

“I’ve lost my memory. All of it, from the past seven years.”

Whale’s eyebrows shoot up into his hairline. “All of it?”

Regina nods. “The last thing I remember is the day Henry and Dr. Hopper were trapped in those mines. Dr. Hopper said it might be a delayed effect of an accident I was in recently.”

Whale nods. “Yes, I remember.” He reaches over and traces his finger about her hairline. “The scarring seems to have mostly faded. There wasn’t any evident brain damage that I could spot at the time. I have heard of this happening, though, on rare occasions.”

Regina bites her lip. “Is it possible to recover my memories?”

Whale hesitates. “You know, in a situation as unusual as this, it’s impossible to say.” He pauses, as though debating whether to continue. “But, it’s not likely. I’m sorry. It’s just been too long to be able to treat it.”

“Right. Well, thank you for your time.” Regina stands up slowly and leaves the hospital on wobbly legs.

The drive home is much too long – has her home moved farther away from the rest of town in the last seven years?

The house is empty when Regina walks in. She runs upstairs to her bathroom and stares at herself in the mirror. “Damn this hair,” she growls out loud, reaching for the scissors. She’s always cut her own hair; she never trusted anyone else with it. It only takes a few minutes for her to snip it down to exactly the way she had it in her memories.

She brushes off the back of her neck, frowning when she feels something there. The skin is raised here, almost like a ridge, and there’s a dull ache where she touches it. A scar? Regina twists and turns until finally she sighs and grabs the hand mirror on the counter, using it to see her reflection in the big mirror. And there it is, a massive, ugly white scar decorating the back of her neck in the shape
of an X.

Regina bites her lip. *That must be why I grew my hair out.* She sighs. What’s done is done. But how the hell did she get that scar, anyhow?

The door opens downstairs. “I’m home,” Emma calls.

Regina tenses. She forgot Emma was coming home early today for their anniversary. A sense of dread settles in the pit of her stomach. *I have to tell her.*

“Regina?” Emma shouts. “I know you’re home; I saw your car in the driveway.”

Regina sighs. “Just a moment, dear.” She quickly changes into a new outfit that isn’t covered in hair, takes a deep breath, and goes down the stairs.

Emma smiles. “Hey, you.” She moves in to kiss Regina, before stopping with a puzzled grin. “You cut your hair?”

“I was growing sick of having it long.”

“So you’re finally over… this?” Emma slowly reaches around Regina’s shoulders and dances her fingers lightly over the scar on the back of her neck.

Regina tenses beneath Emma’s touch, ignoring the warmth that grows in her stomach. Her body may be accustomed to the blonde’s love, but Regina surely isn’t. “Do you remember how I got that scar?” she asks softly, hoping Emma will tell her.

Emma bites her lip. “Yeah. Look, I keep telling you, battle scars are nothing to be ashamed of. Everyone respects you for going up against Elsa.”

Elsa? *Who the hell is Elsa?* There’s obviously a lot she doesn’t remember; this Elsa must have been a valiant foe for her to gain the respect of this town. She doesn’t say anything, just slides out of Emma’s embrace and moves to sit on the couch.

“So, are you finally gonna tell me what we have planned for tonight?”

Regina swallows hard. “Actually… we need to talk.”

“How about what?”

“I think you should sit down.” Regina gestures to the space next to her on the couch. Once Emma is sitting down, Regina turns her body to face her. “You were right. I was acting strangely this morning.”

Emma tilts her head. “Is something going on at work?”

“No, it’s nothing to do with work. It’s me. I…” Regina breaks off and chews on the inside of her cheek. She lets out a bitter laugh. “They don’t make up clichés for this kind of thing.”

Emma’s brow furrows. “Regina, what’s going on?” She reaches over and takes Regina’s hand between both of hers, squeezing as though Regina will disappear the second she lets go.

Regina looks straight into Emma’s wide, green eyes and feels a stirring in her stomach she should never feel when it comes to Emma Swan. “That accident I was in two months ago. It’s apparently had some… delayed effects. I’ve lost my memory. Of everything. Of this life, of our daughters, of-”
“Of me,” Emma says quietly, cutting her off.

“Not exactly…”

“What do you mean?”

“I… my last memory is from seven years ago. When you first came to Storybrooke.”

Emma nods slowly as the words sink in. “So you remember hating me.” She stands up, running a hand through her hair. Tears shine in her eyes that never spill over, and she’s gnawing on her bottom lip like a beaver on an oak tree. “I need a minute.” She moves to the stairs, undoubtedly to go up to their bedroom.

“Emma,” Regina reflexively calls after her.

Emma stops and turns to face her.

“Just because… just because I don’t remember loving you… it doesn’t mean that I can’t.” Regina’s voice breaks as she continues. “And it doesn’t mean I won’t.”

Emma smiles weakly. “Whether you get your memories back or not, I’m never gonna stop loving you. I hope you know that.”

Regina’s voice is almost inaudible as she smiles and whispers one word.

“Good.”
Emma’s still on the verge of crying when she picks up the girls from Snow’s house.

Snow frowns when she opens the door. “Emma.”

“Hey.”

“I thought you’d be with Regina tonight.”

Emma bites her lip. “Can I come in?”

Snow nods and steps aside to let her daughter inside. “You guys didn’t get in a fight, did you?”

“No exactly.” Emma’s about to elaborate when Ellie and Neal burst in, a whirl of chub and giggles. Emma reaches over and easily catches Ellie in her arms. “Hey, munchkin,” she says affectionately. “We’re gonna leave soon, okay?”

Ellie pushes her lips into a pout. “You said we were gonna have a sleepover.”

Emma sighs. “Ten minutes, baby.”

Ellie frowns and pulls away from her mother, chasing after Neal.

Emma looks back up at Snow. “Do you remember that accident Regina was in a while back?”

Snow furrows her brow. “Yeah.”

“So apparently there’s some delayed effects or something of that.”

“Like what?”

Emma runs a hand through her hair. “Amnesia.”

Snow’s eyes widen until Emma’s sure they’re going to pop right out of her skull. “No.”

“She forgot everything. Seven fucking years.” Emma drops her head into her hands. “She still remembers me as ‘Miss Swan’,” she groans, voice muffled by her hands.

Snow rubs her daughter’s back. “Sweetheart, I know you guys are gonna make it through this. She fell in love with you once; she’ll do it again.”

Emma smiles weakly. “Thanks, Mom.”

“Let the girls stay here tonight. I’m sure she’s feeling overwhelmed right now; the less that’s going on at home the better.”

“Yeah, I guess you’re right.” Emma stands up and brushes off her jeans. “Ellie,” she calls. She kneels down in front of her daughter when the girl comes running. “You’re gonna have a sleepover with Neal and Grandma Snow tonight after all, okay?”

Ellie grins broadly. She claps her chubby hands. “Tank you, Ma!”

Emma smiles. “Be good, okay? Listen to Grandma. I’ll pick you up in the morning.” She kisses Ellie’s head. “I love you, munchkin.”
Snow rests a hand on Emma’s shoulder. “Victoria’s napping.” She squeezes her daughter’s shoulder. “Good luck. I know you two are gonna be just fine.”

“I’ll let you know what happens.” Emma leaves the loft and drives in her bug back to the manor.

Regina’s still sitting on the couch when she gets home, her hands twisting in her lap. She looks up when Emma comes in. She smiles weakly. “It’s strange having people in this house other than Henry and myself.”

Emma bites her lip. “Yeah. I moved in a few months before we got engaged. You refused to live in the loft.” She smiles fondly at the memory.

“It’s nice to have other people here. I always thought this house was much too large for one person.”

Emma crosses the room and sits beside Regina. “Look, I know this really overwhelming for you. And I want to help you, but you have let me. Henry’s sleeping over at a friend’s, and the girls are at my mom’s place. Let me help you.”

Regina looks up, meeting Emma’s eyes, and Emma can see her walls coming down. “Okay.”

“Come on. I wanna show you something.”

Regina hesitates, narrowing her eyes at Emma.

Emma sighs and takes Regina’s hand. “Do you trust me?”

After another second’s hesitation, Regina stands up and follows Emma to another room.

It feels strange, being led around her own house. But Regina allows it just this once, only because it’s Emma. She may not remember loving the sheriff, but she can feel something in her stomach, can feel her heart beating faster as an automatic reflex to being near Emma. It’s enough for her to entertain the possibility of Emma being her… wife.

They go down to the basement, and Emma digs around in a chest Regina recognizes all too well. “My photo albums?”

Emma turns around to look at her with a smile. “You were always taking pictures. Of me, of the kids… you used to order us around like it was a professional photoshoot.” She laughs quietly. Running her finger along the spines of the various albums in the chest, she finally selects a few and pulls them out. “Come on.”

They go back upstairs and Emma pours them some wine before they settle down to look at the albums. “This one’s from just after the wedding,” Emma says as she opens the first one. “It’s mostly pictures from Henry’s thirteenth birthday party. You wouldn’t put your camera down for anything; you insisted we wouldn’t be able to remember that day properly without a million and one pictures of it.” She breaks off. “Kinda scary how right you were.”

Regina swallows hard and reaches across Emma’s lap to open the tome. And sure enough, there’s Henry, grinning ear to ear and in the midst of opening a gift wrapped in silver wrapping paper.

She pages through the album slowly, pausing to look at each photo individually, studying them with a lump in her throat. She missed this. She was there, but she missed it. She pauses at one photo in
They must have gotten someone else to take it, because Regina’s in this one. Henry’s standing in front of both his mothers with a wide grin as he holds up his birthday cake, and Regina and Emma’s arms are around each other. Regina’s eyes are wide and she’s got a look of surprise on her face, and Emma’s grinning slyly with her lips pressed to Regina’s cheek.

What really gets her is how happy she looks.

With this family, with Emma Swan, Regina looks truly happy. There’s a sparkle in her eye and she’s laughing in the photo as though she doesn’t have a care in the world – and maybe she doesn’t. Maybe now, finally, she’s happy.

Regina doesn’t notice she’s crying until Emma reaches over and gently brushes a tear off of her cheek. “You okay?”

Regina sniffs, trying to swallow around the lump in her throat. “I look happy,” she says quietly. She raises her head to meet Emma’s eyes. “I didn’t think I could ever have that again, but here…” she trails off, tracing the lines of her face in the photo. “Here I am.”

Emma smiles and nods slowly. “Here you are.”

They stay up the rest of the afternoon and most of the night looking through the photo albums. It’s nearly 1:00 in the morning when they finally get to bed, and Emma has trouble falling asleep without Regina in her arms. No, Regina’s lying on the edge of the mattress, as far away from Emma as she can get; she made it quite clear she wasn’t comfortable with Emma holding her like she always does.

Emma wakes up around 3:30, and when she rolls over, Regina’s side of the bed is empty. She slowly stands up and yawns, stretching out her limbs. Scratching the back of her neck, she throws on a sweatshirt against the cold and pads downstairs on bare feet.

She finds Regina on the couch, a glass of wine in her hand and photo album open in her lap. It’s not until Emma gets closer that she notices Regina’s shoulders shaking with silent tears.

Emma bites her lip and walks closer, snaking an arm around Regina’s shoulders. “Hey.”

Regina jumps, turning to face Emma. “What are you doing up?”

“I woke up and you weren’t there. I thought I’d find you here.”

Regina gently wipes at her left eye with her thumb. “I forgot seven years of my son’s life. I missed him growing up.” She traces her fingers across one photo of Henry standing in front of his new car on his sixteenth birthday. “And the girls… I don’t know my own daughters.”

Emma gives her shoulder a comforting squeeze. “I’ll introduce you. You’re gonna love them.”

“Why aren’t you freaking out? You’re being so supportive.”

Emma smiles sadly. “Because I love you. And when you love someone, you’re there for them. No matter what.”

Regina stares at her lap. “I was always told that love is weakness.”

“Your mom was wrong. It’s strength.”
“How did you know it was my mother?”

Emma reaches down to take Regina’s hand. “You told me a lot in our six years together. It took a while for you to talk about your mom though.”

Regina bites her lip. “I still haven’t quite adjusted to the idea of being with you.”

“I know. But you will.”

“How do you know?”

“I don’t. But I believe in us. I always have.” Emma smiles. She presses a ghost of a kiss over the top of Regina’s head. “Are you coming to bed?”

“I think I want to look at these for a bit longer, if that’s all right.” Regina takes a hesitant sip of her wine.

“Wake me up if you want any company.” Emma kisses Regina’s head one more time before heading back upstairs.

Emma lies down in the bed, with every intention of going to sleep, but the photo on her nightstand stops her. She picks it up by the frame and stares at it wistfully. It’s a picture of her and Regina on their honeymoon in Paris. Yes, it’s a cliché location, but Regina’s wanted to go there her whole life, and Emma wasn’t about to deny her the chance.

Emma had to stretch her arm out until it hurt to be able to fit both of their faces and the Eiffel Tower in the picture, but it was worth it to immortalize the look of pure joy on Regina’s face – especially now that there’s a chance she’ll never remember that day.

Someday she’ll show Regina the wedding album. But right now… Emma doesn’t think she’s ready. There’s a soft knock at the door, and Regina comes in with a bottle of wine and two glasses – one of them already have full.

“You don’t have to knock,” Emma chuckles. “It’s your house.”

“I wanted to make sure you were… decent.” Regina flushes, and Emma can see it even in the semi-darkened room.

Emma raises an eyebrow. “Not like it’s anything you haven’t seen before.” Then she winces. Because this Regina, the one in front of her right now, hasn’t seen it. “Sorry.”

Regina comes to sit beside her on the bed and wordlessly fills the glasses, handing one to Emma. “What’s that?” she asks, gesturing to the picture in Emma’s hand.

“It’s from our honeymoon,” Emma says quietly. “You always talked about wanting to go to Paris so my mom bought us a trip there as our wedding gift. You didn’t trust anyone to not steal the camera so I had to take it myself.” She smiles softly. “This right here is the happiest I’ve ever seen you, at least until the girls were born.”

Regina bites her lip. “You took me to Paris.” Her voice is so soft Emma can barely hear it. “No one’s ever cared enough to even know that I want to go there.”

“I do.”

Regina raises her eyes to meet Emma’s, and Emma can see all the pain and misery in them of the
woman Regina was when Emma first met her. “You really do, don’t you?”

Emma smiles and covers Regina’s hand with her own. “Regina, I care about you so much it’s probably irrational, but with you it feels the opposite. And you know what, I hate that you’ve lost your memories. Not because you hate me, but because you hate yourself.”

Regina opens her mouth, no doubt to shout a defensive comment, but seems to think better of it and stares at her lap. “My mind says I should hate you. But the rest of me… trusts you. Wholly and completely. I don’t know what to make of that.”

“I think it means we’re gonna be okay.”

“Even if I never get my memories back?”

Emma leans over and rests her head on Regina’s shoulder, sighing contentedly. “We’ll make new ones.”
When Regina wakes up that morning, Emma’s arms are curled around her waist and for a moment Regina doesn’t have the presence of mind to push her away.

When she gets up, Emma stirs and groans. “Babe, it’s early,” she mutters.

“Why do you call me that?” Regina asks softly.

Emma pushes herself up onto her elbows. “What, ‘babe’? You used to hate it. When we were first going out you would withhold sex every time I called you that.” Emma pauses when she sees the spots of color appear on Regina’s cheeks. “But it grew on you. I guess it’s just habit by now.”

Regina clears her throat. “Right.”

“Do you… want me to stop?”

“You may call me whatever you wish.”

Emma frowns. “I don’t wanna call you ‘babe’ if it makes you uncomfortable. I can stop. If that’s what you want.”

“No.”

Emma grins. “Okay.”

Regina swallows hard. “I need to get ready.”

“You going somewhere?”

“If you must know, I have an appointment with Dr. Hopper at 10:00. He’s going to try to help me recover my memories.”

A wounded look appears on Emma’s face. “I thought I was doing that.”

Regina sighs. “You are. I just thought I would be good to have a professional helping me as well.”

“Yeah, no, that’s smart. Do you think maybe… afterward, I thought I might pick you up and you could hang out with me and the girls.” Emma looks at her with hopeful eyes.

“I was planning on taking today to spend time with Henry… I missed seven years of his life, after all.”

“Right. Of course. It’s not like Ellie and Victoria are your kids too or anything.”

Regina narrows her eyes. “Henry is the only one of our children that I currently know. I woke up yesterday and he was seven years older than I remember him, so excuse me for wanting to catch up on that first and foremost.”

Emma stands all the way up to match Regina’s height. “Yeah, but you missed our daughters’ entire lives. Don’t you think that’s a little more drastic?”

Regina steps close enough that her face is just inches away from Emma’s. “In my head, where I am right now, Henry is the only person in this family that matters to me. He is everything. And he is my
priority, whatever happens between us or in my mind.”

“You know what, fine. I’ll tell the girls myself that their mother is acting weird because she doesn’t know who they are, and doesn’t want to.”

“You know that’s not-”

“No. I heard you. You said that Henry was the only one that mattered to you. So go. But when you realize that you need me, I’ll be here waiting for you. It’s not gonna be like last time.”

That makes Regina stop. “What happened last time?” she asks, her voice so quiet it’s barely audible.

“God, no… I don’t want to talk about that. Ever again.”

“Emma…” Regina steps forward and tentatively rests a hand on Emma’s elbow. “I’m sorry about what I said. I really am. But if I’m to return to this life, I need to know about everything that’s happened between us. Not just the times we were happy, but also the times we weren’t.”

Emma sighs and runs a hand through her hair. “I know. But just… not that one. Not yet. Please.”

Regina gently squeezes Emma’s arm and goes toward the bathroom to take her shower before her appointment.

When she comes out of the bathroom half an hour later, Emma’s on the phone.

“…around noon?… yeah, I’m thinking a family dinner tonight. Simple, not too overwhelming… okay, thank you so much… yeah, love you too.” She hangs up and turns around to see Regina. “That was my mom.”

Regina slowly sits on the bed beside Emma. “May I ask you something?”

Emma smiles. “Of course. You know you can ask me anything.”

“When did the curse break? How did the curse break?”

“It wasn’t us, if that’s what you’re thinking. We’re not true loves.”

Regina raises her eyebrows. “We’re not?”

Emma shakes her head. “I asked Blue about it. She said that true love is pure and untainted.” She laughs. “We’ve got way too many issues for that.”

Regina chuckles softly. “That we do.”

“It was Henry.”

“Hm?”

Emma swallows hard. “He was under a sleeping curse. I kissed his forehead and… it broke. Along with the big curse.”

“How the hell did he get put under a sleeping curse?” Regina’s voice rises an octave with worry.

Emma bites her lip. “It was supposed to be me.” Her voice is quiet, but Regina can clearly hear the reluctance in it, the unwillingness to tell the story. But Regina needs to hear it. “I did something bad. And you were understandably pissed. So you… you baked me a turnover. With the same apple you
used on my mom. Only I didn’t eat it; Henry did.”

Regina recoils as though she was physically struck. “I put him under a sleeping curse?”

“Not on purpose! And we both forgave you for it. A long time ago.”

“I suppose you must have.” Regina’s voice is hollow. “But did I?”

Emma’s silent for a long time. Then, “No. You never forgave yourself.”

“I didn’t think so. Of all the people in this world against whom I hold a grudge, the only one I really truly hate is—”

“yourself,” Emma finishes softly. “You told me. And now… you’d finally learned to be happy with yourself. You were loving yourself almost as much as I love you – and that’s a lot. But now…” she trails off with a sigh. “It hurts me to see you like this. I hate that you hate yourself. I hate that you can’t see what I see in you.”

“What do you see in me?”

Emma smiles and grips Regina’s hand with the ease of someone who’s done it a thousand times. “My happy ending.”

Archie stares at her intently, pen resting against his thin lips.

Regina shifts uncomfortably. “Are we going to do anything during this session? If I wanted someone to stare at me I could get that at home for free.”

“Yes. Sorry. I was just… never mind.” He sits back in his seat. “Have you spoken to Emma about this yet?”

“Last night. We… we had a conversation. And she showed me some photo albums. To help me.”

“That’s good. Photos can definitely help. If not to restore your memories than to help you learn your own history.”

“What… what happens if I don’t remember?” Regina asks quietly, gnawing on her bottom lip.

“Then you learn to adjust to life here. You make new memories.”

“What happens to Emma? To the girls?”

Archie exhales through his nose. “At the point where you are now, you’re still a year away from the point when the two of you became an item. I’m fairly confident that you will fall in love with her again. I mean look; you’ve only known this version of your life for a day and you’re already caring for her. But there is a… a very slim, but very real possibility that you won’t love her again. In that event I’d predict there would be shared custody of all three of your children and most likely a tentative friendship would be erected between the two of you.”

Regina nods slowly. She’s almost certain that won’t happen; she can already feel herself falling in love with Emma Swan, even though the greater part of her mind is screaming at her not to. She’s really only fighting the inevitable at this point. “And if I do remember?”

“You’ll go back to your life. Although I’m sure that this experience will make you appreciate that life
“Yes,” Regina says hollowly. “I’m sure it will.”

Emma picks her up from the appointment. It’s both reliving and frustrating to see that she’s still driving that same yellow eyesore, even after all this time. “What did Archie say?”

Regina fidgets with her fingers in her lap as Emma drives them home. “He says that I’m to adjust as best I can, and that it’s unlikely I’ll ever get my memories back,” she explains bluntly. She’s never been one to sugarcoat things, and hopefully Emma knows that about her at this point.

“So I guess we have to tell the kids then.”

“I suppose we do.”

Emma’s fingers tighten around the steering wheel. “I thought we’d have a nice family dinner tonight. Just the five of us. We can tell them then.”

“That… that sounds…” Regina’s not really sure what the word is she’s looking for. “Yes,” she says finally. “We’ll do that.”

Emma pulls into the driveway of the mansion and they get out, going inside to an empty house.

“Where is everyone?”

Emma tosses her keys in the dish by the front door and shrugs her jacket off. “Henry’s at school and the girls are still at my mom’s house.”

“Oh.” It’s a school day then. And that’s when it strikes her; she doesn’t even know what day it is. Not even the month. It’s autumn outside, fast approaching winter, but she doesn’t know much else. “Emma, what day is it?”

Emma comes up behind her and gently rests a hand on Regina’s arm. “Wednesday. October fifth.”

Something as minute as a simple date shouldn’t have such an effect on her, but somehow it does. Tears spring to her eyes, and she wraps her arms around her middle. The date makes this real. The date makes everything real.

“Hey, you okay?”

“Fine,” Regina lies, wiping at her eyes. “You should be at work.”

Emma comes around to face her, hands clutching at Regina’s elbows. “I took some time off. I get leave for a family emergency, and this definitely qualifies.”

“Of course.”

“Do you wanna look at some more pictures?”

Regina nods once, and follows Emma into the den.

“Stay here,” Emma instructs. “I’ll be right back.” She disappears from the room, returning a few minutes later with a bottle of wine, two large glasses, and a thick, leather photo album. The edges of the book are worn, Regina notices when Emma sets it on the table, as though someone has looked
through it more than a few times.

Regina gratefully accepts the glass of red wine Emma hands her and takes a large sip.

Emma drums her fingers on the cover of the tome in front of them. “This one’s from pretty early,” she says carefully. “Right after we started dating. Ruby and Henry took most of them; my parents still weren’t very keen on the idea of ‘us’ back then.”

“Of course they weren’t,” Regina says dryly.

“Well, what else did you expect? You spent thirty years trying to kill my mom. That tends to make a person think twice about letting their daughter date you.”


Emma gives her that look, the one that says you’re lying, but says nothing and opens the photo album.

The first picture they see is one of Emma looking extremely embarrassed and Regina a bit like she’s about to be sick. Emma laughs out loud next to her. “That was right after we told everyone. Henry was the only one that knew before. He thought our faces were so funny he just had to take a picture.”

Regina smiles slightly at that. They look like they’re standing in the loft apartment, and Regina can easily picture Snow and David’s horrified expressions as they sit on the couch in front of where Emma and Regina stand.

It’s almost enough to make her laugh.

Emma flips through the pages, explaining a few photos as she goes, until Regina stops her. “Why does Henry look older in this one?” she asks. There are two photos on the page, between which Henry has significantly aged. He’s also standing much closer to Emma than he is Regina, unlike in the one above it, where each of them have an arm around him.

Emma shifts uncomfortably. “Neverland,” she says quietly. “We’d only been together for two months. Henry was taken.” And she tells Regina everything, the story of the pirate ship and trekking through the jungle to save their son, and about Pan’s curse. About how they forgot about her for an entire year.

“You gave us good memories,” Emma says softly. “But they were more than just good memories. They were your memories. All the best things you remembered about raising Henry, I remembered them too. I carried them in my head for a year.”

Regina traces her finger through the space in the photo between Henry and herself.

“He doesn’t remember you in that picture,” Emma explains, as though reading her mind. “When we came back to Storybrooke there was only enough memory potion for me. So we had to introduce you to him as Mayor Mills. It… it was really tough for you.”

“What about us?” Regina asks softly. “What happened to you and me when you returned?”

“We… it was pretty rocky. There were mistakes made on both our parts. I… I don’t really want to talk about it.”

“Is this the ‘last time’ you mentioned earlier?”
“Yeah.” Emma’s voice is barely audible, but Regina can make out the break in even just the one word.

Regina rubs Emma’s arm almost as a reflex, but chooses not to read into it. “Later. But not never.”

“Not never,” Emma agrees, and turns the page of the album. She laughs once. “I remember there was one day when we came back and you took Henry out for ice cream while I went on patrol with David. He came back and he asked me ‘Ma, is the Mayor your ex-girlfriend?’”

Regina’s eyes widen. “Why would he ask that?”

“Well, this is all secondhand from Henry, but apparently when you guys were talking and he mentioned the guy I dated while we were in New York, you got super jealous. Honestly, I’m surprised you weren’t the one who turned green.”

“What?” Regina asks, eyebrows knitting together.

Emma goes quiet. “Some other time. I’ll tell you all about Zelena. But today is a day to talk about happy memories. Good times.”

Regina nods. “So. You had a boyfriend.”

“In my defense, I didn’t remember you. And he was basically just a male version of you. Dark hair, nice suits, lot of money, pretty sure he was like one-sixteenth Latin. And he was a neat-freak.”

“I am not a neat-freak!”

Emma raises both eyebrows, but continues as though Regina hadn’t said anything. “Anyway, Henry said you couldn’t even say his name without looking like you were gonna kill someone. And all I could think was ‘wow, way to be subtle in front of the kid’.”

“We didn’t… we didn’t get back together? When you returned from New York?”

Emma bites her lip. “You’re getting into unhappy-land, ‘Gina. That’s a conversation for another day. That’s a whiskey conversation.” She holds up her wine glass as if to prove a point, draining the small amount of liquid still in the glass.

“I think that’s enough for today,” Regina sighs, closing the book. “Maybe I can handle more later tonight.”

Emma smiles and covers Regina’s hand with her own. “Just let me know when it’s too much, okay? I don’t want to overwhelm you.”

And there it is again, that tug in the pit of her stomach, and Regina has the sudden urge to close the distance between them. And upon realizing that she can, she does.

Emma smiles into the kiss, but doesn’t move to deepen it; doesn’t allow it to be anything but brief and chaste. “Baby steps,” she murmurs, fingers brushing lightly across the scar on the back of Regina’s neck. “Don’t worry, I’m not going anywhere.”

And as she watches Emma walk away, Regina may even allow herself to believe her.
I'm Looking for Baggage that Goes with Mine

“Is… everything okay?” Henry asks, breaking the silence.

Regina shoves her food around on her plate. Lasagna’s normally her favorite, but tonight she’s obviously not hungry at all.

Emma sighs. “We gotta tell you guys something.” She glances at Regina, who keeps her gaze firmly planted on her plate. Guess it’s up to her to break the news. “Your mom’s having a hard time lately.”

“How come?” Ellie asks from her booster seat.

Emma’s heart shatters in her chest. Ellie’s so young; it’ll crush her to hear this. “You remember that car accident she was in two months back, right?” At Henry and Ellie’s nod, she continues. “They said there wasn’t any brain damage… except they may have found something recently.”


Regina sets down her fork. “Amnesia,” she says, her voice rough.

“What’s that?” Ellie asks.

Henry’s face pales. “It’s when you lose your memories. H-How much did you…?”

“You were ten years old the last I remember. It was just after Emma arrived in Storybrooke.”

“Oh.” Henry’s face remains emotionless, a talent he no doubt learned from Regina. “So you and Ma-”

“Are working through it,” Emma interrupts. “She’s trying so hard to adjust, but it’s been hard. So we gotta support Momma, okay, everyone?”

Henry nods, but when Emma looks to Ellie, the toddler’s bottom lip is quivering. “Do you ‘member me, Momma?” she asks so softly Emma nearly breaks down then and there.

Regina swallows once, before standing up, uttering a hurried, “Excuse me”, and walking quickly away from the table.

Emma stands up as well, hoisting Ellie off of her booster seat and onto her hip. “Hush baby, everything is gonna be okay.”

“Momma doesn’t ‘member me.”

“No,” Emma whispers. “But she loves you still, Bug. She loves you so much. And do you know what? We’re gonna make brand new memories with Momma. And soon everything’s gonna be just like it used to be.”

“Promise?”

“I pinky promise.” Emma holds out her shortest finger, and Ellie links her chubby pinky with Emma’s. Then Emma gently sets her daughter back in the chair and turns to Henry. “Are you okay?”

Henry doesn’t say anything for a moment. “Do you and Mom still love each other?”
Emma sighs. “I still love her. She’s still the same person, still your Mom. But she’s having a hard time coming to terms with me. But I got her do fall in love with me once; I’m pretty sure I can do it again.”

Henry smiles weakly. “Better turn on the charm, then.”

“The charm is always on.”

“Can I talk to her? Just the two of us?”

Emma hesitates, then she nods. “Go find her. I’m sure she’d appreciate you being there for her right now. Just make sure not to crowd her, okay?”

Henry nods, pushing away from the table and following the path Regina had taken.

Emma turns to the girls. “Finish up your dinner, baby,” she says softly to Ellie.

“I’m not hungry an’ more.”

“I know the feeling,” Emma mutters. “All right then, I guess it’s time for your bedtime story.” She lifts her out of the seat and into her arms.

Ellie clings to her mother. “Can I have the story ‘bout the queen and the knight?”

“Of course you can, Bug.” Emma gently kisses Ellie’s nose. “Go upstairs and put on your PJ’s, okay? I’ll be there as soon as I take care of your sister.”

“Okay.” Ellie takes a moment to find her footing as Emma sets her down before toddling off toward the stairs. And as Emma hoists Victoria out of her high chair, she lets herself have one moment of weakness. Just one moment where she allows herself to think:

*I wish she was never in that goddamn accident.*

“Mom?” Henry says quietly.

Regina looks up to see her son standing in the doorway. “Henry.” Her voice breaks. “I don’t think I’ll ever get used to you being taller than me.”

Henry smiles half-heartedly and comes to sit beside her on the bed. “You really don’t remember anything?”

“No.”

“I’m sorry I was such a pill,” he says softly. “I just thought everything was so black and white. Guess I just needed to grow up a little, huh?”

Regina smiles sadly. “I never wanted you to grow up. Even when you were a baby and kept me up all night I wanted you to stay like that forever.” She turns to face him, resting a hesitant hand on his cheek. “And now look at you. You’re all grown up and I don’t even remember when it happened.”

Henry covers Regina’s hand with his own, squeezing it comfortingly. “Do you think you’re gonna fall in love with Ma again?” He looks and sounds so young when he says it, and Regina can almost pretend he’s still ten years old and asking her to kiss his boo-boos.
And if she’s being honest, she has no idea how to answer his question. She knows that this version of her loved Emma very much; she can feel it in every part of her body. But she can still so vividly remember the fear that rested in her heart that Emma Swan was going to take her son away from her, can still remember their constant fighting and the burning passion that boiled in her stomach whenever she cast her eyes upon blonde curls and red leather.

But then, isn’t that how the saying goes, “it’s a fine line between love and hate”? Maybe that passion in her stomach wasn’t loathing, as she thought, but the beginnings of love. Maybe if she’d just acted on that impulse outside the mines…

“Mom?” Henry asks, breaking her thoughts. He sounds worried.

Regina smiles and squeezes his hand. “I think I’m already on my way.”

“Henry,” Emma interrupts quietly from the doorway. “Can you tell your sister a bedtime story? I gotta talk to your mom.”

Henry glances between his mothers once before and nodding and heading across the hall to Ellie’s room.

Emma smiles and takes Henry’s place on the bed. “Did you mean that? What you said to Henry?”

Regina ducks her head and hides her blush with her hair. Even now, with whatever feelings she has toward Emma, she’s still wary of sharing her private thoughts with her. “There’s definitely something,” she says carefully. “It feels like love. I’m just having trouble catching my mind up to the rest of me.”

“I know what you mean.” Emma rubs up and down Regina’s arm, and it’s oddly soothing. “It’s Wednesday.”

“Yes?”

“If you… wanted to skip tonight… I’d understand.”

Regina tilts her head. “Tonight?” Then it dawns on her. In all the craziness of the past few days, she completely forgot. Wednesday is when she visits her father. “Oh.”

“Did you still want to go?”

“Yes.” Regina’s never missed a single week, no matter what was happening in her life. She always visited her father on Wednesdays. Always.

Emma smiles. “We’ll stop by Game of Thrones on the way.”

“D-Do you usually come with me?”

“I… not usually. You brought me a couple times. But I just think – I really should come with tonight. You know, after everything.”

“Of course.”

Emma follows her out of the room and to the entryway. Regina reluctantly gets into the yellow bug, and they drive to the flower shop.

“Why do you need to accompany me tonight?”
“You’ll see.” Emma glances over from the driver’s seat and rests a hand on Regina’s thigh.

She almost pushes it away, but finds that she likes the weight. It’s comforting. So she lets it rest there all the way to Game of Thorns.

“Hey, Moe,” Emma greets the shop man when they walk in.

“Emma, Regina.” Moe smiles. “Your usual Wednesday?”

“Yeah, please.”

Moe heads into the back and brings out three bouquets. Emma pays, thanks him, and they leave.

“Three?” Regina asks.

“Three.” Emma doesn’t elaborate.

The crypt looks the same as Regina remembers it. “I’ll wait out here,” Emma says. “While you talk to your dad. And um, don’t go into the vault without me.”

Regina tenses. Emma knows about the vault. Of course. “Why not?”

“Just… don’t.”

“Okay.” She accepts the bouquet of lilies (Emma really does know everything about her) and goes into the crypt. Gently, she lays the lilies on her father’s empty coffin, kneeling down in front of it to say what she needs to. “Hi, Daddy. I don’t really know where to start. I met my daughters today. Met them for real. You would have loved them, Daddy. And Henry. You would have loved Henry so much.” She pauses, allowing a tear to roll down her cheek. “Did I come here every Wednesday these seven years? Emma says that I did. I wonder if you would have been happy for me. I wonder if you would have liked her.” Regina feels a small smile creep across her face, unbid, but not unwelcome. “I think I might.”

Emma comes in slowly. “Ready?” She holds up the remaining two bouquets.

Regina nods and wordlessly helps Emma move the coffin aside to reveal the staircase. She accepts the bouquet of lilacs and walks down. What she sees makes her heart leap into her throat. A golden sarcophagus in the middle of the room. Regina thinks she knows whose it is before she’s even close enough to read the inscription. “Mother,” she whispers.

Emma rests a comforting hand on the small of her back as she walks forward to lay the lilacs on top of the coffin. “I’ll be in the next room,” she murmurs, going to a door on the right that Regina doesn’t remember. She pushes the thought from her mind, however, as she kneels down to speak to her mother.

“I don’t know how you got here,” she begins. “I left you two worlds away. I don’t know how you died either. I suppose I’ll have to ask Emma about that. I’m sorry you’re gone and I don’t remember it, but I’m not sorry you’re not here to know my children. You don’t deserve to know them. Goodbye, Mother.”

Standing, Regina moves to the mystery door. When was this put in, anyhow? Emma stands over a silver sarcophagus in the third room, the bouquet of roses clutched in her hands. Her face is hard, but her eyes are soft. She turns and holds out the flowers when Regina comes in. “Hey.”

“Who’s this then?” Regina asks, accepting the bouquet.
“Zelena. Your sister.”

Regina scoffs. “I don’t have a sister.”

Emma comes over and rests a hand on her arm. “Half-sister. From your mom. Cora gave her away when she was born. It was before she met your dad.”

“I… no. She can’t be my mother’s firstborn. She can’t be!”

“I know about the letter,” Emma says softly. “Rumple’s letter I mean. But Zelena’s the firstborn, the one Rumple thought was so amazing, and you still defeated her. You saved Henry.”

“She came after Henry?” Regina’s voice comes out as a choked sound, hand clutching at her chest.

“Yeah, she did. But Regina, you got her. You used light magic.”

Regina shakes her head. “That’s impossible.”

“But it happened. Try to use magic. It’s different, isn’t it?”

Reaching deep inside herself for her magic, Regina’s astonished to find that it’s not the same sadness and anger she remembers feeling. Her magic brings joy to her mind, conjuring images of the things she loves. There’s Henry, and Rocinante and Daniel, and Emma, throwing her head back in laughter. Quickly, Regina cuts off the magic flowing to her fingertips, the image of Emma too much considering her current situation. “It is,” she breathes as Emma – the real, tangible Emma – comes into focus.

“Do you wanna say anything to her?”

Slowly, Regina approaches the grave and runs her fingers along the smooth silver. “I wouldn’t know what to say,” she says quietly. “I don’t even know how she died.”

“Rumple. She controlled him to do whatever she wanted and he killed her for it,” Emma explains gravely. “You were pissed. He killed her, even after you did the right thing and let her live.”

“That doesn’t sound like me.”

“I told you.” Emma steps closer, resting a hand on the crook of Regina’s arm. “You changed.”
Don't Let Go or You May Drown

“I swore I’d never get married again,” Regina says one night as they lay in bed. It’s been three weeks since she first woke up without her memories, and they’ve been slowly working to assimilate her into this world. She plays with the ring on her finger – the one Emma put there and that she can’t quite figure out why. “After the king. I promised I’d never let myself get trapped like that again. So why do I have this?”

Emma rolls over to face her, propping herself up on her elbow and taking Regina’s left hand in hers to gently stroke the ring with her thumb. “It’s not a legit marriage,” she says softly. “The first time I proposed you said no. You wouldn’t tell me why; you just said no, and then came up here. I let you be, but that night when we went to bed I asked you why, and that’s what you told me. But I asked again. And that time, you said yes.”

“Why? What changed?”

“I did. I changed my definition of marriage. We had a wedding, a honeymoon, rings, the whole bit. Even changed our names. But we don’t have a marriage license. You’re my wife in everything but contract.” She pauses, absentmindedly moving her thumb to rub gentle circles over the back of Regina’s hand. “I knew from the first time we kissed that I wanted you to be my wife, but you didn’t want to be trapped, bound to anyone but yourself. So I made it so you didn’t have to be.”

“You did that for me?”

Emma lifts her gaze from their joined hands to meet Regina’s eye, and through the velvet darkness Regina can just make out the moisture glistening in those impossibly green eyes. “I told you I’d do most anything for you. That’s always been true, and it always will be.”

Regina chews on her bottom lip, trying her best to control her heartbeat. It’s pure impulse that makes her lean forward and press her lips to Emma’s; it’s emotion that makes her stay there. Their lips fit together as though they were made to do just that, and Regina revels in the feel of Emma’s lips curving into a small smile even as they move against her own. After a few seconds she pulls away, just far enough to meet Emma’s gaze.

“Hey,” Emma murmurs with a grin.

Regina smiles. “Hi.”

“You okay?”

“Yes. I think I am.”

Regina spends the next week mostly with Ellie, learning everything there is to know about the enchanting little girl she can’t believe she forgot she loved. She learns that Ellie has a best friend named Gracie who lives in Snow’s apartment building and her favorite color is blue and her favorite days are sleepovers with Grandma Snow because she gets to play with Gracie and her cousin Neal.

One night Ellie even invites her to listen to Henry’s bedtime story with her. Regina sits in the bright blue chair in the corner of what used to be the guest room, while Henry lies in Ellie’s bed with her and tells the story of the queen and her knight.
“Once upon a time, there lived a queen and her little prince. They lived in a beautiful white castle and ruled over a kingdom called Storybrooke. They were very happy together, until the prince started to think the queen was evil. He thought to himself that something had to be done to stop her. So one day, he ran away from the kingdom in search of a strong knight to defeat his mother the queen.”

“Di’ he fin’ the knigh’?” Ellie asks, popping her thumb into her mouth as she listens with evident intrigue. Regina, too, is interested; she leans slightly forward in her chair as Henry continues.

“He did. He brought the knight back to his kingdom and told her to defeat the queen, even though the knight didn’t believe the queen was evil. The queen grew nervous; she thought the knight was going to take her prince away from her. The queen and the knight fought often, until one day when the prince found himself in danger. The queen and the knight had to work together to save him.”

Ellie grips Henry’s arm with her free hand. “Di’ the prince die?”

Henry smiles down at her, gently kissing the top of her head. “No. They saved him. Unfortunately, the queen and the knight fought again after the prince was safe, and both of them went home feeling very sad. They kept fighting for a whole year. It wasn’t until the knight got lost in another world that the queen realized she didn’t hate the knight. She loved her.”

Regina remembers Emma telling her about this part; the part where Emma and Snow fell through the portal to the Enchanted Forest. She remembers Emma saying that this was when they fell in love.

“The queen sacrificed much in trying to save the knight – she almost died, but her magic was strong enough to protect her. After the knight returned safely home, there was a celebration. The knight invited the queen to the celebration, but many people still didn’t like the queen, so she was all alone and left very early.”

“Wha’ happened then?” Ellie interrupts.

“Why don’t you listen and find out?” Henry laughs. He affectionately tousles her hair and squeezes her small hand as he keeps talking. “The queen left the celebration very early, but the knight followed her out. They went for a walk and talked for a long time, and they finally decided to try being together. Eventually, they got married, and they had two princesses to keep their little prince company. And they lived happily ever after.”

“Nuh-uh,” Ellie says. “Wha’ ‘bout the part where the quee’ forget ‘bout stuff?”

Regina stares at her lap, tears threatening to spill over and down her cheeks. She’s about to get up and leave, but Henry’s words stop her before she can stand.

Henry frowns. “The queen had a crash a little bit after the youngest princess was born and she forgot all about her knight and her kids. But she loves them still, and she’s trying really hard to get better. The knight promised she would never stop fighting for her queen, and she won’t. The queen will always love her knight and her princesses, no matter what.”

Ellie grins. “I love her too.”

“Good night, Bug,” Henry murmurs, kissing Ellie on her forehead. “Have sweet dreams, okay?”

“Nigh’ nigh’, Henwy!”

Henry meets Regina’s eyes, and they both leave the room, Henry flicking off the lights and gently shutting the door behind them. Emma’s waiting in the hallway with a bottle of whiskey in one hand.
and two glasses in the other.

Regina stops in her tracks. “Tonight?”

“Henry, you think you can take care of Ellie if she needs anything?”

“Yeah.”

“Thanks, kid.” Emma meets Regina’s eye, gesturing toward the stairs with her head. They go down to the couch together, and there’s a photo album sitting on the coffee table but Regina doubts they’ll be looking at it. She has a strong feeling there were no photos taken of what they’re going to discuss tonight. “We’ve only ever had one big fight,” Emma says quietly as she pours the whiskey into the glasses. “It was right after I got back from New York. I came back so excited to see you again and when I knocked on your door you sent me away.”

“Why?”

“For a while you avoided me. I guess you just didn’t wanna have the conversation or whatever, but it hurt me, you know?”

Regina frowns. “What happened?” she asks, sipping her drink. She feels she’ll need it for whatever she’s about to hear next.

“It was right after Henry got his memories back. Somehow I’d been there weeks and no one told me about it, but I guess you were sloppy once or maybe you wanted me to see it, I don’t know.” Emma downs her entire drink in one swallow and refills her glass before she continues. “I saw you kissing some guy on your porch. And I asked you about it the next day. You told me about the time when Tinker Bell showed you your soulmate.”

“I remember that. When I first became queen, she used pixie dust.”

“Yeah. The guy with the lion tattoo. I guess when you guys got back to Storybrooke you met him and you went out with him because Tink said it was your destiny. And look, I’m not proud of what I did next, you gotta know that.”

“What did you do?”

Emma takes another long drink. “I packed my bag and I took off for New York. I didn’t even think twice; I just did what I always do. I ran from my problems. I left a note for Henry and that’s it. He… he wouldn’t talk to me for weeks after I came back. He said he couldn’t trust me anymore. And he didn’t want you to trust me.”

“And did I?”

“Eventually. I came back after one night. It was shitty, being away from you guys. I thought a lot while I was out there, and I decided I’d rather see you happy with someone else than unhappy otherwise. You ended up dumping him like a month after that because you realized that destiny is bullshit and you weren’t happy with the guy. And another month after that we both cooled down a lot and started going out again.”

Regina exhales through her mouth, picking up her glass and draining it. “That sounds like it was pretty bad.”

“It was awful. But that one night I was in New York I swore to myself I would never hurt you like that again. And I stand by that promise, even now. But I also stand by what I said before. If
something about this isn’t working for you, I want you to leave, okay? I never want you to be with me if it doesn’t make you happy.”

“It does,” Regina says quietly, her voice sounding strange to her own ears even as she says it.

“Yeah?”

“You make me happy, Emma. Happier than I thought I deserved for a long time. And if I’m being honest, I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

Emma smiles and takes her hand. “That’s what you said when you gave me my ring.”

“What?”

“When we got married, we each got something engraved on the ring we were gonna give each other. It was your idea. Mine says ‘Reluctantly, I call you my knight’.”

Regina tilts her head. “What does it mean?”

“It’s basically a shortened version of what you said at our wedding.” Emma reaches forward and slides the thick photo album into her lap, turning to the first page. “This is our wedding album,” she explains. “We taped our vows into the front of it. As usual, you were way better at words than me.” She skims the page for a moment before finding what she’s looking for and reading aloud. “‘The people of Storybrooke call you their savior, their white knight, but I’m proud to simply call you mine. However, as you insist on being a heroic idiot, and since it’s Henry’s favorite story, reluctantly, I call you my knight. Reluctantly because that title is almost sure to get you into trouble. And Emma, it’s not that I can’t live without you – it’s that I never want to.’”

Smiling through the moisture in her eyes she insists to herself is only due to the fact that she hasn’t removed her makeup yet, Regina nods her head. “It’s still true, you know. I don’t know that I would have been able to overcome this ordeal if I were married to anyone else. So thank you.”

Emma smiles and takes Regina’s hand in hers again, squeezing it once. “I’m gonna head up to bed. You can stay down here for a while if you want; just don’t look at the rest of the album yet. I wanna show that to you later.”

Regina smiles. “I’ll be up in a few minutes.”

“‘Night.” Emma leans forward and gently kisses Regina briefly on the lips before heaving herself off the couch and going up the stairs.

Regina closes the album and sets it on the table, resisting the urge to open it and look through it. Instead, she slides her wedding ring off of her finger, turning it so that the light catches it just right for her to read the inscription.

*Here’s to second chances being better than the first.*
Chapter Notes

And here we are at the last chapter. Thanks to all who read and left kudos!! (:

Emma comes into the bedroom the next night carrying wine and the thick book Regina remembers is their wedding album. “You ready?” she asks, setting the album on the bed and pouring two glasses of wine.

Regina accepts the glass and taps her ringed finger absently against the bowl of it as Emma sits down beside her and opens the cover of the book. “This is me when I first woke up the morning of our wedding,” she says with a laugh, pointing to the photo of Emma with rumpled bedhead and eyes barely open against the most likely blinding flash of Regina’s camera. “I still can’t believe you did that to me,” she mutters.

A turn of the page shows Regina sitting in a stylist’s chair and Ruby and Aurora standing on either side of her holding various tools in their hands. “I trusted them with my wedding hair and makeup?” she exclaims.

“We actually became pretty good friends with Ruby and Aurora over the years. You came around to Ruby a lot more after she started dating Belle. She mellowed out a lot after that.”

Emma’s not wrong; the photo shows a softer version of Ruby with less makeup, her hair falling in gentle waves instead of flat-ironed to the point that Regina’s surprised it wasn’t damaged beyond repair. “Fair enough.” She turns the page again, and the image she sees before her is breathtaking.

It’s a simple photo of her and Emma, awkwardly posed, but it’s their faces that catch her attention. Both of them have red-tinged eyes, and they both wear the widest smiles Regina thinks she’s ever seen on anyone. Emma’s hand is slung around Regina’s waist, both of Regina’s arms wrapped securely around Emma’s midsection. Both their gowns are relatively simple, but they’re beautiful in spite of – or possibly even as a result of – their modesty. “Oh,” she murmurs, tears flooding her eyes. “I like this one.”

“My favorite is the next one,” Emma says softly, reaching around Regina’s back to turn the page again, and leaving her arm just there even after she’s done it. Regina decides she likes this one even better than the last, simply because it’s so much more them.

Emma’s holding both of Regina’s hands in hers, obviously ready to pose for a picture, but something must have been outrageously funny because her mouth is open and her head is thrown back in a hearty laugh. Her hair, left loose even beneath a sheer veil, falls around her shoulders and down her back in a shower of blonde curls, and she’s more relaxed and carefree than Regina’s ever seen her before. In the photo, Regina wears a look of quiet impatience, but even in the stillness of the image she can see the amusement glinting in her own dark eyes.

There are a few of the wedding party, including Belle and Aurora as Regina’s bridesmaids and Ruby and Mulan as Emma’s. And then the photos of the wedding itself. Regina sees one of a grinning Emma clutching David’s arm as they walk down the aisle, and her breath catches in her throat when she sees Henry walking her down.
“He felt bad that your dad couldn’t give you away,” Emma says softly. “So he figured he’d do it himself. He just didn’t want you to walk down the aisle by yourself.”

Regina lingers an extra second on the picture of the two of them standing at the altar, Emma holding Regina’s hand gently in her own as she slides the ring onto her finger. She’s leaning forward, her lips parted in speech beside Regina’s ear. “What did you tell me?” she asks, pointing to the photo.

“That was right after you read your vows. I said I’d always be your knight in rusty armor.”

Regina wipes at her suddenly moist eye. Turning the page, she gently traces the photo of Emma dancing with David, and stops at the one of herself dancing with him. The dance floor is empty, save for the two of them.

“He didn’t want you to miss out on the father-daughter dance,” Emma explains with a smile. “He really does love you, you know. He thought of you as family way before my mom did.”

“That’s… very kind of him.”

“He’s always just wanted me to be happy.”

“And are you?”

Emma smiles, covering Regina’s hand with her own and catching her eye. “I couldn’t be happier.”

Over winter break, Henry goes on a trip with Emma to Boston to look at colleges, leaving Regina at home with the girls. Victoria’s gotten bigger in the past months; she’s nearly a year old now, and crawling on all fours around the house. Snow and David come and stay to help Regina care for the both of them while Emma’s away, bringing their young son with them.

One particular morning Neal and Ellie are running all around the spacious manor, getting in everyone’s way in a manner that is much too easily forgivable. “So, how are things between you two?” David asks as Regina stands at the stove, making breakfast. Snow has already gone to work at the elementary school, leaving the two of them alone with the children.

“Between Emma and me?”

“Yeah.”

Regina shrugs, flipping the pancakes one by one in the pan. “We’ve made a lot of progress since I lost my memory.” It’s quite the understatement; in the two and a half months since Regina woke up with seven years missing from her mind, Emma’s helped her adjust far better than she ever could have hoped for, not to mention loving her like nothing was different. “Not that I would know, but I think I’m getting close to where I was before.”

David smiles. “I’m glad.” He reaches his arms out and wrangles Ellie and Neal into his grip as they zip by, tickling them both to the point where their shrieks make Regina cringe despite the smile on her face. “Ellie’s gonna start kindergarten soon, huh?”

“She’s getting so big,” Regina muses, scooping pancakes onto the four plates set on the table. “It’s hard to believe she was ever a baby.”

Ellie digs into her food with an excitement reminiscent of her absent mother, bringing a wistful smile to Regina’s face. “S really good, Momma,” she says around a mouthful of pancake.
“Don’t talk with your mouth full, dear.”

“Sorry,” Ellie says after chewing and swallowing.

David and Regina make small talk as they eat, and after Regina cleans up the dishes (she’s the only one with enough discipline to do it), she gets dressed for the day and heads off for her weekly appointment with Archie.

“And you’re adjusting well to this life?”

Regina nods. “I think I’m just about used to it.”

Archie writes something down, a smile coloring his face. “And Emma?”

“We’re good. I think… you were right. It wasn’t hard for me to fall in love with her again.”

“That’s about all I need to hear. I don’t think we need to have these appointments anymore, unless there’s anything that concerns you?” At the shake of Regina’s head, Archie writes something on his notepad. “I’d still like to meet with you every so often, but those meetings won’t need to be as frequent, nor as long.” He stands up, holding out his hand with a wide grin. “Congratulations, Regina.”

Regina shakes his hand. “Thank you, Dr. Hopper. For everything you’ve done. I don’t know how I would have dealt with this without your help.”

“It was my pleasure. Good luck with everything.”

“You know, I think I’m going to be just fine.”

When Emma comes home, she brings with her an exhausted teenager and a single red rose. “It’s for you,” she says, handing it to Regina with a flushed face.

Regina takes the flower and inhales its sweet scent. “What’s the occasion?”

“Will you marry me?”

“What?”

Emma reaches out and takes Regina’s left hand, taking the ring off of it and holding it out to her. “Will you marry me?”

Regina laughs once, tilting her head in confusion. “I’m quite sure we already did that. I saw the pictures.”

“I know. But I want you to always be able to look back and remember our wedding day. I want our wedding to be there in your head so if you’re ever having a bad day, if you’re ever mad at me, you can remember it maybe you’ll feel better.”

The tears come completely unbid. Regina wipes at her eyes. “Yes.” She takes the ring from Emma’s hands, sliding it onto her left hand where she knows it belongs. “Of course I’ll marry you, you idiot.”

Regina’s a nervous wreck on the day of the wedding, but even she’s not as bad as Ellie. Emma made
the mistake of making their daughter a flower girl, and she seems to have gotten stage fright. She’s hiding behind every piece of furniture she can find in Regina’s hotel room, sobbing only semi-coherently about how she’s scared she’ll drop the flower petals before she can throw them in the right places.

When Regina finally coaxes her out from under the bedspread, her hair is a mess and there’s tear tracks all the way down her chubby cheeks. “Come here, sweetheart, let me fix your hair.” She runs the brush through Ellie’s fine brown locks as she murmurs soothing words, and eventually the girl calms down. And magically, it calms Regina down as well.

When Henry knocks on her door to walk her down the aisle a second time, it takes everything Regina has in her not to cry then and there at the sight of her little prince nearly a foot taller than her and dressed in a pressed suit. “You ready?” he asks, producing a package of tissues from his pocket and handing her one.

Regina blows her nose and disposes of the tissue before nodding and taking his arm. “Let’s go.” Emma and David walk out first, and as Regina waits for her turn, she feels the nerves building in her stomach once more. She and Henry begin to walk in step with each other and as they round the corner, Regina finds all the nervous energy inside of her dissipating when she sees the wide smile on Emma’s face.

They’re called to read their vows. “I don’t know what I could say to top last time, so I’m just going to repeat myself,” Regina begins. “I call you my knight, but reluctantly, for your heroism often gets you into danger. And Emma, my knight in rusty armor, I don’t ever want to imagine a world where I don’t wake up to your smiling face beside me every morning.”

“Whenever I’m having a bad day, it’s almost like I’ve got my own personal raincloud following me around. Like in cartoons. But when I come home and you’re there waiting for me… it’s like you’re this magical bolt of sunshine that makes the storm disappear in a split second. I don’t ever want to not have that. If that even makes sense.”

Regina cries when David chooses to dance with her first.

He smiles reassuringly at her as he takes one of her hands in his much larger one, resting the other on her waist as they twirl around the dance floor. “I’m glad you and Emma have each other,” he murmurs, quietly enough for only her to hear.

“I’m lucky to have someone like her.”

Regina doesn’t hear what he says to Emma, but she’s pretty sure she read his lips accurately.

*You picked a good one.*

They have their honeymoon two towns over, in a little Bed & Breakfast called the Rose House, where they serve French food at meals and have a miniature Eiffel Tower in the garden in the back. “It’s not Paris,” Emma says when they arrive. “But I figure it’s the closest we’re gonna get with three kids.”

“It’s wonderful.”

“So, Mrs. Swan-Mills. What shall we do first?”

Regina grins, raising her eyebrows. “I think you know what I’m going to say.”
“To the bedroom?”

“The bedroom.”

“Hey, Regina?”

“Yes?”

“I’m gonna take you back to Paris someday.”

Regina smiles. “Oh?”

“Yeah. I don’t know when, but I’m gonna do it. Sometime later.”

“Later. But not never.”

Emma grins and takes her hand. “Not never.”

And so, reluctantly, Regina calls Emma her knight in rusty armor. She knows she’ll never be quite the same as she was before the car accident she can’t remember, but she’s well on her way. She’s so glad that ‘Miss Swan’ became the savior who became Emma who became her wife in everything but contract. And as she glances over at the blonde who’s walking beside her, she wonders who they’re going to become in future that doesn’t exist yet.

She’ll never know the feeling of joy when her daughters were born, nor the pain of almost losing Henry more than once, but she feels an odd peace as she decides that she’s not done yet. Seven years is only a small piece of the life she’s building with Emma, and she’s not going to miss a single day of the years to come. She’s started keeping a diary of everything that happens to her, even the mundane, because in these months she’s come to know that every memory is a treasure that she must never lose.

And so, that night when they lie down for bed and Regina opens her diary, she has only one thing to say.

12 April, 2018

*I began a new life today. And I think it’s going to be a good one.*

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