Finding Happy

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Summary

AU SB
Regina had lost it all. Her son and her Mother both were gone. She felt there was nothing left. Until she realized there was more to come.

Magic baby fic! SQ past and maybe future

Trigger warnings posted inside.

Notes

I do not own OUaT nor any of their characters.
She was so tired. But unfortunately, not numb. A heavy weight pressed down on her entire being. The ache in her heart flooded her entire system. The pain wracked through Regina’s body. Henry had chosen. And it wasn’t her.

She walked back into the house with the document that Emma Swan had just thrown into her face. She wished she could just slap the woman. But she knew it wasn’t all her fault. She was just doing whatever it took to keep everyone on her side. And she’d won. She’d beaten the Evil Queen.

Cora was dead by none other than the goodly Snow White’s conniving ways. But as usual, Regina was the epitome of all that is evil while Snow was held up as all that was good. And Emma had decided that she needed to do something to stave off any retaliatory acts by Regina.

Regina walked upstairs to her bedroom. Every step she took in her house just echoed throughout the empty house. Much like her pain echoed throughout her system.

She made it up to her bathroom. She stood in front of her medicine cabinet thinking of taking some migraine medicine to stop the pain reverberating through her skull. Then her eyes lit upon a bottle of pain killers she’d gotten when she’d had an accident years before.

Regina didn’t like taking meds much at all. She liked to be in complete control of her senses. She had only taken 2 out of the bottle of 30. And that was only because her pain had been too severe for her to pretend it wasn’t there anymore. She knew that pain medication got more potent over time. And for the first time, that sounded like music to her ears. She put the pills on her nightstand and went back downstairs.

She went back down into the kitchen. Her heels clicking across the sterilized floors as she walked in and poured herself a glass of juice. Then she went back up to her suite. She sat on the edge of her bed for an extended period of time. Then she calmly popped the pills into her mouth one by one washing away the acrid taste with some cold apple juice.

Emma slowly followed her parents from the mansion. She knew that it was what they wanted and felt was needed. She had known that Regina wouldn’t take her decree of not being able to see her son until SHE’D deemed her fit very well. And she hadn’t.

But nothing had prepared her for the actually feel of it. Or for the pain she’d seen in the woman that to her was bigger than life being brought down by something she knew from experience was one of the most painful things in her life. She had given Henry up of her own free will and that had hurt. But she had just taken him away from a woman who’d loved and cared for him when she hadn’t. She had been unprepared for the way her heart clenched in her chest as she’d watched a part of Regina crumble. And to know that she was the cause of it nearly killed her.

She followed behind her parents as their dutiful daughter should. She’d found that giving into whatever they decreed was easiest for her. And Henry was so in love with the fairy tale of them all he’d eagerly follow any of their commands. Emma had had no choice.

Or so that’s the way she’d rewritten the tale in her head. It was for the best. She was sure. After things calmed down, then she’d assess where they all stood.
She walked out and climbed into her car. Her heart clenching as she stared up at the house. She banged her hand repeatedly on the staring wheel while screaming. Then with one last glance at the house, she put the car in drive and drove away.

She arrived next to a lake. The moonlight glinting off the waters held her mesmerized. Regina had no idea where she was or how she’d gotten there. She quickly found she didn’t care.

It seemed a tranquil spot but she knew it was no place in Storybrooke. She had built that town from scratch herself. She knew every square inch and landmark there.

She saw a small towheaded child next to the water. She was softly humming to herself while she played with a stuffed swan. The swan had a golden halo attached to its head. Regina looked around wondering where the child’s parents were.

Regina had always had an affinity for small children. She watched the child happily skip towards her. She put her arms around her and leaned into her. Regina felt a joy flood her system. It had been too long since Henry had been this way with her. She soaked up the loving feeling. She put her arm around the small child before bending down to her level. “What’s your name little one?”

The child giggled and hugged her swan but said nothing.

“Is it a secret?”

“No. It’s just you haven’t given me a name yet. You’ll know my name when we meet.”

Regina’s brow furrowed. “When we meet? Do you know me?”

Again the child giggled and went back over to the lake. She skipped around humming to herself.

“Regina?”

Regina froze at hearing her name called. She knew that voice. She turned slowly. Now she was sure she was dreaming. Or dead. She had to be. Because this couldn’t be real.

And yet it was. Or seemed to be. She was standing right before her true love.

“Daniel?”
CHAPTER 2

“Where are we?” Daniel’s blue eyes regarded her with sadness.

Regina’s head whipped back. “I could ask you the same question,” she threw back at him. She knew he was disappointed in seeing her here in this way. Truth be told, she couldn’t believe she’d given into her lesser instincts either. She was a fighter. That’s what she was meant to do. Not lay to lay down and take other’s people’s bullcrap. But she had been bone tired. Too tired to keep on fighting. So she’d just allowed herself to slip away.

Daniel shook his head slowly at her. His expression was one of pure sadness. He opened his arms and she flew into them.

He smelled and felt the same. He was strong and warm. And his embrace filled her with comfort and kindness. “Where are we?” she asked pulling back only slightly.

“You’ll find out soon enough. But first, let’s get you someplace comfortable.” Daniel turned as he grabbed her hand.

Regina looked over at the child. She didn’t think it was safe for her to be there alone. “Little one,” she called out to her. The child stopped skipping and ran over to them. “Do you know this child?”

Daniel looked shocked. He glanced in the direction of the little girl then back at Regina. He shook his head, “No.”

The little girl grinned up at Regina as she grabbed ahold of her hand.

Regina bent down to her level, “Where’s your Mommy and Daddy little one?”

“I don’t have a Daddy. It’s just me and Mommy.”

“And where’s your Mommy?”

The child giggled and started to pull her forward. Regina looked over at Daniel who looked uncomfortable. “I guess we’re following her,” Regina shrugged.

As they walked along Regina took in their surroundings trying to find some identifying landmarks. She had no idea where they were, how she got there, or how Daniel could appear so real after he’d been dead for so long. “Where are we Daniel?” she asked again.

“Don’t you remember?” he turned to her frowning.

Regina was about to answer but the child had stopped walking. Regina looked up and found they were outside the mansion. “I guess I’m back home. But,” she turned around and surveyed the landscape. “This is definitely not Storybrooke,” she frowned. Everything was the same yet different.

There was a sort of foggy haze over everything. Her house was standing as it should. She could even see her beloved apple tree out back. But there was nothing else around. At all. No town, no trees, no wildlife, no birds or insects, nothing. It was like the house had been picked up and moved to the middle of nowhere.
The child continued up the path to her house and walked inside. The door gave way which was good since Regina had nothing with her. No keys or purse or anything else. She wasn’t even wearing a coat. She was still dressed in the skirt and top with knee high boots that she’d had on previously that day.

Regina and Daniel followed. They entered the house just as the child made her way upstairs. Regina went to follow her up but Daniel tugged lightly on her hand to get her attention. When she looked over at him he told her that he would wait for her downstairs. Regina nodded and proceeded to follow the child.

She hadn’t noticed any changes to her house walking in. But upstairs was a different story. She found the child in the room that had previously been Henry’s. Now all of his things were missing and had been replaced by what was obviously a little girl’s room. The room had been done up in purple and white. The bedroom furniture included a white canopied bed and matching accents. The child sat playing with the toys as if she belonged there.

“Little one,” Regina looked around her mystified. She looked at the child closely, “do you know where we are?” Her only response was another giggle before the child went back to playing being Mommy with her doll babies.

Regina had no clue what was going on. The last thing she remembered was taking the pills and then darkness closing on her. She supposed she was dead. And that knowledge filled her with nothing but acceptance. If this was death, she could handle it. She’d always known she’d be reunited with Daniel one day and that had happened. It just hurt her to know that a child was also here with her.

There was no sense of anything in this place. Time, space, surroundings, nothing. She figured her mind had conjured up the house for her because it was familiar. She guessed it was a part of being dead. Her magic still worked and she could conjure up whatever she desired. She lifted her hand to test her theory and sure enough a fireball sat in her hand.

The child had been watching her throughout her playtime and now she walked over. She was still giggling and Regina smiled down at her. Her smile turned to shock though as the child made a waterball in her hand. She smashed it into Regina’s fireball. “I win Mommy!” She threw her hands up in the air.

Regina stood stunned. She wasn’t sure which threw her the most: the waterball, the child having magic, or being called Mommy by said child. She shook her head as she rubbed her hand along her side to dry it, “No sweetie. I’m not your Mommy. But I will try and help you find your Mommy.”

Again the child’s response threw her. She wrapped her arms around her legs gigging up at Regina. “Me and you Mommy. For always and forever. You promised.”

Regina didn’t know how to respond. So she did what she did best. She deflected while buying herself time to figure things out. “How about we go downstairs and get something to eat. I’m sure you’re hungry.”

The child hugged her swan and skipped happily out of the room presumably to go downstairs. Regina looked around her and then stared into the mirror of the vanity. She looked and felt like herself. But she had to be dead. None of this could be real. Even though the mere suggestion that the precious little thing was hers had done a number on her heart already. It was beating triple time.

She shook her head. This wasn’t real. She was dead. And unfortunately so was the child. This was her ending. And truth be told, if this was what it consisted of, she could live with that. She’d gotten Daniel back and a beautiful little girl to complete their family. It wasn’t a storybook ending. But she
felt it was befitting of her and she had no complaints.

Regina walked downstairs and into the kitchen where the little girl stood in the open refrigerator. Regina picked her up and then looked inside trying to figure out what she could throw together that a small child would like. “What do you suggest little one?”

“Cheese toast!”

Regina’s brow furrowed, “Cheese toast? You mean grilled cheese?” She turned to the refrigerator and saw there were all the ingredients. “Alright poppet. Cheese toast it is.”

She pulled out her cast iron skillet and began cooking. She pulled up a chair to the kitchen island and let the little girl help her put the sandwiches together. Then she fried up 3 of them for herself, Daniel, and the child. She remembered to slice up the child’s sandwich into triangles and then smaller triangles just as Henry had liked them when he was a child. She called Daniel in from the den where he had just been sitting alone. They went into the dining room and sat down to eat.

Regina poured out glasses of apple juice for them all. Then she picked over her food while the child happily chewed away at hers. She noticed Daniel didn’t touch his either.

She studied the child. She had to admit, she actually did look like her. Aside from the blonde hair. Regina figured she must’ve slept with freakin’ Thor for it to be that white.

She shook her head. This was nuts. And this line of thinking would get her nowhere. She really needed to know where she was and what was going on. She hated not being in control. She turned to Daniel, “Have you been here long?”

He gave her a ghostly smile. He shook his head, “I came here to help you.”

“Help me with what? We’re all dead aren’t we?” Regina figured being dead meant they had no more rules. What more could happen to them if they were already dead?

“I’m not dead Mommy!” the little girl screeched.

Regina colored ashamed of herself. She’d forgotten about the child. She certainly didn’t want to upset her. “Of course you’re not poppet. Now finish your dinner,” she patted her head. The child stared for a moment. Then seemed satisfied and went back to her meal.

Regina had more questions but she knew now was not the time. She turned back to Daniel, “so what have you been doing?”

“I ride and take care of the horses. And I have a few friends.”

Regina brightened at the idea. “I’m glad you’re still riding.” She lapsed into silence. She didn’t want to tell him about her past. She was just happy he was here. And now they could build the future they had always wanted for themselves.

“And why don’t you still ride?”

Regina looked over to him surprised. She wasn’t sure if he was reading her mind or if he’d been looking over her during their time apart. She hoped not. She cringed at the idea of Daniel knowing what had become of her. “Umm – I - ,” she stuttered. Thankfully they were interrupted.

“Mommy, I’m tired,” the child told her while holding her yawn back with her hand.
Regina stared at her for a minute before her mind caught up to what the child had said. “Of course. Why don’t we go and get you ready for bed?”

They rose and Regina looked down at the little girl. “You want to say goodnight to Daniel?”

They both wore twin expressions of horror.

Regina was confused, “What’s wrong?”

The child let out a loud sigh, “Mommy, he’s not real.”

“Of course he’s real. He’s right there. We’ve been talking.”

“No he’s not Mommy,” the child told her in an exasperated tone. She went over to him. “See?” She swiped her hand across where Daniel sat. And it went right through him!

Regina stumbled back. “Wha - what’s going on here?” He was real. He was solid and warm. She had run into his arms when she saw him. She had held his hand as they’d walked home. Was she dead? Where in the hell was she? Maybe that was it. Maybe she was in hell. She knew she deserved it. But if this was hell, what was Daniel doing here? Not to mention the precious little girl. He was the sweetest man she’d known. And his life had been cut short way too early for him to have caused any trouble to be sent here.

Daniel sighed. “Why don’t you put her to bed? Then we can talk.”

The child skipped happily back up the stairs.

Regina turned to Daniel. He stood and came over and took her hand in his. Again she noticed the warmth of his skin. She could even still feel the roughened callouses on his hands.

“I’ll tell you everything. I promise,” he kissed her hand before gently dropping it back to her side.

She gave him a small smile. Whatever was going on she sensed no danger. And she had always had great instincts. If she hadn’t then she would’ve been dead a long time ago.

Regina turned to follow the child although her confusion had just increased. Her skin still tingled from where Daniel had kissed it. She could feel the warmth from his breath as he bent over her hand. His hand had felt like any other inside of hers.

She followed the child back into her room. She was playing with her doll babies again but still hadn’t let go of the stuffed swan. Regina turned toward the dresser in search of something to sleep in. A bath would have to wait until tomorrow. Regina wanted to get back to Daniel as soon as she could.

She found a nightgown and pulled it out. She walked over to the child, “Come on now poppet. Time to get ready to go night night.”

The child came over and allowed Regina to take off her shoes and clothes. After Regina dressed her she jumped into the bed and sat up waiting on Regina.

Regina folded her things to buy herself some time while she figured out what came next. It had been a while since she’d last dealt with a small child.

The little girl appeared to be about 4 or so. And she was so sweet. Regina would’ve been honored to be her mother.

She grabbed a book off the bookshelf above her bed. “How about a story?”
“No Mommy,” the child shook her head and instead pulled a book from underneath her pillow. “This one,” she handed it over to Regina.

Regina took the book and her eyebrows rose to her hairline as she read the title. “Okay poppet. This one it is,” she sat on the bed and the child snuggled into her side. She clutched at her stuffed swan. “The Ugly Duckling,” she read.

By the time she finished the story, the child had already fallen asleep. She tucked her in and went back downstairs.

She was anxious to hear all that Daniel had to say. But as she got to the first floor she heard more than one voice coming from the den. She made her way back there quickly. She gasped and her hand flew to her chest. Her mouth opening and closing repeatedly as she took in the sight before her with horror. Her heart was beating in overtime again. Now she knew she was in hell.

The woman rose and took a small step toward her. “Hello Regina.”

Regina took a step back. Then she stiffened her spine and stared back at her in challenge. “Hello Mother.”
CHAPTER 3

Regina studied her Mother. This wasn’t the woman she remembered from her nightmares nor her dreams. This was a completely different woman. Cora stood before her as if she herself was afraid of Regina. Which was insane. Her Mother struck fear into the cold dead heart of even Rumplestiltskin.

As if reading her mind Cora took a small step forward, “Do you remember the last thing I said to you?”

Regina frowned not knowing if this was a trick or not. She remained silent.

Cora took another step closer to Regina. She was now within arms’ reach of her. “I said that you would have been enough.” Regina’s breath hitched as she waited for her Mother to continue. She searched her eyes sure that this must be a trick but instead of the usual frozen expression she found nothing but sincerity and love. There were even actual tears caught in the corner of her eyes. “That was true then, and it’s true now. You would have and you are enough.”

Regina pressed her hand to her trembling mouth. She clutched herself around the waist with her free hand. Tears pooled in her eyes but she willed them not to fall. She needed to keep her wits about her. She took a deep breath and looked away.

Her mother walked forward and engulfed her in her arms. Regina tried to remain stiff but found herself leaning into her Mother. Cora held her and stroked her hair. Regina felt the floodgates open up. She could hold her tears at bay no longer. An anguished sob burst from her throat. Regina found herself clinging to her Mother as the tension and grief inside of her came flooding out.

When her sobbing died down, Cora walked her over to the sofa. Regina was spent. She practically fell onto the cushions. Cora continued to hold her as the tears began to dry up.

Regina looked at her Mother embarrassed. But Cora just continued to smile at her. Her face and demeanor radiating nothing but love. She handed Regina some kleenex from the box behind her. Regina took them gratefully. She cleaned herself up as she collected her thoughts.

She was dead. And now she was with her Mother and Daniel. She wondered briefly where her Father was but held onto it for later. Now she needed answers.

“Where are we?”

Daniel had been sitting silently on the armchair that faced them. “I promised to tell you everything and I will. But there’s a lot to go over. Most of it I’m sure you’ve figured out already.”

Regina nodded, “I’m dead.”

Daniel and her Mother both exchanged looks filled with alarm. “No you’re not!” They both almost yelled simultaneously.

Regina looked at the both of them not following. “Then how am I here with the two of you if I’m not dead?”

Daniel shifted in his seat. Her Mother sat closer to her. Daniel reached across and took Regina’s hand in his own. Regina smiled as she felt the familiar flutter in the pit of her belly. “You’re not
dead. But yes, as the child said, we are.”

Regina frowned down at their intertwined hands. She could feel warmth radiating from him. And he felt completely solid. She looked between Daniel and her Mother, “Then how - ?”

Daniel held up his hand, “What did you do before you got here?”

Regina colored. Tears pooled in her eyes as she brought her head down in shame. “I – I – I took some pills,” she stammered. She glanced up at Daniel hoping that he could forgive her weakness.

Cora stood and again reached behind her. Regina gasped and pulled back. Cora ignored her and instead reached for more kleenex. She held her hand up to Regina as if to ask her permission first. When Regina nodded her Mother used them to wipe her tears away. “You have nothing to be sorry for darling. It is I who owe you everything.”

“But I killed you!” Regina couldn’t stop the horrible words that had been running through her head from bursting out. She clamped a hand over her mouth afraid of the wrath they would surely bring and hating the fact that Daniel would have to witness the horror of their family secrets again.

Cora shook her head. She cupped Regina’s chin and forced her eyes to meet her own, “You were tricked, my darling. It wasn’t you. I know that. It wasn’t you,” Cora assured her.

Daniel sat forward, “that was the beginning of a chain of events that brought us all here.”

Regina looked around her living room once more. She asked her question again, “Where is here?”

“We’re in the nether. The space between living and dead souls.”

“And that’s in my living room?”

Cora and Daniel both laughed. “No, my dear. Your mind has conjured this up because it is familiar to you.”

“But how did you two get here?” Regina was still confused.

Cora moistened her lips. She glanced at Daniel and then back at Regina, “We were summoned here by you. We heard your soul crying out. And we came to you so that we could help you find your way back home.”

Regina digested what she had been told. She wasn’t dead but she didn’t seem to be completely alive either. She was obviously neither here nor there. She closed her eyes tight as she inhaled deeply. She was beginning to feel tired. The emotional toll of the day was obviously catching up to her fast.

“I think – I need some rest,” she rose unsteadily to her feet. Her Mother and Daniel both flanked her on either side. When she was steady they began to help her up the stairs and to her room.

Regina looked around as they entered. Everything was the same. She heard her Mother fumbling around the dresser as Daniel helped her sit before helping her out of her shoes. He excused himself with a reddened face as her Mother came over with a nightgown thrown over her arm.

Regina sat like a child on the edge of the bed as her Mother helped her out of her clothes and into the gown. Her eyes blinked slowly as she tried desperately to stay conscious.

“There, there my dear. I’ve got you,” her Mother pulled the gown over her body and then pulled back the blankets. Regina was only mildly aware of being pressed gently down before the warmth of
the blankets pulled her in. She allowed herself to succumb to darkness.

The redhead came back up the stairs after filling another bowl with ice water. She entered the room to find the brunette still in a restless sleep. She tossed and turned continuously while her body continued to burn.

The red haired figure sat beside her as she wet the cloth and held it to her head. “There, there my pretty. I’ve got you.”
CHAPTER 4

Regina awoke with a start. She was sure she had been dreaming. She glanced around. There were shadows on the wall but she still couldn’t tell precisely what time of day it was. She glanced at her alarm clock. The time read 5:48 pm. She must’ve really crashed.

She looked at her bedside table with a flushed face. The glass of juice and the pills were still lying there. The bottle was now almost empty. The pills must’ve only knocked her out.

She bit her lip as she contemplated what to do next. She closed the lid on the bottle and then stood up from the bed. She walked back into her bathroom and stared at herself in the mirror. She sure didn’t look like she was dead. She seemed her usual self.

She shook her head at herself. She couldn’t believe she’d given in to such weakness. This wasn’t the first time she’d tried to kill herself. The first had been the night that Tink had come to her and told her that she could find her true love even though she was trapped in marriage to Leopold. The second time she’d attempted suicide was after Leopold had locked her in the tower. He would come to her and force her to repent for her sins of lusting after other men. Then he’d force himself on her. If she pleased him well enough she’d be allowed forgiveness though she would still have to continue to pay penance. If not she was punished further. That was when she stopped caring about anything or anyone.

Then she received the box of venomous snakes from her Father. She freed them and waited for her impending death. But the genie intervened on her behalf and had them go after Leopold instead. That’s when she rose from the sniveling child she had been to the fierce woman who’d never allow herself to be used again. And for that she was deemed the Evil Queen.

She accepted her role as she’d accepted all the others before. From dutiful daughter, to faithful wife, and now to a fierce force to be reckoned with. But her happiness continued to elude her. Until Rumplestiltskin’s forked tongue began to whisper in her ear about finding true happiness forever.

The curse was meant to be her happy ending. Instead it had turned into her personal prison. She had trapped herself just as much as she had the idiot villagers.

She shook her head at herself. Now was not the time to give in.

She had just been so overcome with grief at the thought of losing the last person she had loved. But she needed to face the reality that Henry’s love was and had for some time been conditional. Now that he was living with Emma and her parents, he seemed to only remember her when he needed something from her.

She had just replaced the pills to her medicine chest when the door opened. “Mommy!” a small voice yelled. Her bathroom door flew opened and a blur of white hair came barreling toward her. She raised her arms up to be held. When Regina obliged she jumped into them and wrapped her arms tightly around her neck.

Regina was shocked. It had been a dream. She was sure of it. And yet the child who was intent on squeezing the breath out of her felt as real as Daniel and her Mother had last night.

The child at her with a grin on her face, “I’m hungry Mommy.”
Regina blinked repeatedly a few times. “Umm…,” she stammered. She took a breath to steady her thumping heart and frayed nerves. She put one hand on the doorjamb to help steady herself, “Well, why don’t you go to your room while I finish getting dressed? Then we can go down and have some breakfast.”

The child seemed satisfied and she skipped off humming to herself. Regina stared after her still stunned.

She had just convinced herself that it was some horrible dream. Either that or some drug induced craze. But if the child was here then that meant her Mother and Daniel were here somewhere as well.

Regina went through her morning routine then hurried to her closet. She dressed quickly then ran a brush through her hair. She walked out into the hallway and down to the room that had previously been Henry’s.

The child was once again playing with her doll babies. She dropped them but continued to carry her swan along with her as she spotted her Mother and ran to her. She threw her arms around her again and grinned up at her.

Regina couldn’t help it. The child was beautiful. She had a head full of blonde unruly curls. She had big brown eyes that resembled Regina’s with pale skin that had just a dash of color. Dimples adorned her cheeks and chin.

Regina scooped her up and gave her a small hug. The child giggled before wrapping her free arm tight around her neck. “What do you want for breakfast poppet?”

“Cheese toast!” she said excitedly.

“Again?” When she got an exuberant nod Regina shrugged. “Cheese toast it is,” she said as she made her way downstairs to the kitchen.

Regina prepared a sandwich for herself and the little girl. Then she thought better of it and made 2 more. One for Cora and one for Daniel. “Poppet, do you know where - ?” Just as she was about to ask the question Daniel walked in from outside. And Cora came in through the front door.

“Breakfast is almost ready,” Regina told them as they made their way into the kitchen. She went to the refrigerator and began putting the things together for hot chocolate.

They sat around the nook in the kitchen to eat their meal. Regina wasn’t hungry but she took a few nibbles here and there. Cora’s and Daniel’s meals went untouched.

The child chattered on about some dream or other she’d had and some book that Regina wasn’t familiar with. Regina half listened and gave the appropriate ‘oohs’ and ‘ahs’ and ‘then what happened?’ as needed. But inside she was busy processing through the situation.

She wasn’t dead but Cora and Daniel were. Cora had murdered Daniel in cold blood. Snow had used Regina to murder her Mother. And yet now they were all sitting around having a meal together as if what had brought them all here had never even occurred. To top it all off, this child kept insisting on calling her Mother.

Regina had noticed Cora looking back and forth between her and the child with an expression she’d never seen cross her Mother’s face. If she didn’t know her better, she’d think her Mother was positive enraptured with the child. After the talk last night she realized she still had plenty of questions left to ask. She just needed some time and space to ask them without the child around.
She got her wish when Daniel went off to the den after the meal and thankfully the child followed leaving Regina alone with her Mother. She began gathering dishes and bringing them into the kitchen to wash. Her Mother accompanied her.

“Mother?” at Cora’s questioning hum she continued, “what exactly is going on?”

Cora looked at her curiously. “What do you mean dear?”

Regina scraped the plates and began loading the dishwasher. At least electricity worked here. “I mean by all of this,” she gestured around her as she replayed their conversation from last night. “We’re in the nether world. I’m not dead but you and Daniel are,” Cora’s face reddened. Regina chose to ignore it thinking it was merely her being uncomfortable with the situation. She instead walked over to the kitchen doorway where she could see the child happily sitting with some paper and markers while Daniel stared at her as if she was an alien. “But I don’t understand, who is the child?”

Cora still had the effects of having her heart slammed into her chest. She still carried it with her. The last thing she wanted to do was to bring more pain to her daughter. She wanted to take this time to get to know her and hope that Regina could move on in her own life. But she knew lying to her wouldn’t end well for either of them. She took a deep breath, “She is your future Regina. She is the reason you must get out of here.”

Regina’s mind could barely register what she was hearing, “My – You mean she was telling the truth about being my daughter?”

Cora’s eyes closed momentarily before she began to nod her head, “yes.”

Regina’s heart swelled in her chest. She had always wanted her own child. But she didn’t think it was possible. She had cursed her own womb to prevent ever carrying a child for Leopold. She could never live with herself if she had to see a replica of that man everyday or know that she’d carried his seed inside of her. “But how - ?”

Cora shook her head lightly, “You’ll learn that in your own time my dear. But first you have to get to where you belong.”

Regina looked over at the child who was happily oblivious to the adults around her. The child grinned over at her Mother as she made eye contact with her. She raised her swan’s wing and waved it at her. Regina waved back at her and grinned.

Cora chewed on her lip. She took in the beam spreading across Regina’s face as the news of her daughter soaked in. But Cora knew that Regina would need to prepare for what came next. She hated to break her daughter’s happiness seeing as she was a huge part of the reason she’d had so little of it in her life. Cora pushed the pain of that one away from herself. Right now was about Regina. She needed to be the Mother that she’d stolen away from her as a child. And that meant being honest with her about everything. Now was the time to lay everything out for her daughter. She called out to her to get her attention. “We need to talk,” was all she could say when Regina’s eyes swung back over to her.

Regina heard the heaviness of whatever her mother had stored to say to her. She wasn’t sure how much more she could take, “okay,” she nodded weakly.

Her mother made to go back upstairs. Regina trailed after her.

Cora stood in the doorway of her bedroom. But she didn’t go inside. She waited for Regina to catch
up to her.

“What is it Mother?” Regina didn’t like the look on her Mother’s face right now. She’d felt she’d had enough surprises to last a few lifetimes already. And she hated surprises. But she could tell that what was coming was going to be a doozy.

Cora gestured inside and Regina looked.

She gasped and clutched at her midsection. Her hand flew up to her mouth as if to push the offending sound away. “I – I - ,” Regina stammered.

“Yes,” her Mother answered her unspoken question. “That is you.”

Regina’s head swung back around to her bedroom. She was lying on her bed in what looked to be obvious distress. She was tossing and turning and sweating. There was a redheaded figure sitting beside her wiping at her face with a cloth.

“But – how -?”

“It’s called spirit walking,” a voice said from behind her.

Regina jumped and turned to look behind her. She did a double take as her head swung around to the figure beside her on the bed and the one now behind her. “What – I -,” she stammered. She looked back toward her bed. The figure standing behind her with a smirk across her face was also slumped in the chair beside her bed still holding onto her hand.

Zelena smiled over at her.

Cora walked over to her and put her arm around her. “Regina this is your big sister, Zelena. She’s the reason why we’re all here.”
 CHAPTER 5

“Sister?” Regina’s mind could barely wrap around being in two places at once. Now there was a child involved that belonged to her. Her fiancé and mother had both returned from the grave. She was stuck in some netherworld and after being alive for almost 60 years she was hearing about a sister? “What the hell Mother?”

Cora’s head hung with shame. She let out a big breath, “It’s a long story my dear.”

Regina huffed and gestured around them. “I think now’s a good time for telling it don’t you think?” She continued to look back and forth between her Mother and this woman, Zelena.

Zelena had bright red hair and startling, big blue eyes. But aside from that, she was the spitting image of their Mother. Even more so than Regina herself.

Regina fought down the small flash of jealousy. Her Mother had never put her hands on her in a loving way before. But now she had her arm around a stranger and was gazing at her with a look that held nothing but love. This was not the Mother that Regina had grown up with. This was a stranger who had her Mother’s face. Again Regina wondered if she was hallucinating.

But when she turned and saw herself on the bed with the redhead slumped next to her she knew she couldn’t have made this up. Nor having Cora and Daniel in the same place together. Her mind was reeling quickly to try and fill the gaps on how this situation came to be.

“I got pregnant before marrying your Father. I was engaged to Leopold but I did not love him. Another man had my heart. We got carried away and - ,” Regina rolled her eyes as her Mother spread her hands and shrugged.

“Afterward, that witch Eva used my pregnancy to force the King to throw me out,” Cora’s voice took on a hardened turn as her face wore a mixture of disgust and anger. Now this was the Mother Regina remembered clearly. She put her hand on her hip and waited for the story to continue to unfold.

“I couldn’t keep her,” Cora’s voice broke. “I had nothing to give to her or myself. I had to let her go,” an errant tear made its way out of Cora’s eye as she raised her hand to Zelena’s cheek. “Please forgive me. I was so weak. It’s why I took out my heart. I thought then I could find some strength.”

Now she turned to Regina, “But instead I ended up hurting my baby. I’m so sorry Regina. For everything I’ve ever done to you,” Cora buried her face in her hands and wept softly.

Zelena put her hands around her and held her gently. “It’s alright Mother. We start with today. And we move on from there. Yes?” she wiped her Mother’s tears away with the pads of her thumbs. She looked over at Regina as if she was awaiting her to confirm what she had said.

Regina was torn. She’d always wanted these things from her mother. An apology and some sign of atonement. She just wasn’t ready. She shook her head as she backed away from the two of them. She made her way downstairs. She was almost to the door when she heard someone shout out.

“Mommy? Where are you going?” the child stood staring at her Mother with a picture in one hand and her swan clutched to her chest with the other. When she saw the tears on Regina’s face her face dropped, “Mommy what’s wrong?” she cried out in alarm.
Regina stopped in her tracks. She gaped at the small child. When she looked at her, she saw her own eyes staring back at her. She wiped at her tears, “Nothing. Nothing my dear. Mommy just got something in her eyes.”

The little girl ran over to her and Regina lifted her up and held her close. She kissed her cheeks. The girl wrapped her little arms tight around her neck.

Regina looked past her shoulder over at Daniel who was standing and staring at them alarmed. She made her way over to him, smiling. “I’m okay. It’s nothing. Mommy was just being silly.”

The little girl pulled back. Then she squirmed to be let down. Regina acquiesced.

She grabbed Regina’s hand. “Come on Mommy. I’m going to draw you something really special to make you feel better.”

Regina followed her back into the den. Daniel walked behind them. She went back to drawing while Regina and Daniel sat on the sofa.

“What’s wrong?” Daniel spoke quietly so as not to alarm the child. He was still confused about his role here. All he’d known was that Regina needed him. And he’d do anything for her. He did and would always love her.

Regina looked over at him. She crossed her legs and smiled as he put his hand upon her thigh. She shrugged and gestured around her, “I’m just not sure about all this,” she too kept her voice soft.

“What’s confusing you?”

Regina chuckled at the absurd question. He wanted to know what was confusing about her having a child she never had calling her Mommy, a Mother who was apologizing for her lifetime of evil past deeds, a fiancé who’d come back from the dead, and now a sister she’d never even known about appearing. “What isn’t confusing?” She smiled and waved at the little girl when she turned to look at them. She smiled and waved back. She turned back to her drawing while speaking softly to her stuffed swan.

Daniel had known about Cora’s abuse at the time. But Regina had hidden the bulk of it from him. Although he knew she was strict he’d never known the whole truth.

Daniel frowned but sensed this was what needed to happen. He moved closer and wrapped an arm around her. Regina just melted into his side. Quietly, ever mindful of little ears nearby she began to tell him her story.

She started with telling him about Cora. She explained what had happened in Cora’s early life that would cause her to take out her own heart. She took him all the way through Cora’s life into hers. Regina quietly relayed her childhood to him. She included the part her Mother had just relayed to her about a sister she’d never known existed. She stopped right at the time of his death.

“Mommy,” the little girl walked over stiffly. She yawned big while rubbing her eyes. She brought her picture over to her, “I made you something,” she passed the paper to Regina before crawling into her lap and letting her head fall on her shoulder.

“You tired poppet?” Her only response was another yawn. “Alright. Let’s get you to bed,” Regina picked her up and turned to Daniel. “I’ll be right back,” she told him.

Regina walked up to the little girl’s room. She placed her in her bed. The child just lay back blinking
slowly. Regina knew it wouldn’t be long before she was out. She pulled off her jeans and shoes. Then she tucked her into bed.

The child’s arms reached out for a stuffed swan that rested near her head. “Mommy did you like the picture?” she asked around another big yawn.

Regina looked down at the paper still clasped in her hand. She sat beside the child and held it up so that they both could see it.

“It’s our family,” the child explained.

In the picture was a big blob with dark hair that she supposed was her. She was wearing a lopsided crown on her head. There was a small blob with blonde hair that she supposed was the child. She was holding a stuffed swan in her hand the same as now. Another brunette blob stood to the side of them with a red topped blob beside her. They all wore huge smiles upon their faces.

Regina stared at it frowning. She was wondering how the child knew about Zelena. And why would she draw her Mother with them?

When she turned to ask the child was already asleep. Regina bent and gave her a kiss. She really was a beautiful thing. And knowing that she was hers just made the situation that much sweeter.

She clasped the picture to her. She knew she would treasure it as she had cherished Henry’s handprint that he had made for her in kindergarten.

She left the door open just in case the child needed her. She glanced at her bedroom but decided against going and inspecting it. She hadn’t seen her Mother or Zelena for a while. But her first priority was getting back to Daniel.

She made her way down the stairs and back into the den. Daniel had started a fire in the fireplace. Regina looked around surprised at how dark it was. The whole place had been cloaked in some kind of haze that made it hard to tell what time of day it was but she assumed it since it was only a few hours since they’d had breakfast that it couldn’t be that late.

Daniel smiled at her as she walked in. He had been stoking the fire in the fireplace but as she came closer he stood. She walked into his arms and he rubbed her back.

She enjoyed the feel of being in his arms for a while before pulling back. She had more to tell him and no idea how much longer they had together. She didn’t want to waste any of it.

She pulled him back over to the sofa. They resumed their previous positions. She looked up at him from where her head lay against his shoulder. “Now I have to tell you something. And I hope after you hear me you won’t hate me,” her voice cracked but she was able to push the words out anyway.

Daniel frowned down at her, “I could never hate you. The love I have for you has to be pretty deep if it brought us both to this place at this time.”

Regina shook her head, “You won’t be saying that after you hear the rest,” she said sadly. She pulled away from him. She needed space between them before she told him the rest of her story. She sat on the end of the sofa with her arms wrapped around her. She averted her face staring deep into the flames of the fire. She told him everything. Starting from his death leading up until now.

She told him about marrying Leopold. Her vision blurred with unshed tears as she looked at him begging him to understand why she’d married him. Then they began to fall as she described her marriage.
She dried them and turned away from him completely as she told him about her rise as the Evil Queen. Her voice cracked but she forced the words out of her throat as she told him about the curse. She told him of her loneliness while being the Mayor of Storybrooke. And how she’d adopted a little boy. A child that she thought would make the sad and lonely endlessness disappear.

Her tears came back and began to fall anew as she told him about Henry receiving the book. She told him how he had changed from her Little Prince to a live viper in the hand. He’d become so full of poison intent on nothing but her downfall.

And how she fell. She told him of the Savior. And even of the time she and Emma had spent together before the curse had broken. And the one last night they spent clinging to one another in each other’s arms after the curse was broken. She told him everything. Right up until the last thing she remembered before waking up here.

She was still staring into the flames when her story was ended. She wasn’t yet ready to look at Daniel’s face. She didn’t want to see the man she’d loved more than life itself staring at her with a face that mirrored the way she felt inside.

So she sat watching the flames dance around as the fire sparkled with life. Even before becoming the Evil Queen she’d always been mesmerized by fire. It was wild but it was also beautiful. And she had a gift for taming it.

She reached out toward the flames and conjured them to her. She stared transfixed at the array of colors that one flame could hold. She smiled over at Daniel as she held it in her palm. As she caught sight of his face, she used her opposite hand to snuff it out.

He was staring at her with a gaze so intense that she was surprised he hadn’t drilled a hole into her. She licked at her lips nervously. He slid closer to her and in a fast, fluid motion cupped the back of her neck before crashing his lips down onto hers.

It was only the need for air that forced her to pull away. “You don’t hate me for what I’ve done?”

He stroked her hair. “I could never hate you. And from what I heard you were mostly protecting yourself in a world that had shown you little to no kindness. I only wish I had been there to spare you all that pain.”

Regina sobbed. That a man as kind and good as Daniel was could look at her with so much loved radiating throughout his being shocked her. She buried her head in his shoulder and let the tears fall unabashedly.

Daniel held her throughout her ensuing crying storm. When she had no more tears left, she lay against him limp.

He picked her up and took her to her room. He lay her upon her bed.

When he began to walk away she reached out and grabbed his arm. “Please don’t leave me. I don’t want to be alone.”

He nodded then climbed in beside her. He took her in his arms where her head lolled onto his shoulder. She wrapped her arm around him willing him to stay. She fell asleep wrapped in a tight cocoon of love.
Loving You is Easy

Chapter Notes

****TW: Regina x Daniel Loving Ensues ****

CHAPTER 6

When Regina awoke Daniel was still lying beside her. He smiled down at her and pressed their foreheads together. She grinned and shifted to move the rest of her body closer to him. That’s when she felt an unfamiliar weight against her back.

She twisted around to see the little girl had an arm wrapped around her waist. She was snoring lightly. Regina noted she was still gripping her stuffed swan between her body and arm.

She turned back to Daniel once she ensured the child was still asleep. “She really needs a name. I can’t keep calling her the child.”

Daniel shrugged, “You’re her Mother. That’s your job.”

Regina cocked her head to the side, “Are you her Father?”

Daniel looked stunned, “No!”

“Ouch! Rude much?”

“The dead cannot make a child with the living. That would be - ,” Daniel’s shudder said it all.

“Yeah I guess it would.” Regina moved closer to him again, “Anyway,” she ran her hand lightly down his chest. “Where were we?”

Daniel smiled down at her and began to kiss her. They kissed until they became dizzy from breathlessness. When they pulled apart the child was awake and sitting up. She was frowning over at them.

“Mommy what are you doing?” she threw her arm across Regina and pulled her back. She frowned at Daniel making it obvious she thought he was doing something to her Mother.

“We’re just kissing dear. Grownups do that sometimes. It lets the person know that you like them.”

The child continued to look suspiciously back and forth between them.

“Are you hungry poppet? I think someone needs some dinner and a bath,” she climbed over the child and got out of bed. She reached down for her and the child jumped into her arms.

“Cheese toast,” she crooned.

Regina squeezed her eyes tight as she pinched the bridge of her nose. “Cheese toast it is,” she held her hand out to help Daniel up.

He took it smiling as he followed them all downstairs.
Regina entered her room after putting her daughter down to bed. She smiled as she saw Daniel reclining with his arms behind his head. He was so big he took up almost all of the bed.

She jumped into a space on his side and got as close to him as she could. She leaned over and kissed him lightly before snuggling in closer to him. Regina frowned, “Is it just me or do you think she sleeps a lot? She seems to only wake up for something to eat and then she’s down again.”

“You’re the only person I ever wanted to have a baby with so - ,” Daniel shrugged.

Regina pushed the pangs of what never would be away from her. She’d spent too much time in that headspace and it never made her happy. From here on out she vowed to only do what truly made her happy. Otherwise she really wasn’t living.

She ran her hand up and down Daniel’s chest. She smiled when she heard his breath hitch. She grinned wickedly at his body’s obvious response as her hand slipped lower.

“You can’t make a baby with me. But you seem quite capable of doing other things,” she waggled her eyebrows up at him.

Daniel stared down at her for a second. She thought he was about to refuse. Instead he grabbed her hand that was exploring his chest and pinned it over her head. He brought his lips to crash down onto hers.

The kiss was filled with longing and desire. At first it was urgent and hungry but as he pushed his tongue inside of the warm recesses of her mouth he became gentler and less rushed. As if he wanted to savor every minute of this.

Regina was in seventh heaven. She’d spent her entire life waiting for this moment. She and Daniel together as they always should’ve been. It was all she’d ever wanted. The two of them and a few kids.

She always knew with him she’d have a nice large family. They may never be wealthy. But they would be happy. And for her that was all that was important.

Now she had the opportunity to do what she’d never done. And that was to give herself to Daniel in every way. She’d wanted to before but he thought they should wait until marriage.

Her hands reached up and buried themselves in his hair. His hands made their way up and down her sides before stopping at her ribcage. He pulled back as if to ask her permission about going further.

Without hesitation she grinned up at him. “Daniel I want this. I’ve always wanted this.”

He grinned back. Then brought his hand up to cup her breast. She moaned softly and arched herself into his hand.

He began to make his way down to her neck with his mouth planting open kisses the entire way. Regina moaned again and ground her pelvis against him.

She wanted him to take it up a notch. She was becoming impatient. She waved a hand over the two of them to rid them of their clothes.

Daniel gasped as the cool air rushed against them. Regina just smiled and brought his lips back down to hers.
Her hands explored his chest then made their way further south. She cupped his member lovingly. He threw back his head and let out a long moan. By now they were lying side by side.

She pushed him onto his back as she took control of their situation. She began kissing her way down to where her hands were working stroking him to life.

When her tongue snuck out to lick across the expanse of his lower belly he let out another low moan. Then he grabbed her hand and flipped her over until he was on top of her.

He grabbed her leg at the knee and lifted it gently. The aroma of her arousal perfumed the air. He lowered himself into her as his mouth came down to claim hers once again.

She moaned and bucked her hips against him. She raised her hands to his shoulders as he began to move. Slowly the two of them began a rhythm that left the both of them panting and covered in a light sheen of sweat.

Daniel plunged in and out sending the two of them to dizzying heights. Regina’s walls began to tighten then to quiver around him. She heard a low scream cry out as her body turned to pure liquid around him. He gave a low guttural cry as he began to convulse above her.

They held one another close as their tremors slowly died away. Daniel had the presence of mind to roll away from her before collapsing to the side of her.

She looked over at him and smiled. He reached over and planted a kiss against her lips. Their breathing came out in small pants until they were able to get themselves under control.

Making love to Daniel had been just what Regina had always known it would be. Full of love and desire. The both of them giving all of themselves to one another. It had been everything she’d ever dreamed of but had never experienced. Well outside of those few times with Emma. But what the two of them shared transcended all of that. It had been so beautiful that tears came to Regina’s eyes.

Daniel reached over anxiously wiping her tears away with the pads of his thumb. He was raised above her leaning on his elbow. “Did I hurt you?”

Regina chuckled and clasped his hand in hers. “No my love. You were perfect.” She intertwined the fingers of their clasped hands, “This is perfect. This is how it should’ve always been,” she said sadly thinking about all the time that had been stolen away from them by fate’s cruel hands.

“We have now,” he whispered as he kissed the hand that held his. “I love you.”

Tears pricked Regina’s eyes as she looked deep into the eyes that held hers, “I have always loved you.”

The two of them lay together talking, whispering, sharing and making love repeatedly until they both were exhausted. Then they slept cradled in one another’s arms.
I Swear

Chapter Notes

**** Just a little happy before we get to the juicy parts. ;) ****

Regina x Daniel lovin'

CHAPTER 7

Regina’s eyes flew open the next morning. In a panic, she turned then chuckled at herself. It was real. And Daniel was still here. He was lying staring straight up at the ceiling. When she had abruptly turned he’d looked over at her with alarm in his eyes.

“Are you okay?” he put his arm around her waist while propping himself up on his elbow. He searched her face then body trying to find what had troubled her.

Regina turned until she was fully on her side and able to wrap an arm back around his waist. “No my love. I just –,” she bit down on her bottom lip and looked up at him shyly. “I thought for a minute that it was a dream,” she confessed.

She drew herself in closer to him. “I’m glad that it wasn’t.”

They lay together quietly just enjoying being back in one another’s company. “What’s it like – where you are?”

“It’s like this except for the haziness. Everything there is happy. And bright. There’s tons of people around. But no one’s a stranger. It’s like we’re all connected. We feel one another without even having to speak. We know who the other is without saying a word.”

Regina frowned. Then she shook her head to clear it. She didn’t want to dwell on anything negative. She wanted to stay within each and every precious moment she spent with Daniel.

As if sensing her thoughts, Daniel smiled and bent to give her a kiss. “That wasn’t a dream either,” he said playfully as he pulled away. He grinned at her but then his face turned dark and he pulled away.

She reached up and placed a hand alongside his cheek. “What is it my love?”

“I just - ,” Daniel took a deep ragged breath then looked down. He grabbed her hand and interlaced their fingers. “You love me?”

Regina smiled up at him. “With all my heart and soul. I always have and always will.”

“Then I want you to swear something to me.”

“Anything. You know that. There’s nothing that you could ask that I wouldn’t give a thousand times over.”

“I want you to swear that from now on you will do nothing except pursue your happiness. With or
without me. No matter what.”

Regina began to shake her head, “I will never be happy without you. I never have - .”

“You never have? Or you never allowed yourself to be?” When she looked at him confused he continued, “I need to know that no matter what you’ll be alright. And I can’t be happy while knowing that you’re not. I need you to swear to me that you will always only do what makes you happy. And if you find yourself in an unhappy place then leave. Just let it go and keep going until you find your happiness again.”

“You said anything,” he reminded her. “But I still need to hear you say it. I need to hear you swear.”

She didn’t want to say it aloud. She needed him to know that she needed him with her. But she knew she was being childish. She didn’t want to spoil any of their time together by wasting it on useless emotions and petty arguments. “I swear,” she said quietly. When he looked at her hesitantly, she cleared her throat and looked deep into his eyes. “I do. I swear. I will always chase my happy.”

Daniel grinned and brought his lips down upon hers. Regina gave a happy little moan and reached out to his chest. She ran her fingers lightly over his nipples loving the way it tensed beneath them. She broke free of their kiss and ran her hand lightly down his side as her mouth came down to claim first one nipple then the next.

She pushed him back to give herself better access as she felt his excitement grow against her belly. She chuckled at how responsive he was beneath her hands. She began to kiss her way down lower.

Daniel sucked in a sharp breath. He writhed beneath her as her mouth followed her hands down lower.

When she came to the tight dark curls she pulled back slightly and looked up at Daniel. His eyes were half closed and he was biting lightly at his lip. She grinned and went down further.

She licked the underside of his throbbing member all the way to the tip. She heard him suck in another breath as she sucked him into her mouth. She repeated the motion a few times before Daniel pulled her away.

He flipped the two of them over and slid into her with one smooth thrust. He leaned down and kissed her as he waited for her body to adjust around him. He held his weight off of her by leaning onto his forearms.

Then he began thrusting his hips. He’d pull out and thrust back upward making a grinding action when he came back in. He hit that spot inside of Regina that was causing her to melt around him.

She cried out as she felt herself turning to liquid around him. He repeated his ministrations over and over again as she felt the beginnings of her orgasm building with each thrust.

She felt him become engorged inside of her and knew that he was close also. She pulled his head down for another kiss. When he pulled back he reached for her hands and clasped them in his. They both stared into one another’s eyes as they both gave in.

Regina fell over the edge first. She wrapped her arms and legs tightly around him as her body tightened around him as she convulsed. Then she felt his hot liquid pouring into her as she held his trembling body as close to her as she could.

They stared at one another as they both came down slowly. They exchanged a smile as their breath continued to come out in small pants.
Daniel pulled out of Regina and instantly she missed the feel of him. He lay beside her and she wrapped her arms around him tight. They lay together for a few minutes just basking in their afterglow together.

It was finally Regina who pulled back. “I think we’d better get up and see what everyone else is doing.”

Daniel groaned but complied. He began to turn and rise.

“Hey,” she reached out and clasped his shoulder. “That doesn’t mean we have to stop,” she whispered as she leaned across and gave him another kiss before going into the bathroom. She left the door open in invitation.

~ll~

After a normal than longer shower they both dressed and exited the room. Regina poked her head in and upon seeing her daughter’s room empty went dragged Daniel along behind her to search for her.

They got to the top of the stairs and she stopped short.

“What?” Daniel asked as he gently placed a hand along her belly.

“She really does need a name. I can’t just yell child throughout the house,” she shook her head.

“Well you could,” Daniel teased. “But I’m not sure she’d answer.”

She gave him a quick kiss as she continued pulling him down the stairs behind her. She found the little girl sitting with her Mother and well – she supposed her sister near the fire. Her Mother was reading a book to her. As Regina came closer she realized it was the Ugly Duckling. Apparently the child had a thing for swans she thought as she watched her adjust the stuffed swan on her lap.

Daniel sat down in the recliner and pulled Regina down onto his lap. She snuggled up close to him as they sat listening to her Mother drone on.

Regina smiled over at her little girl who smiled sleepily back at her. Her gaze flew past her sister and landed at the fire roaring away in the fireplace.

“Blue,” she said surprising even herself. Her head snapped around as her daughter sat up excitedly. “Blue. That’s your name. Blue. Blue Ember.”

The child grinned and slid down from her grandmother’s lap. She walked over to Regina who picked her up and pulled her onto her own lap. She held her tightly. She sighed contentedly as the child melted into her embrace. “My little baby Blue,” she crooned as she ran her fingers through her little girls’ beautiful blonde curls.

The child really was gorgeous. She patted her stuffed swan. “You love that thing don’t you poppet?”

“I’m a swan princess Mommy,” she said sleepily as her eyes began to flutter then close.

Regina tweaked her nose earning her a slight sleepy smile. She grinned over at Daniel. This was her happiness.

She grinned over at Daniel. This was her happiness. Being in his arms with her daughter held tight against her, she was complete. She pushed the momentary fear that rose up away from her. She’d promised Daniel to embrace her happiness. And she’d keep that promise no matter what.
Instead she rested her head upon his chest. And basked in the glow of loving and being loved.

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Zelena watched the two lovebirds sadly. She knew she’d have to tell them that their time was coming to an end soon. They still hadn’t discussed the reason she’d brought them there at all. But she’d wait as long as she could.
Emma drove her usual route the same way that she’d been driving it for the past few months. When she got to Mifflin street she slowed down to a crawl that even an old man on crutches would’ve been able to beat while craning her neck to see all that she could.

She had no idea why she insisted on torturing herself this way. She told herself it was that Regina not making an appearance anywhere in town had a lot of people worried. But she blocked out the part of her being worried as well.

Their affair had been brief. And Emma had questioned the entire thing from beginning to end. She’d tried addressing who they were and what they were doing with Regina but once they were getting dressed Regina instantly reverted to her Mayor persona. Emma knew at that point it was fruitless to continue trying to get answers out of her.

And yet, ever since the breaking of the curse Emma had felt at odds with herself. She had her son and her parents. Plus an entire town who couldn’t thank her enough for being their savior. And now they all looked to her to lead them. She should be on top of the world. Instead everytime someone referred to her as the savior she just felt sick inside. And she got little to no joy out of Henry or her parents.

So she stayed away from them as much as possible. She took the night shifts citing that she was used to late nights and it was better for her that way. But since her Mother had dispatched with Cora there were no more big bads around anywhere.

And no Regina. She looked for her everywhere she went. She knew it was social suicide and the way to being isolated. But she couldn’t rid herself of these feelings for the woman. After all she had cared for Henry and turned him into the sweet little boy that he was when she herself couldn’t. She swore that it was all that there was to it. Her looking out for Henry’s other Mom.

But as her heart pounded during the 3 minutes it took her to crawl her way from one end of the block to the next she knew she was lying. She had feelings for Regina. She knew no one would accept that. The Savior having feelings for the Evil Queen who’d cursed them all would never be accepted. But Emma couldn’t help it. The heart wants what it wants.

She knew she was being a coward. But once her car passed with no sighting of Regina all she felt was glad. Glad that another day could go by peacefully where she didn’t have to confront herself, her family or the woman she’d fallen for.

RQ

“Good morning stranger,” Regina purred as she rolled her body into Daniel’s. She couldn’t believe that her body could still want more of him so quickly. But she’d been without him for so long. She figured it was time and distance catching up to them.

She wrapped her arms around his neck and stretched up as he bent down for a kiss.

Daniel cut the kiss off short. Regina gave a low growl of frustration. He chuckled and grabbed her arm and peeled it away from his neck. He held her hand up in his while looking pointed at her hand.

Finally she followed his line of sight. Then she gasped, “My ring! How?!!” The last she’d seen this
was when she’d thrown it into Jefferson’s hat to retrieve the poisoned apple. She figured it would be lost forever.

Daniel smiled at her, “Magic my love. I told you it was yours forever. No matter where in time and space it will always come back to you.”

Regina grinned and rolled onto his body. She straddled him then leaned down to kiss him. Their lovemaking took them to new dizzying heights before they crashed down wrapped in one another’s arms.

They were both enjoying the peaceful afterglow when pounding at the door broke them apart. Regina jumped and looked over at an equally anxious Daniel who was staring at the door himself. She jumped out of bed remembering to grab a robe. She tied it around herself just as she pulled the door opened.

A flash of annoyance passed across Regina as she took in the sight before her. Zelena stood there with her daughter in her arms. She grabbed her away from her while asking coldly, “What the hell do you want and why are you pounding away at my door?”

As she cradled the child’s head in her shoulder she noticed how hot she was. The child was practically burning up. Regina’s eyes snapped to the intruder, “What did you do to her?”

She wasted no time waiting for an explanation. She just took her daughter into the bathroom and began to fill it with cool water. She slid the child in the water as gently as she could but the sting of it lapping against such a hot body caused the child to buck then to cry out. She began sobbing as Regina tried her best to soothe her and make her understand that it was for the best.

“Shh my love. You have a really high fever. You need to cool down.” Regina had been through plenty of fevers with Henry. But this one was pretty bad. Though the child still whimpered and was in obvious distress, she was also quite lethargic. Regina knew this was serious. She needed a hospital.

She turned on the redhead who had slumped down onto her bed beside Daniel. “She needs a hospital.”

“That is not what she needs,” the redhead answered equally cold. “She needs her Mother.

Regina blinked rapidly repeatedly. “I’m not a doctor. I can’t fix this.”

Now Zelena stood. Regina watched her move slowly and with obvious effort. She came to the door of the bathroom and leaned on the doorjamb. Regina could see she wasn’t faring much better than the child. She looked at her up and down.

There was a light sheen of sweat covering her body. And her nose had begun to bleed.

“What’s going on?” Regina asked again as she went to grab some tissues and handed them over to the redhead.

“What’s going on, sister,” Zelena spat out. “Is that while you’ve been in your little love nest someone had to keep things together. And that obviously wasn’t going to be you.”

Regina heard water splashing behind her and she went to the child. She grabbed a towel and lifted her from the water. The child began crying and clung to her Mother tightly.

Daniel had gotten out of bed and yanked his clothes on. Regina walked out of the bathroom and sat
on the edge of the bed rocking the child while she tried to get her dried off.

She felt guilty about leaving her alone this long. She had no idea how long she and Daniel had been locked inside her room.

“It’s time for you to hear the truth. And make your choice,” Zelena blotted at her nose before falling heavily into a chair that was beside the bathroom. She was breathing heavily and really didn’t look well to Regina.

“What are you talking about now?” she snapped at her older sister.

“Mother, your daughter, and him,” she pointed to Daniel who was hovering nervously about. “I can’t do this any longer. This world is collapsing. That child is dying. A hospital will not help her. Only you can do that. And that’s only if you choose to live.”

It was Regina’s turn to panic. She swallowed the lump that had risen in her throat even as she pushed away what was being said to her at the same time. “I don’t understand - ,” she looked at Daniel with alarm.

“Daniel is dead. I brought you here for one reason only. Mother said she needed to speak to you and this was the only way. But I can’t hold it much longer. As you can see it’s slipping away.”

Regina’s head snapped up as she looked around. The haze that had filled the room was lifting. It was alternating morphing back into her original room and this haze filled alternate reality. “How do I fix this?”

“Mother’s not dead,” Zelena paused and allowed that to sink in. “But she soon will be if you don’t make the right choice. And so will that child,” she looked pointedly at the child that Regina had clutched in her arms who was becoming hotter.

“If you live, then so will she. But if you stay here then you will die. And so will she,” Zelena laid it all out for her in no uncertain terms.

Regina gasped, “And Daniel?”

Daniel knelt beside her and cupped her cheek lovingly, “My love you already know the answer to that.”

“No! NO NO NO!” Regina screamed shaking her head repeatedly. “I won’t! I won’t choose.”

Now Daniel stood, “Then I will.” Regina’s breath hitched as she heard the conviction and even the sadness in his voice. “My love, you have given me all that I have ever wanted. Before you my life wasn’t worth much. I was nothing but a stable boy. And I would willingly make any sacrifice that I had to for your happiness.”

Regina grabbed his hand and held it tight, “No. There’s another way. Just because she doesn’t know it doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist.”

“This is it. I am dead. And you are not. You must go on living. For you and for her. She deserves to live. And to have her Mother with her.”

“No, I won’t choose! I won’t!” Regina screamed again.

Daniel reached up and kissed her. Long and hard and deep. “Please be happy my love. And please find someone to share all that you have to give. I love you,” and like that – he was gone.
The next thing Regina knew she was jerking up in bed. She looked around her. Zelena slowly began to rouse herself from the chair that sat beside her bed.

“NOOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!!” Regina screamed out. She curled in on herself and began to sob uncontrollably.

Zelena moved from the chair to the bed. She looked down at the broken figure of her little sister. She reached out and pulled her over to her.

Regina stiffened in her sister’s embrace. Then she stopped caring and gave herself over to her completely.

She cried until there were no more tears left. Then she stared listlessly ahead of her.

She swallowed repeatedly to wet her throat that had now gone hoarse from the straining. Her sister reached to the side table and grabbed a cup of juice. She helped her sit up and drink enough to wet her parched throat.

“Where are they?”

Zelena didn’t even bother pretending not to know what she was talking about. “Daniel is dead. He always has been. But that little girl, she’s your future. Mother is trapped where you left her. And there is no more time to waste there.”

“How is she not dead?”

“I was able to counteract the poison before it completed her system. You left so fast there was no way of telling you anything after you left her body. I had to remove her heart once again.” Regina’s squeezed her eyes as she knew if her Mother had no heart then dead was the best place for her.

“I gave her mine,” Zelena said surprising Regina out of her stupor. “She refused to take half. She only acquiesced to taking a portion. But it won’t sustain her without more. And that part she’s left up to you.”

Regina sniffled and wiped at her eyes. She grabbed a kleenex and wiped at her face before cleaning her nose. “You want me to give her a part of my heart,” she finished for her sister.

“It’s the only way to getting what we both want. Our Mother. Our real Mother. The way things should have been if she had her heart with her. Us. A family. Love.”

Regina laughed bitterly, “what makes you think I would want any of that? I’m the Evil Queen. Villains don’t get happy endings.”

“Because you are no villain.” Again Regina gave a mirthless laugh and turned her head away. Her sister knew nothing. As if reading her thoughts her sister cupped her cheek in hers and forced her head back around, “You’re just like me and everyone else. You want the same things that everyone else does. And now we have a chance to make things better.”

“What the hell do you know? Where in the hell have you been all this time anyway? How could you give me Daniel and then take him away from him again? You really are your Mother’s daughter,” Regina tried turning away from her sister but she refused to allow it.

“I am my Mother’s daughter. And so are you. We are survivors. And we fight. We fight because no one gives us anything. This,” she gestured around her. “Is nothing but trappings. Mere window dressing.”
“I’m not claiming to be a saint. I’ve done as much damage as you have in your time. I’m the Wicked Witch of the West,” Regina’s head snapped around as Zelena raised her chin. “We have both made some bad choices in our lives. But now together, we have a chance to forge together our family and make our own destinies. You, me, and even Mother deserves that chance.”

Regina looked into a face that was so much like the Mother she grew up with and yet not. She knew she was probably being stupid but Zelena had struck all the right chords with her. She shut her eyes tight. Then she reached into her chest and pulled out her heart.

She stared at it in her palm before handing it to her sister. “Here.”

Zelena nodded and took the heart. She twisted it and broke it into 2.

Regina cried out and grabbed at her chest. It was really hard for her to breathe. For the first time she wondered what in the hell she was doing.

“Sorry,” Zelena grimaced at her sheepishly. “I’ll make this quick.” She twisted one half of the heart again and Regina cried out again.

With the pain rocketing through her system, Regina knew this was the end. And she welcomed it. Then she gasped aloud as her sister slammed the two pieces of her heart back together before quickly slamming it back into her chest.

Regina was breathing heavy as she clutched at her chest. Though it was a little tight at least she was intact. “I think I need a drink.”

Zelena stuck her finger out at her. “Not while you’re recuperating. Doctor’s orders.” She looked around the room. “I’m sorry to grab and dash but I really need to get to Mother. She’s been locked in your crypt this entire time. I’ll just pop over and grab her and we’ll be right back.”

Regina sat around waiting for what seemed like forever but judging by her clock was nothing more than 5 minutes.

Zelena and Cora poofed into her room.

Cora stepped forward, “Regina?”

Regina stared at her with deadened eyes. After all the crazy that had gone on just now she wasn’t sure what to expect next.

Cora sat beside her on the bed. Then she pulled her into her arms. “My baby. Oh, thank you my baby.”

For the first time ever in her entire life Regina clung to her Mother for comfort. Sometime during the embrace Zelena had joined them. Regina and Cora easily made room for her. They clung to each other with no more expectation than to take the comfort offered in this moment. Sometime later, they slept still curled into one another.
CHAPTER 9

“Ready?”

Regina looked around the place that she had once called home. Now all the furniture was covered with sheets. All of the precious mementos she’d collected over the years of a life being spent had already been transported to her new home. The moving van had left moments before taking with them everything that belonged to Henry. A boy who she had shared her life with but was her son no longer.

Regina finished her protection spell. This would ensure that no one would be able to come and go as they pleased in her home. She was intimately acquainted with the saying of never say never. Even though the only thing she wanted now was to be far away from this place, it had once been her home for years and served her well. She’d raised her son here. Despite Henry’s insistence on pretending otherwise there were some happy memories here.

She turned back to Cora and nodded solemnly, “Yes Mother.”

Cora walked over to her and Regina dropped her head onto her Mother’s shoulder. She allowed her to poof them to Regina’s vault where her sister was awaiting their return.

Regina had made the decision to leave days before. There had been no question in her mind when she’d awakened from the nightmare of having Daniel ripped away from her the second time that she wouldn’t be staying here. She’d looked around her bedroom as she lay curled in her Mother’s arms for the first time in her life and knew. This was no longer her home.

The next decision was equally easy. She had known she had a sister for such a short time. Zelena had already explained that though their time in the netherworld had seemed to last for weeks the truth was they’d only been there for 4 days.

Regina had avoided her sister while they were in the other world. But here there was no Daniel nor her baby Blue to act as a buffer to her and her Mother. She’d had no choice but to interact with them.

She hadn’t gotten much of her sister’s past life which was to be expected. They’d only been back for a few days. But her accent did intrigue her. Zelena had explained that she was actually a mogul. She ran a few businesses and was based mostly in Europe. She had homes throughout different countries but had spent the majority of her time in London which was where the accent came from.

Zelena had offered a chance for her and her mother to spend time with her while they sorted out the next steps in their lives. Maybe together, they could become the family that she and Regina had been cheated out of their entire lives.

Regina had instantly accepted. There was nothing left here for her. Emma had instantly retreated into becoming a Charming since the curse had broken. The first time she’d seen her since the night they’d spent together was when she’d handed her the papers claiming guardianship of Henry for what she deemed his own safety.

Regina had allowed it even though she knew it wasn’t right. But this was Storybrooke. It was a part of the new world but mentally everyone was still stuck in the Enchanted Forest. Even if she’d tried
no one would stand beside her against the Charmings. So she’d allowed the farce of going along with them if it meant they’d be able to keep the peace. And though she didn’t want to admit it to anyone it was a break that she’d wanted just as much as everyone else.

Henry was thrilled that he was part of the good guy heroes that he idolized so much. He seemed to prefer her to be forgotten as well. Regina was tired of the fight. So she’d just given up.

Now she had positive proof that her life wasn’t over. It was the only thing that had gotten her moving out of the bed since her return. She knew her little girl was out there waiting for her. She just had to find her.

Zelena assured her that the child wasn’t a Storybrooke child. And with that worry taken care of Regina saw no other reason to continue to tether herself to this place that had caused her so much misery.

“Ready?” Zelena asked as she, Cora, and Regina stood in a circle. She had already poofed Regina’s beloved car over to her home. Regina had been adamant about not leaving it nor her other treasures behind.

Again Regina went through her incantations to seal and protect the vault. She knew it was silly. They were taking all of its contents with them. But the thought of someone vandalizing the place still made her queasy.

Regina looked around at the emptiness. It seemed so much smaller with all of the furnishings gone. Again her answer was a solemn nod.

Cora kissed her atop her head. She wrapped an arm around her as Zelena wrapped her arms around the two of them. She poofed them all over to home in the England countryside.

Regina shook her head in amazement. “I still can’t believe you can do that,” she said as she looked around at the stylish yet comfortable home. “Magic isn’t supposed to exist outside of Storybrooke.”

“There’s plenty you don’t know about me yet, sister,” Zelena pinched her cheek. “But you will learn all there is to know,” she smiled at her before giving her a hug.

And Regina accepted. Until her stomach began to act up. She clutched at it as she bent over. “Bathroom,” she managed to get out before clamping a hand over her mouth.

Her sister looked at her alarmed before pointing down the hallway. Regina took off at a run. She barely made it on time. She slammed the door behind her before emptying the contents of her stomach into the toilet.

Zelena turned to Cora, “When are you going to tell her that she’s pregnant?”

They both grimaced as they listened to the upheaval happening behind the closed door.

Cora looked worriedly after her youngest daughter. She pulled Zelena into her arms and gave her a kiss, “When she’s ready to listen.”

CF

Emma cursed and berated herself as she hid behind a shrub. She watched from her hiding place as her Mother and son walked down the street on their way to school. She’d already seen David heading for the station a few minutes earlier.
Emma was still doing all she could to avoid the family. It was just so – overwhelming. She needed her space and yet all they wanted was for her to be the perfect daughter, princess, and with Henry some leaping buildings in single bounds super hero. It took a lot out of her to placate them. Instead she chose to be at work all night citing the safety of the town as an excuse for why their peaceful little town needed a full time lawperson on duty.

The night duty which seemed to consist of patrolling around while she did her best not to think of her wreck of a personal life or the woman who even in her absence was still the center of her thoughts. She’d swear she’d only do one drive around her block just to make sure things were alright there. But each time she’d be awakened by the morning sun she’d known she’d screwed up again.

She’d recently taken to parking the car and staking out the house from a covert location a few houses down. She’d wait and watch all night but nothing. And she was beginning to get genuinely worried. As far as she could tell no one had seen hide nor hair of her former lover anywhere. Not even at the grocery store.

Emma swore she’d give her space for one more night. Then she’d bang on the door and demand to know what was going on. The only thing that had stopped her so far was her own guilt and shame. She’d been blowing off Regina ever since the curse had broken. They’d spent that one last night clinging to one another desperately knowing that by morning everything would change. And it had.

Her parents had immediately cornered her and made it clear that they expected her to be on their side of the battle line between them and Regina. And Henry’s reaction was worse. She’d actually felt queasy at the glee that he took in joining them against the only Mother he’d ever known his entire life.

She told herself it was a good thing that he was adjusting so well. But when the idea of Henry staying with them had first been floated it was merely meant to be temporary. Until they could build trust in allowing Regina into their lives.

But Emma knew there was no turning back once the deed was done. And knowing that she was the cause of so much pain to a woman who’d done all the things for her son that she herself couldn’t and hadn’t tore her up inside. But she was a Charming. Regina was the Evil Queen. That was just the black and white world they lived in now.

Emma waited until Henry and Snow were at least a block away before making her way to their apartment. The place was too small for the 4 of them but she didn’t want to rock the boat. Her parents swore they all needed time to get to know one another. And apparently being stuck in a tiny apartment like sardines was the only way to go. So as usual Emma went along with them without complaint while she swallowed down the hate she was feeling toward herself and feelings she still refused to name toward them.

“Emma!”

Emma’s head swung around to see who it was that was speaking to her. She was still learning people in the town. Their real names and their characters were all a bit of a blur though hugging her and randomly talking to her seemed to be something all the citizens felt comfortable with.

“We were just on our way up,” Moe French stepped out from the back of a moving van. He handed her a clipboard, “you need to sign here. You’re in apartment 4b right?”

“Yes,” Emma said tentatively. “What’s going on?”

“The Queen said these were Henry’s things. She left strict instructions that if they weren’t received
that would be donated to the church.”

Emma’s heart rate sped up. She shook her head to clear it, “I – I don’t understand.”

“Henry’s things. If he doesn’t want them then she said we could take what we wanted of what was left and donate the rest. We figured we’d drop them off here and you all can sort through it then let us know and we’ll drop by and pick up what’s left and take it to the church.”

Emma quickly penned her signature and handed back the clipboard. Tears stung her eyes but she refused to let them fall. “I’ll just open up the place. Your men can follow along,” she turned and jogged up the 2 flights of stairs before pulling out her keys and opening the door.

Box after box became stacked in living room. She thanked the moving men and closed the door staring at them. They were all neatly labeled. She remembered once lying in bed and teasing Regina over her OCD. She really wished she could turn time back to those days.

As she looked at the boxes that contained Henry’s life she began to get angry. Who in the hell did she think she was?!? The curse was broken. She was the Queen no longer.

Emma slammed her way out of the apartment. She jumped into her bug and made her way over to the mansion. She jumped out of the car and made her way to the door. But when she was close to the front porch she was thrown backward by some invisible wall.

She cradled her nose as she let out an ‘owww!’ She was surprised as she drew her hand back that it wasn’t bleeding. She tentatively put a hand in front of her trying to find it and sure enough she pulled her hand back quickly from the shock. “Screw this,” she said as she rose and wiped her sore backside. She knew that fall was going to leave a bruise there. Her nose still hurt but it obviously wasn’t broken.

She picked up handfuls of grass and threw them at the barrier. She managed to mark that it went all around the house. When she got to the side of the house she almost lost it. Regina’s beloved apple tree was missing. Emma tried walking forward and ended up being shocked by the force field again. She stood and stared forlornly at the empty spot where the tree should be that mirrored how she felt inside.

She walked back to her car slowly still confused. “She wouldn’t,” she said under her breath. This was Regina’s home. It just wasn’t possible for her to be gone. Then she remembered her vault. She put the car in drive and made it there as fast as she could. When she got to the vault she encountered the same force field.

Emma stood staring for a while. She was barely breathing because when she took a breath it came out in a gut wrenching sob. She was gone. Her Regina was gone. Her girlfriend who’d made her swear before the curse broke that things would never change between them as they lay whispering together as lovers did had just left without a trace.

She wiped furiously at the tears that continued making their way down her face. She walked back to her car and got inside. She hung her head on the steering wheel and just cried.
CHAPTER 10

When Emma awoke she was surprised to see she had fallen asleep. She hadn't meant to at all. She sat for a couple of minutes just getting her bearings before the day came flooding back to her. Regina was gone. And that sat as well with her as a stone in her belly.

She grabbed her phone. She noticed she had missed calls and texts from her parents. She ignored the calls and answered the texts. She let them know she was fine before they sent out a search party. She told them she'd meet them at their place later.

When they tried calling her, she dismissed them. Instead she dialed Regina's number. The first time she called she hung up knowing that it was a mistake. The second time she called she listened to the recording telling her the number was no longer in service and began to get angry.

"Damn her! Damn her! Damn her!" she cried out as she beat her hand against the steering wheel. She looked out her window over at her vault. Then an idea hit her. She raced over to Regina's office in the town hall. She raced up the stairs and came face to face with her secretary who was sitting at her desk staring listlessly ahead of her.

"Hi," she greeted her cautiously. The woman stared at her in shock. "Is the Mayor in?"

The woman's head slowly went from side to side. "It's gone. Everything's gone."

Emma gave her a puzzled look and then walked past her into Regina's offices. There was nothing there. Just like the woman had said. Everything was gone.

"Do you know when she's coming back?" her secretary had come up behind her as she stood stock still in the doorway. "Maybe I should just go home."

"I'm sure this is just a temporary thing. But you going home for the day is a good idea," Emma nodded at the secretary. She nodded back then went and gathered her things. She left without another word.

Emma pulled out her phone again. This time she dialed Regina's home phone number. When that got her the same voice recording she almost threw it across the room in frustration. But there were photos of Regina and voicemails that had been left. She couldn't part with those right now. Even though her heart was still breaking, she knew that this was nothing but a blip. It was a bad spot they'd get over soon enough.

With nothing else to do, she went back to the apartment. When she got back there she immediately began going through the boxes. Most of it was random kid things. Henry's comics, some random
papers that looked like they'd probably been left in or on a desk, toys, old broken clocks, a globe.

But then she got to a box that had obviously been Regina's things. Emma swallowed down the thickness that had begun to build in her throat as she saw the contents. They were things that no mother should ever part with. Henry's baby book and baby blanket, endless pictures of the two of them throughout the years wearing twin grins plastered on their faces, old school projects. The one that made Emma drop the box and cry out before falling to her knees was the mold of Henry's handprint as a small child. Regina had always called it her most prized possession.

After she had calmed herself she noticed the top of the box. There was a little envelope attached to the it. She'd recognize Regina's neat careful scrawl anywhere. It was made out to Henry but she needed to know what was inside of it. She pulled it off and opened it.

Her hand flew to her mouth to hold back the sob choked in her throat. She gave herself a few minutes as she read the words once, thrice, 5 times over. She couldn't believe it.

She gave herself time to grieve although why the tears still hadn't stopped by now was beyond her. She didn't even know she had this many to give. But she needed to be strong now. For Henry at least. It was just her and him now.

She cleaned herself up. After her shower, she stared at herself in the mirror. She barely recognized the face staring back at her. It was a ghost. Literally. She was as white as a sheet. Her eyes and nose were red from all the crying but aside from that her face was just pasty and sickly looking. She shook her head and took out some make up to cover up with.

She wasn't a big makeup user or expert but she didn't want her son to see her looking like death on what was about to be the worst day of his life. She ended up using more than the usual lip gloss and mascara. She did her best to work a miracle to make herself look alive again. She came out of the bathroom and dressed. She still had time to kill so she organized the boxes as best she could before taking a seat on the sofa. She sat with the note in her hand and waited.

XO

Emma was in the living room when her family got home. She could hear Henry chirping away before the door even opened. She sat on the sofa facing the door with her knees apart and her elbows on them. Her hands dangled in between them with the note for Henry still in her hands. She was just turning it around and around the note.

"Wow! Mom! You're here," Henry ran over and gave her a hug. She gave him a sad smile and hugged him back. She started to pull away but stopped. He was the only thing left of Regina that she had anymore. She pulled him closer and held him tight.

When she let him go he looked around, "You got my things Mom?" he asked excitedly as he recognized his bedroom.

"No Henry. Your Mom sent them over."

Henry stilled for a moment before shrugging it off. He flicked his wrist at her, "You're my real Mom."

"Yes, she is," Snow gushed. She pinched his cheek and then pulled him into a loose side hug, "And thanks to you we're all a real family now. It's about time Regina came to her senses."
Emma rose and stared her Mother down. She hadn't wanted to do it like this but between her and Regina she'd had no choice. "Come to her senses? She left! She left us without even talking to us or letting us know. She's just gone."

Snow stared at Emma confused. "And that's a good thing Emma. Now we can live in peace."

Emma shook her head at her as she compressed her lips. She didn't say another word but inside she was fuming.

Henry was happily going around looking through the boxes, "It's all here!"

David walked in at that moment. He looked around confused. "Hi family. What's going on here?"

"The Evil Queen is dead!" Henry crooned as he ripped open another box. He had finally gotten to the one that held his childhood projects and photo albums. It wasn't until then that his face faltered. He stared at the box with his face twisted in something between confusion and something else that was unreadable.

Emma just watched him. She had been angry at his comment and was about to reprimand him for it. But as she saw the pause on his face she knew.

Henry had been acting as if he was on this great family vacation. He was living off of the high of having the curse broken. But in that pause she saw the truth. He'd just realized he'd lost his family. She stepped toward him. "Henry, there's something you need to read." She put her arm around him and led him upstairs to the room they were sharing.

Henry sat on his little cot. It was all they could throw together since no one had planned their day to finish the way it had when it had started. The day the curse broke had been a normal day. Until Henry bit into the poisoned turnover. Then the world changed in a matter of minutes. They were all still trying to catch up.

Emma had never been good at talking. She didn't really have anything planned to say. "Your Mom left you this," she held the envelope out to him. "I'll give you some privacy."

Henry had taken it and looked at it confused. Emma went outside the door and waited on the landing of the stairs.

Henry hadn't given his customary brat retort of she's not my Mom when Emma had handed him the envelope. Emma knew that sweet boy she had met before the curse broke and everything went to hell in a handbasket was still in there somewhere. She waited for some sign that he needed her.

The note didn't take long to read. It was only a few lines. Emma had memorized them all. And they had nearly killed Emma.

The fact that it was so casual was heartbreaking. And the impersonal tone from a woman she'd always associated with fire and burning passions and big brown emotion filled eyes had hurt. The fact that it was short and to the point made her angry. It looked like it had been jotted down quickly and without any forethought.

Emma was insulted on her behalf and Henry's. After a lifetime of raising the boy she could've at least done better. It wasn't even a real note. Just something she'd jotted down. She could've used a post it instead of the expensive stationary that still smelled of her.

Henry,
I hope you find what makes you happy.

Goodbye.

First she heard sniffling. Then muffled crying. He didn't ask for her though. So she made her way back downstairs.

Her parents were trying to reorganize Henry's things.

"I don't think that bed's going to fit in your room honey. We're going to have to put it in storage. And whatever else Henry doesn't need for right now too," David said as he looked over the larger furniture items.

Snow just shook her head, "Leave it to the Evil Queen to do something so outrageous."

"Don't call her that!" Emma yelled.

Her parent's heads whipped around to her. They looked at her in shock. "It's who she is."

Emma shook her head. "You don't know who she is. She's Henry's Mom. And for that alone she deserves more respect."

"You're his Mom," Snow insisted. "And trust me I do know Regina well. She was my stepmother for years before she decided to try and kill me."

"It's not like she's the only person who's ever done that," Emma snarked. "And you're still here anyway. So you got the win. I think we should leave it at that." Emma began to leave but turned back around. "By the way, you don't have to put these things in storage. I'm looking for my own place. Henry and I will be gone as soon as I find one."

Emma left her gaping parents to stare after her as she made her way to her car. She jumped in and headed for the Rabbit Hole. She needed a drink.

Chapter End Notes

***The next chapter will be all about the business. I promise I will update within a few days. Just gotta give my other fics some love first. :D See ya on the other side.***
Revelations

CHAPTER 11

Regina watched as the contents of her stomach emptied out into the toilet. The stomach bug she’d caught had just refused to go away. She had no idea how that much had even come up since she’d barely been eating.

She’d been sick pretty much since she’d come to live with her sister. First she’d blamed it on the move. But the sickness refused to let up. It had been almost 2 months now. Honestly she was starting to get a little worried.

She cleaned her mouth out with toilet paper before flushing. Her vacating her stomach had left her weak so she stretched out and lay on the cooled tiled floor. When she’d gotten her strength back she’d risen and brushed her teeth. Then she slowly made her way back to bed. She climbed between the cool sheets and fell asleep.

So much had changed in her life since coming here. She, Cora, and Zelena were all working together to become a family. They all even went to counseling together. It wasn’t easy. They were all private people who were used to keeping their pain on the inside. And there were so many open wounds that it seemed like there was no way they’d ever heal. But they knew it was worth it and stuck with it anyway.

Regina and Cora kept busy helping Zelena out at her company. She was CEO of a company that sold and acquired different companies. It allowed her great wealth and freedom to do whatever she chose. But the best perk for her was that there was also a philanthropic arm of her company. She had put Regina in charge of it. Giving back was important to them all. They felt it helped aid in atonement for past deeds. Plus they loved the work. And for them it helped keep them constantly challenged and constantly busy at work that they loved to do.

Right now Regina was working to set up a school that would house, educate, and provide a stable and safe environment for children who were in foster care. They would get everything they needed to succeed from infancy all the way up through them finishing their degrees. She was also putting together a wildlife sanctuary that would provide refuge to endangered species, a local no kill pet shelter, a shelter for homeless, a transitional housing program, and a housing program that would house and educate at risk youth who had no place else to turn. It was a huge undertaking but Regina had always loved challenges. Her time as Mayor had provided her with all of the skills she’d need to succeed at this current post.

Zelena had already confided that her driving force had been her adoption into a family that she spent her entire life never feeling apart of. She had confided in her Mother and sister that she’d never felt loved or accepted by them. It had left deep scars within her that she hoped her philanthropy would help to heal in other children. Her goal was for no child or animal to ever lack home, food, and a safe place to call their own.

Cora helped as best she could. But right now that wasn’t much. Zelena had hired her a personal assistant who was helping to bring her into the 21st century. Regina had spent her first couple of weeks here just teaching Cora the basics of indoor plumbing, using kitchen appliances, driving, and filling out paperwork that asked for basic information. Before they’d left Storybrooke, Regina had set up herself and her Mother both with new identities that had verifiable paper trails attached to them such as licenses, social security cards, birth certificates, bank accounts, and work histories. The
background information would come in useful in case anyone ever did a background check on them.

Cora’s personal assistant was handling the driving for now but eventually the goal was for Cora to be 100% self-sufficient and not bring attention to the fact that she’d literally only just arrived in this world. She was learning to type and use a computer though Zelena had had to restrict her internet access until she’d managed to learn more social skills and taken courses on internet safety. For now, they mainly kept her safe by making sure she was never left alone for too long.

At lunchtime, Zelena left her office and headed home. It had become a habit for them to all meet up at mealtimes and discuss their days. When Regina failed to come down she and Cora looked at one another worried. They both made their way up to her room. They found Regina fast asleep.

“I think it’s time you told her the truth,” Zelena said to her Mother.

Cora sighed and nodded. She made her way into her daughter’s bedroom and smoothed her hair back, “Regina? Regina dear it’s time to wake up.”

“No,” Regina growled as she pulled the blankets above her head. “I’m sick and tired.”

“You’re not sick,” Cora informed her as she took a seat on the bed beside her. Zelena sat on the other side of the spacious bed.

“How the hell would you know?!?!” Regina growled as she pulled the blankets tighter around herself. “You don’t know me. And those pills you’ve given me have done absolutely nothing.”

Hurt flashed behind Cora’s eyes. But she pulled herself together. Since they’d been together Zelena and Regina would occasionally have flare-ups of the pain that Cora had caused them throughout her life.

Cora accepted their lashing out. She knew she deserved that and so much more for her past deeds. But she was working hard to make up for them. Some days were better than others for all of them. They were all trying to find a balance between reconciling their pasts and moving on to brighter futures.

“I know because I’ve had the same thing. Twice, actually,” she smiled down at her babygirl as Regina peeked out at her from underneath the blanket.

“What are you talking about?” Regina had thought this was just some weird bug or else just stress. Now she was worried, “This runs in our family? What has the doctor said about it?”

“Well, the first time, a few months later I had your sister. And the second time I had you,” Cora’s smile grew bigger as she watched her daughter’s face go from alarmed to dawning with understanding.

“What?!?!” Regina was sure Cora couldn’t be saying what she thought she was saying. There was no way in hell she was pregnant.

Cora looked nervously over to Zelena who nodded to her. She turned back to her Regina, “You’re pregnant dear. And those pills came from your sister.”

Zelena leaned into her sister’s field of vision, “They’re prenatal vitamins and folic acid. They’re the best brands that I could find until you get to the doctor and get your own.”

Regina gaped at the two of them not sure what to make of this announcement. Then her temper flared up. She compressed her lips into a tight line as she gritted her teeth. She thought they were
working at being a family. She began to get angry at having been taken by these two. She thought they were trying to build a family. Apparently not.

She shot up in the bed. Then immediately regretted it. Her head was already spinning. She held it between her two hands and used all of her willpower to stop the merry-go-round that was going on within, “I haven’t done anything to -,” her voice started to falter as she thought back to before coming here. She wrapped loving arms around her belly as her face lit up, “Daniel?”

“No,” Zelena was quick to douse out that one. She shook her head, “there’s no way. He’s been dead for like 300 years or so. You need to remember who you were doing before Daniel.”

“I wasn’t doing anyone! I don’t sleep around. I’ve only been with -,,” again her voice faltered as she remembered that wasn’t completely true. There was someone else - but no. Regina shook began to shake her head. God, please no. It couldn’t be, “No, no, no, no.” She turned on her sister, “You said Blue wasn’t from Storybrooke.”

Cora and Zelena exchanged a look. Regina caught it and her temper began to flare higher. “Tell me!” she demanded.

“I don’t know who that little girl was,” Zelena confessed.

“What do you mean?! She was there with us the entire time! Me, Daniel, Mother, and you. Don’t pretend she wasn’t real.”

“Oh she was real alright,” Zelena confirmed for her. Regina let out a breath she’d been holding upon hearing that. “But I didn’t bring her there.”

Regina’s forehead furrowed, “What are you talking about? You had us in that – netherland or whatever for weeks.”

Zelena sighed. “And as I explained Mother thought that it was necessary for you so that she could talk to you since she didn’t think you’d give her a chance any other way. Daniel showed up on his own. But that child, well, you brought her there.”

‘How could I bring her there? I don’t even know where there is. And I don’t know how to do any of that,” Regina flicked her wrist out. She’d been aware from the beginning that her sister was quite powerful. Even more so than their Mother. It practically vibrated off the two of them.

But she’d been shocked to see that her magic was also firmly intact. And it seemed stronger than it had ever been before. She shouldn’t be able to do magic at all outside of Storybrooke. But for some reason she had been able to conjure up almost all of her old tricks.

“You were obviously pregnant when you got there,” at her sister’s obvious protest Zelena held up her hand to stop her before she started. “And although I’m sure the sex was great judging from all the screaming and vast amounts of time the two of you spent in that room together the fact still remains that the dead CANNOT make a child with the living.”

“But - ,” Regina just refused to get past it. There had to be some mistake. Daniel had to be Blue’s father. Because the only alternative – wasn’t one that she wanted to acknowledge. Already just the thought of it was causing her to be sickened again.

Zelena knew this was going to be difficult. She took a deep breath and moistened her lips. “When I found you, you should’ve been gone. But there was this light radiating from within you. I think - ,” she shook her head, ‘No. I’m sure that was your baby. She was healing you from the inside. And she did say repeatedly that she was yours. Plus she has your eyes.”
Cora nodded and clasped her daughters hand in hers. “The soul can only be apart from the body for so long before it starts to die. She got sick because she needed you to return. And Daniel understood it was what was best for you. He wanted you to live. And to be happy.”

Regina’s head was reeling. Daniel’s sacrifice had been just as painful the second time around. She was trying hard to fulfill her promise to him to only strive for happiness while letting go of things that made her unhappy. She had thought that at least she had a beautiful girl to look forward to. And she was looking forward to meeting her baby again someday. Blue was a chance for her to regain her happiness. And also redeem herself as a Mother.

Tears began to well in her eyes as she looked at her Mother. “I wanted it to be him so bad.”

Cora pulled her daughter into her arms, “I know dear. I know. And I’m so sorry for taking that away from you.”

Regina gave into her sobs. She wrapped her arms around her Mother and sobbed on her shoulder. Cora held her tight as Zelena rubbed her back in soothing circles. When the sobbing died down she pulled away. She began fumbling for kleenex.

“If it was a one nighter stand, we understand,” Cora told her. Regina quirked her eyebrow at her Mother. Cora was still trying to get modern slang down. “We’ve all been there dear.”

“Eww,” Zelena and Regina said together.

Cora smiled at her daughters, “I did have a life before coming here, you know.”

Neither daughter wanted to hear about their Mother’s sex life. And Cora had proven not to be shy when discussing any of her past. Zelena hurriedly turned to her sister and asked, “so who’s the father?”

Regina was cleaning her nose when images began to flash through her mind. The child calling herself a Swan princess. Her blonde hair and dimples. Her carrying around that damned swan like it was permanently attached to her. That damned ugly duckling book. Emma had once confided in her that she’d always felt like the ugly duckling who didn’t belong anywhere. But as she got older she worked really hard at turning herself into a swan.

“Oh no,” Regina groaned as she held her head again.

“What’s wrong? Are you hurting?” Zelena looked her little sister over from top to bottom. “Because you really do need to get to the doctor. I already made you an appointment for 2 today.”

“Mother,” Regina corrected. At the confused looks on her sister and Mother’s faces she clarified, “there is no father. I haven’t been with any men in a while. The only person I’ve been with like that is a woman.”

Cora smiled and patted her hand, “There’s no shame in that either dear. We’ve all been there too.”

Regina blinked repeatedly at her Mother. That woman had a lot to explain. But she wasn’t sure she was brave enough to listen to everything. Although their therapy sessions were going well they had only just begun to mend fences. “it’s Emma,” she admitted.

“Emma?!?!?” Regina had told them both about her life. She’d gone over the Evil Queen phase, the curse, the breaking of the curse, Henry, and Emma. She’d told them she was just glad to let that part of her life go forever. She never wanted anything to do with either one of them. They were the unhappiness and ugliness that she was learning to let go of.
“Well,” Zelena interrupted the introspection. “I have to get back to work soon. You’re going to need to get up and we can do a late lunch before your appointment,” Zelena began to walk out the room. “I’ll be in my office when you’re ready.”

“Would you like me to help you get dressed dear?”

Regina smiled at her Mother. As neglectful as she had been to her as a child and young adult, she was making up for that by being overly attentive now that they were all together. “No Mother. I’m fine. I need a little time alone anyway.”

Cora nodded and left.

Regina let out another groan and dropped back down into the bed. She wanted this. She really did. She couldn’t wait to meet her baby Blue. But to have to share her with – that family. She wasn’t sure if she was up for that.

She got up and went through her morning routine. Then she went to find her sister and Mother.

The three of them had a light lunch at a nice restaurant before making their way to Regina’s appointment.

Zelena had looked all over and found her the best OB that England had to offer. At the doctor's office, Regina’s pregnancy was confirmed. She was almost 4 months along already. She couldn’t believe it had been that long since her curse had broken and her world had turned upside down. She got multiple copies of the ultrasound along with books on pregnancy, prescriptions for vitamins, and a complimentary baby bag. She was also handed an appointment card for her follow up.

“I still have to tell Emma,” she told her Mom and sister as they walked toward the in-house pharmacy. No matter how much she was going to hate to do so, there was no way around Emma being the other parent. Even though Regina didn't want any of the Charmings involved in her life she felt Emma had a right to at least know about Blue.

Cora's face was confused and concerned as she asked, “How do you plan on doing that dear?” Cora and Zelena were completely clear about the circumstances that had driven Regina to take such a drastic step as trying to end her own life. They both still worried about her.

Regina handed her prescriptions over at the front desk and went to have a seat to wait for them. She sat between her Mother and sister and chewed her bottom lip, “I don’t know,” she answered truthfully. “I still don’t want her to be a part of my life. I’d rather she just gave me custody and walked away.”

“That can be arranged,” Zelena said before taking her phone out of her purse and making a call to her lawyers. When she got disconnected, she smiled over at her sister, “Mission accomplished. They’ll draw up the papers immediately.”

Regina was shocked, “That easily?”

Zelena flicked her wrist at her, “You’d be surprised how easy it is to give up a child. Anyway, who’s going to believe she’s biologically related to two women? There’s nothing Emma can do to fight you on this. She keeps Henry. We keep Blue. I’d say it’s a win-win.”

Zelena seemed satisfied but Regina knew better. She knew to never underestimate when it came to those damned Charmings. But then her name was called and she rose to collect her prescriptions.

They were walking toward the carpark when Zelena stopped to run into a corner shop. Cora and
Regina walked the candy aisles. Their sweet tooths had been raging lately. Neither one of them could get enough chocolate in their system. After buying out half the aisle they walked out with satisfied smiles on their faces.

“Here,” Zelena handed Regina a phone.

Regina's brow furrowed, “What’s this for?” When Regina left Storybrooke she had cut off any and all ties that connected her to that place. Which included getting rid of her cellphone. She and Cora had already gotten new phones when they came to this country.

“It’s a burner,” Zelena grinned at her. When Regina continued to look confused she continued, ”You can leave her a message to meet you somewhere. Then toss it. We go to the meeting place and if she doesn’t show up then it’s on her,” Zelena shrugged.

“What should I say?” Regina was nervous. She hadn’t spoken to nor seen Emma since she thrust that paper in her face about taking custody of Henry. She really wasn’t looking forward to this conversation at all.

“Just let her know that you have something serious to talk to her about. And make sure that it’s in a public place. I’ll be there with you,” Zelena took her hand in hers and squeezed it.

Regina nodded. She gathered her thoughts then began typing. She sent out the text and made sure it came back successful. Then she turned the phone off and tossed it in the nearest bin.

“I told her to meet me tomorrow at the pier. It’s two towns over from Storybrooke. I told her to come alone so hopefully she won’t bring Henry. I really don’t want to see him at all.” Her face glazed over but then she shrugged it off, “Now it’s up to her.”

“You don’t think tomorrow’s too soon dear?” Cora asked. She wasn't sure how any of this was going to work. She just knew that Regina was still in a vulnerable place and she didn’t want her to get into anything too emotional in her current state. They were all already dealing with so much.

Regina shook her head, “I want this over and done with.”

SF

Emma had gotten a call that Henry hadn’t shown up for school. She’d looked all over for him and finally found him sitting down in the driveway at the side of his old house. He was staring at the crater where Regina’s apple tree used to live. Emma sighed when she realized he’d must’ve just found out the hard way that there was a barrier around it.

Henry had been having a harder time than she was dealing with Regina’s absence. They were both weighted down by guilt and hurt. But Henry had also been doing everything he could to push Regina out of his life for the past year and a half. The words he’d used to wound her cut Emma just as deep. She wondered again for about the 50th time if she needed to get them both to see Dr. Hopper. It couldn’t hurt she supposed as she made a mental note to call for an appointment.

She got out of the car and walked over to him. She crouched down next to him, “are you okay?”

Henry sniffled. He was just sitting and staring at the empty crater and pulling up bits of grass and shredding them before tossing them and picking up more. “I’m fine.”

Emma’s heart broke seeing her son’s heartache. She knew he was carrying his pain buried deep. She also knew that holding it inside wasn’t healthy.
She had found them a new place right across from her parents. And they were trying to become a family. They were still in the early stages of learning one another's habits and whatnot. But there were still more silences between them than words.

Emma was trying her best. But it was so hard. It hadn’t been this hard before Regina left. But the crater she’d left vacant in them matched the one in her backyard.

“Henry, you can’t leave school like this anymore. The curse is broken. And your behavior has to get better. You got everything you wanted. You should be happy now.” Emma leaned back from the vehemence of the glare he threw at her. She could feel it burning a hole right through her.

“Yeah whatever,” Henry got up and walked around to the car. He jumped into the passenger seat without looking back.

Emma sighed and followed him. When she got back to the car her phone pinged. She absently pulled out her phone and looked at it. Then she did a double take. It was a text from some unknown phone. She read it through quickly in shock. It said: **This is Regina. I need to speak with you about something important. Please meet me at the pier, slip 12 alone at 11 am. We have a lot to talk about.**

Emma gulped. This was the first contact she’d had with her since leaving her standing in her doorway the day after Snow used her to kill Cora. She fell into her seat in the car.

Henry broke her reverie, “What is it?” he asked from beside her.

“No- nothing,” Emma said. She put the key in the ignition. “Just an old text. Nothing important at all,” she closed the door and took off for their new apartment.

But she was hunched over the steering wheel talking to herself quietly the entire way. Henry knew something was wrong. And whatever it was she didn’t want him to know about it.

He sighed. He’d lost one mother. He didn’t want to lose the one he had left. He knew he’d have to wait until she was busy to get to her phone and read it for himself. He made it his next mission.
** So, I'm not going to make anymore empty promises at trying to get out a chapter a week because I can already tell you that my life will continue to be chaotic at least until mid-May. I have managed to finish Sweet Child of Mine and My Tourniquet has reached its turning point. And I have put up a few new stories that you all should check out. I will try my hardest but updates from here on out will be sporadic. Thank you for sticking with me on this journey though. I do promise it will be a wild ride. ;) **

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CHAPTER 12

Regina is fidgeting at the full length mirror in her bedroom as she stares at her reflection. A frown is plastered on her face as she pushes her palm self-consciously into her tummy that is taking on a bulge that only the shrewdest eye would detect. And of all the things that she can say Emma's guilty of, being shrewd wouldn't even be on the list.

"Are you ready?" Cora asks from behind her.

Regina turns and her frown grows bigger as she takes in her sister (and she’s still not used to that yet) walking into her room behind their Mother. Her face pinned with a curious expression as she watches her little sister.

She sighs even as she nods and turns back to the mirror. Her stomach is rolling with butterflies. She feels bile in the back of her throat and she's not sure if it's her nerves or if it's the morning sickness that she's been told should stop soon. "I guess," she answers quietly as she looks over her reflection one last time.

"We don't have to do it today," Zelena offers. "We can reschedule. I mean, you've barely had time to get used to anything."

Regina's face grows pensive as she thinks this over. Her brow furrows and her lips pucker before she shakes her head, "No. Let's just get this over with," she leans over the bed, grabs up her coat, and begins to put it on. She grabbed her purse and went through it making sure she had all the paperwork she had for Emma inside.

Cora walks over and gives her a hug. She kisses her daughter's cheek and offers her up a smile. She pats her shyly on the arm as she pulls back, "It'll be fine dear. And you'll be back home in no time."

Regina smiles shyly back at her. She is also still learning this. This family thing. This is the way
Mother's are supposed to behave toward their children. Love, comfort and cherish them as she once did to Henry as opposed to the loneliness, misery, nightmare inducing behaviors, and abuse of her childhood.

It's taken her two different lifetimes to get to this place. Henry used to be the only person that showing affection came freely and easily with. There had been others before him. Namely her father and always with Daniel. Now she has a sister and a Mother who are none of them perfect. But they're trying. And that's good. For now it has to be enough. Because she never thought she'd have this. And she's grown enough since Henry first brought Emma home that she feels she's at a place to accept it.

She turns to her sister and takes a huge gulping breath before saying, "I guess it's time."

Zelena nods and walks over to her sister. She puts her arm around her as both girls turn toward their Mother with smiles. Cora waves as the duo poofs away.

They arrive at the entrance to the marina. Regina notices as they walk to the pier that she chose as the rendezvous point for her meeting with Emma that her steps are heavier. Even though the scale at the doctor's office just yesterday revealed she'd lost weight her heavy steps carrying her body forward tells her differently. Again she self-consciously pushes down on her tummy as she keeps an eye peeled for Emma's entrance.

Zelena steers them over to a bench in the almost empty marina. She takes a seat beside her sister as she looks around her, "What made you choose here?"

Regina impatiently flips her bangs out of her eyes as she looks around. Her hair is getting longer and she's considering letting it grow out of its usually well styled bob, "Emma and I would come here sometimes to just get away from things." She pointed toward the water with a mischievous grin, "go over there and look over the rail."

Zelena follows her sister's directions. After looking out over the water she turns back toward her with a grin. Regina grins back at her as she watches her sister turn back out toward the water again. When the weather is right a colony of seals uses this as one of their stops along their migration route. But even from where she sits the smell that she never noticed before is making her queasy so she stays back content on watching her sister.

Zelena has been a welcome addition to the family. She gave Regina the gift of a lifetime. To experience what her life would've been like with Daniel. Though the cost of losing him was as painful the second time around as the first it was still a gift. And for that alone Regina could never thank her enough.

But Zelena had also opened her house and life to her and their Mother. And for that too Regina is grateful.

Her affection for her big sister is evident as she watches her stride back towards the bench that she waits at. Despite her bright red hair, pale skin, and startling clear blue eyes Zelena looks even more like their Mother now than ever before.

She sits back down beside Regina with a carefree smile before glancing over at her. "Are you okay?" and though the concern that can be clearly heard in her sister's voice annoys her, Regina pushes it aside to answer honestly.

"I'm nervous. I have no idea what to say," Regina begins playing with her fingers. "I'm basically just winging it."
Zelena nods. As a family they've spent many nights cuddled together as they whisper softly to one another about their lives and past deeds. Both the good ones and the bad. There isn't much that's been left unsaid between them at this point. She's aware that because of the curse and also of Henry playing the two women against one another that her sister again missed a chance for love. She hoped that she, their Mother, and Blue could help fill the void inside of her. Even as Regina was insistent upon convincing herself that Henry was enough it was clear that wasn't true. It took the breaking of the curse to make it obvious to her that it was never true.

Henry became even more openly defiant and manipulative. He screamed how much he hated her and that she was evil every chance he got. He only loved her and she was only worthy of his attentions when he needed something from her. Like inhaling a curse that he understood was meant to cause death so that he could get Emma back. Not for her, but for himself. Because a storybook had told him that was his fairy tale happy ending. And Regina tried desperately to bury the anger, hurt, and betrayal that she felt when she watched her son embrace his 'real family' while not bothering to glance back at her while she collapsed under the curse's aftereffects.

Zelena draped her arm around her sister and brought her in for a hug. Regina sighed and laid her head upon her sister's shoulder. For a moment she allowed herself to just breathe in and out and enjoy what was. Thoughts of seeing her babygirl soon again and having her family around her brought a small smile to her face. And that was how Emma found the two women.

CF

Emma stared at herself in the mirror and growled. She angrily tore the top off that she had just tried on and tossed it along with her other previously discarded clothes that littered the bed.

She sat down heavily on the end of the bed and dropped her head into her hands. "Grr…," she jumped up and took a couple of jumps up and down. "Get a grip Emma. It's just Regina."

But it wasn't just Regina. Because Regina was no longer her Regina. Their relationship changed forever from the moment that Henry had bitten into that turnover and Regina had confirmed that his storybook was true.

Emma had been angry, hurt, and shocked. After Henry had gotten well her Mother (and she was still getting used to that too) had explained to her the specifics of the curse. Emma had been ready to spit nails as she ordered a judge to transfer custody of Henry over to her.

She was still at a loss. She and Regina had always been like oil poured in a fire. And she'd loved every minute of it. Their first sexual encounter came out of nowhere and took them both by surprise. One second the two of them had been in the middle of a heated argument as usual and the next they were laying on the cramped bed in the jail house panting beside one another from the most intense orgasm Emma had ever had. Then Regina had rose, gotten dressed, and left without another word. Until their last day together who had made the first move and who couldn't resist was an argument that both loved to plead ignorance to.

They went on like that for months. Eventually they had christened almost every part of the town. Then Emma had given Regina an ultimatum. Either define what it was they were doing or she was going to walk. The next thing she knew she was watching her son's eyes roll to the back of his head as he fell down into her arms.

Emma was instantly thrown into fighting a real life dragon, finding out that all these people were really fairy tale characters, her son had been right the entire time about his storybook, her parents were not only alive but younger than she was, she was living with her Mother and had swapped sex stories and secrets with her. And the worst yet, her secret girlfriend was the Evil Queen who'd
cursed everyone, tried killing her parents numerous times, and turned everyone's life upside down. Including hers. And there was no going back.

Emma’s instinct to run kicked in before she realized she had nowhere to run. The one person she wanted to talk to was Regina. But her parents were pulling her in the opposite direction. Even though Emma needed answers she was so overwhelmed that allowing them to take control just seemed so much easier. And as they were the 'real family' that Henry insisted on telling her about she'd been lulled by that little lost girl inside of her who'd always wanted nothing more than to have her own Mommy and Daddy.

But being the daughter of fairy tale folk and their Savior was not how Emma saw the rest of her life going. And the one person that she wanted to talk to about it had just packed up and left after trying to kill her.

Emma ran two frustrated hands through her hair before she started to just grab at what was handy. She settled on the trusted usual battle attire. Her boots, skinny jeans, and a sweater. She really shouldn't be trying to impress Regina anyway. Though for the life of her she couldn't figure out why she was agreeing to meet her anyway.

As she ran a brush through her hair the only thing she could come up with was that it had to be Regina reaching out to try and find a way back into Henry's life. And Emma had no idea how she felt about that. She sighed at her reflection before adding a few swipes of light foundation and a small amount of lip gloss. She grabbed her infamous red leather jacket and headed out the door.

Emma spent the drive from Storybrooke to the marina four towns over lost deep in thought. After asking Regina to define their relationship, the arguments that followed involved Regina telling her that she was too selfish and possessive. This had hurt Emma's feelings. She had thought that the fact that their encounters now ended with them lying next to one another talking quietly as they touched one another softly and slept together that they were ready for the next step. Apparently not as far as Regina was concerned.

From there the oil poured on gas effect would commence. After that they'd spend days avoiding one another before meeting in a frenzied haze of tongues, fingers, and mouths across warm skin. Emma was still prepared to just wait her out. She knew that Regina hated ultimatums. And figured it was just her usual pig-headedness that was causing these reactions. She figured she'd calm down after a while and things would settle down. Instead her entire life fell apart.

Emma had already informed her father that she'd be off today. She'd also asked her parents to keep Henry for the night just in case. She wasn't worried leaving the town for one night. And with not knowing what was going to happen at this meeting, she made sure that she had all her bases covered. Since Cora's death life had just returned to normal. Or as close as a previously cursed town full of fairy tale folk could ever be.

When Emma arrived at the marina, she looked around for Regina's car yet found nothing. But she shook off the nervousness that had begun to fill her belly. She parked her car, got out, and began to slowly walk toward the pier knowing that once again her entire life was about to take a turn that she wasn't in control of. And that was why her entire body felt like she was walking underwater. She concentrated on placing her feet one foot in front of the other and repeating until she could see Regina just up ahead.

Her breath catching in her throat told her that she was right even though she couldn't yet see her face. But the bob and the straight backed almost regal way that she carried herself were the most obvious telltale signs.
Emma began to move faster of her own accord until she noticed the tall, thin redhead grinning Regina's way. She slowed down as she watched her sit beside her and then casually place an arm around her. Anger, hurt, and even jealousy roared up inside of her as she kept walking.

When she rounded the bench, she saw that Regina had her eyes closed and her face glowed with a peaceful contentment. Emma's hands clenched into fists and her nails dug into her palms as tears pricked the back of her eyes. Regina sure had rebounded quickly while Emma's life seemed to continue to hang in tatters.

Emma said nothing as she stopped a few feet away. But Regina must have sensed a shift in the air. Her eyes blinked open slowly before they focused and fixed on Emma standing a couple of feet away. Emma thought ha! She'd finally gotten one over on the Queen.

Her glee was short-lived as she finally allowed herself to throw a passing glance at the redhead beside her. The woman's wide eyes were such a clear blue they were almost opaque. It kinda creeped her out.

Regina took a deep breath and sat up straight, "Hi."

Emma just stared at her hard. She began rocking on her feet as Regina's head dipped low. She folded her arms across her chest, "What do you want Regina?"

Regina saw Emma's eyes slip toward her sister before they went back to her. She sat up straight and gave Emma a small smile, "This is Zelena," she said even as her mind was searching for a way to introduce her sister. Zelena nodded at Emma who responded by narrowing her eyes at her.

An awkward silence followed before Zelena rose. She gestured to the storefronts on the marina, "I'm going to go and grab us some drinks." She looked at both women who were still avoiding looking directly at anyone. She frowned down at her sister, "unless you need me to stay?"

"She doesn't need a bodyguard," Emma snapped. "Especially not the Evil Queen," she said under her breath then immediately regretted it. Not because Regina's eyes widened with hurt but because snapping at your ex's new girlfriend wasn't cool. And that's precisely the appearance she wanted to give off right now even as she knew she was failing.

Zelena looked toward her sister who gave her a small almost imperceptible nod to let her know that she was okay. "Well, I'm off," Zelena announced to no one in particular before she walked away.

After she was out of earshot Emma again turned to Regina, "why did you summon me here? Or is this more about your Evil Queen act?"

Regina placed her palms alongside her on the bench. Her fingers curled over the edge of it, "we have a lot to talk about Emma."

"Do we?" Emma's voice came out angrier than she'd liked. She'd wanted to play this cool and she was cracking up inside already.

"Yes we do," Regina's head dipped once more as she tried gathering her thoughts. She silently cursed herself for her stupidity. She should've had a plan. She always had a plan. Until the day Emma had showed up out of nowhere on her doorstep.

"Well spit it out!" Emma snapped. Her inner turmoil lending her voice a bark she wasn't sure she meant. "I have a son to get home to."

Regina nodded before looking up into Emma's eyes, "will you sit?"
Emma didn't want to. But honestly her legs were about to give out anyway. So she sat in the spot Zelena had just vacated even though she made a big show of keeping as far away from Regina as she could.

Regina rummaged in her purse until she came across the envelope she'd placed inside yesterday. Inside were papers that only needed Emma's signature and a notary stamp to make official. Emma would have custody of Henry as long as she agreed not to try and make a claim on any other children that were in the custody of herself. There were also papers for Henry to change his name. Regina hated that he bore the name of the two men she loved most in the world. And finally, an ultrasound picture proving Regina's pregnancy. She looked at the envelope and took a deep breath before handing it over.

Emma looked at it suspiciously. "What's this?" she asked even as she was tearing it open. She got to the custody transfer papers first just as Regina had planned. She wrinkled her nose and looked at Regina, "You're giving me Henry?" Emma narrowed her eyes and looked Regina up and down, "Why?" Regina had spent months warring with her over Henry. Leaving town was one thing. But to give him up – Emma couldn't make sense of it.

"I'm pregnant," she answered quietly. She remained quiet as she allowed Emma to digest this news.

Emma's head snapped up. She stared straight ahead and clenched her jaw so tight she felt her teeth clink together with a loud noise. Her chest began to hurt and she realized she wasn't breathing. She took a long shuddering breath in as the pain inside her intensified.

She had thought she'd seen and done everything at this point. And even though she cursed herself repeatedly for even giving in to Regina's demand to meet her here, her giving up Henry had been enough of a shock. Compared to that, out of all of the reasons Regina had for bringing her out here, this one was nowhere on the list.

Emma gulped in a mouthful of the fresh, salty air. Her tongue darted out as she moistened her lips, "Fucking congratulations," she sneered. "I'm sure you and Strawberry Shortcake there will be happy. Hope she knows she's dating someone who'd abandon her and the baby as soon as a better offer came along."

Regina instantly understood that she had the wrong idea. She shook her head as she said softly, "Emma, it's yours."

"What?!" Now Emma's voice was coming out louder than she'd hoped. She noticed the handful of heads that had turned their way and ignored them, "Have you lost your mind?! I don't have the right equipment to get you pregnant. And if I did I would never have a baby with you. A woman who throws away her own kids doesn't deserve to have any."

Though Regina's insides were trembling she knew the pain Emma was determined to skewer her with was justified. "It's true," she said wishing she could stop her voice from coming out broken. She took a deep breath and blinked back the tears forming on her lashes, "It happens when two women have magic," she tried to explain before Emma cut her off.

"Did you ever care? About either one of us?!" Emma couldn't stop herself from asking. Her emotions were all over the place. And Regina admitting to even more betrayal than she thought possible ripped straight to Emma's core. She fought back the tears that threatened to fall as she tried desperately to appear strong even as she felt like her insides were caving in.

Regina tried to answer but again Emma cut her off. "You know what? I don't even care. Henry and I are and will continue to be just fine without you," Emma jumped up from the bench, her legs
brushing hard against Regina's sending a jolt throughout her entire body. She clutched the papers and envelope in a tightened fist as she kept her back straight. She walked away with as much dignity and her head held high as she could muster before making it back to her car.

"You okay?" Zelena asked as she came closer to her sister. She'd expected yelling and fighting. But it seemed that whatever had transpired between the two women had broken her sister. She put her arm around her as Regina collapsed into her sister's arms.

"No," she answered weakly as her tears began to fall. "Just please, take me home."

Zelena nodded and grabbed her sister's purse. She helped her up and began walking them to the entrance. When they got outside Zelena looked around making sure they were alone. Then she poofed them back home.

Neither woman saw or heard Emma's gasp as she sat in her car. She angrily swiped away at the tears that had fallen despite her best efforts at holding them at bay. Magic? Green magic? What the hell was going on here?!

Emma put her car into gear and drove off. Her mind gushing like a river that had just had a dam cleared out of it. Her thoughts were going a thousand miles an hour as the car ate away the miles between the marina and the place she now called home. Her tears never stopped falling the entire way.
Figuring It Out

Chapter Notes

I know I have other stories to update. But right now I'm battling a wicked case of writer's block. This story is so easy to write right now that I'm hoping concentrating on it will help knock me out of this slump I'm in.
Anyhew, enjoy! :D

CHAPTER 13

"David!" she heard what had to be the world's most annoying voice scream out.

Emma struggled to sit up as she tried desperately to get her stomach and head to stop spinning. She swung her legs dangling over the edge of the bed and buried her head in her hands as she tried to figure out why she was sitting up at all.

After returning from the marina, she'd gone straight to the bar. She wasn't in the mood to face her parents or even Henry yet. And she knew the first thing they'd all want out of her was what she'd been doing all day. The truth definitely wasn't something she was yet prepared to go into with them just yet.

Her drinking buddy Ruby had eventually shown up after her shift at the diner. When Emma had gotten belligerent to the point of crying and trying to start a fight with some male who'd been stupid enough to hit on her, she'd grabbed her and herded her toward the door. She helped her get back home even though Emma made it perfectly clear she didn't want anything from anyone. Although to be fair by this time she was 3 sheets to the wind and had no idea what she was saying. She only remembered the embarrassing puking twice as Ruby had to practically carry her. Then the ugly crying started up complete with phlegm rolling out of her nose and down her face.

Ruby had said nothing as she put her into a warm bath and helped her clean up. Then she put her in a tank top and some underwear before depositing her into the bed. And that's where Emma had been until that abominable screeching had started up.

Emma had always considered herself independent. Having to check in with other people was new to her. She tried to tell herself that's just what families did. But hers seemed even nosier and more judgmental than any she'd ever come across before. And as a former foster kid, she'd pretty much seen them all.

Emma jumped as she heard a shrill "Emma!" ring throughout her apartment. She groaned as she stood and stumbled to the door.

She held her head in her hand as she stared bleary-eyed at her parents. "For the love of all that is holy will you please stop with the damned screaming?!" she managed to choke out through a completely dehydrated throat. She began to do a zombie-like shuffle to the open kitchen while she went through the drawers looking for some headache meds.

When she finally found them in her spare drawer that held a little of everything, she popped 3 of them in her mouth and dry swallowed. Then she took another two just for good measure. Her face
contorted at the bitter taste that was left in her mouth. She shuffled over to the refrigerator and began to down some grape cranberry juice from the container. Then she took a bottle of water out and made her way over to the sofa where she collapsed against the cushions.

Snow stared at her daughter's disheveled appearance. It was almost 3 in the afternoon. She narrowed her eyes following her movements as Emma shuffled around the kitchen. She'd come over because she hadn't heard from her since she'd informed her Dad she was taking the day off and asked her Mom to keep Henry for the night. "What is this?" she asked in an accusatory voice as the envelope shook in her hand.

Emma squeezed her eyes tight as she got comfortable on the sofa. She pulled the duvet from the back of it around her shoulders as she lay her head down on the arm of the sofa, "what does it look like? An envelope," she muttered and made a face at how harsh her voice sounded. To Emma, it was tangible proof of her failings as a girlfriend and Emma never wanted to see it ever again.

David was standing and reading through some of the papers that Snow had obviously handed over to him, "it says here that Regina is giving you full uncontested custody," David smiled at his daughter. "That's great Em."

"If you say so," Emma muttered. The pills were thankfully starting to work. Emma frowned but didn't mention that this was her personal mail. And the envelope had been sealed when she'd come in last night. She was aware it would fall on deaf ears.

Snow continued perusing through the envelope. She gasped as her face got even whiter than it already was, "Emma," she said as she began shaking like a leaf. "What is this?" she strode over to where Emma had collapsed and was half-dozing on the sofa. She waved the ultrasound photograph underneath her nose.

Emma cracked open an eye only partway trying to identify what the hell could cause that voice to emanate from something that wasn't dying. "An ultrasound," she muttered with her face halfway in the pillow. She hoped her Mother would leave it at that. But wait – she forgot who she was dealing with.

Henry had obviously gotten his nosiness gene from his grandmother. Though if Emma had been more nosy maybe she would've known that Regina was sleeping with some guy when they were supposed to be together.

Her Mother gasped, "so you're pregnant?"

Emma snorted. Then cursed herself as her head began to ache again, "Regina is. You were right about her," she blinked her eyes open repeatedly as she tried hard to focus. "She tried to say that the baby was mine."

"Oh my God Emma, you didn't!" David screeched like no man should ever be caught dead doing.

"I thought you were done sleeping with her," Snow pouted. "Why didn't you tell me you were still having sex with her?"

David turned on his wife with his jaw hanging slack, "You knew about this?"

"I knew she had slept with her before the curse broke. I didn't know it was still going on," Snow turned from her husband to her daughter. "Emma!" she cried more insistently.

Emma was still entirely too hungover and her parents weren't making things any easier. She hadn't paid attention to any of their conversation but as her Mother insisted on shrieking her mind began to
process through slowly. She scoffed, "Since you haven't noticed," she stumbled through the obvious, "I don't have the right equipment to get anyone pregnant."

"Don't be absurd Emma. You both have magic," Snow tapped her foot and planted her hands on her hips while she glared her disapproval at her daughter. She continued to stand awaiting her daughter's explanation.

Emma's mind took a few minutes to catch up. She frowned as she remembered Regina saying the exact same thing to her. When her mind caught up to what her Mother had just said her eyes bulged and she sat up quickly. She grabbed her head as her eyesight swam before her. Thankfully the pills quickly began to dull the ache. "What the hell does that have to do with anything?!"

Snow and David exchanged a glance that Emma instantly caught. It was starting to make her angry. She started to think maybe she was sane afterall. I mean, if she were insane then she wouldn't be able to tell that her parents obviously were. Right? She rose on unsteady feet and glared at her parents, "What in the hell are you talking about?! Do you have any idea how nuts you sound?!"

The expressions on her parents' faces turned sheepish. They alternated looking at one another then away repeatedly.

Emma's breathing sped up and her eyes watered even though her mind hadn't fully put the picture together. She looked at the ultrasound photo that Snow had in her hand that she'd dropped to her side. She felt a stab of pain in her heart at the thought of Regina carrying someone else's child and again she felt cheated. It should've been theirs.

"Emma," Snow spoke as someone would when placating a small child before dropping into silence. She looked at the ultrasound photo that Snow had in her hand that she'd dropped to her side. She felt a stab of pain in her heart at the thought of Regina carrying someone else's child and again she felt cheated. It should've been theirs.

"Emma," Snow spoke as someone would when placating a small child before dropping into silence. She stepped forward and ran her hand up and down her daughter's arm. She led her back over to the sofa and sat down pulling Emma down beside her. David sandwiched her in on the other side.

Emma's head swung back and forth between her parent's faces. Snow's looked like she'd eaten something that had made her nauseous. David looked defeated yet resigned. "What?!!" she cried out when the silence stretched out too far and long.

"When two women have magic," Snow began once more adopting a voice that grated on Emma's nerves even more than her head was at the moment. "And they engage in – intercourse," Snow scowled as the offensive word dripped from her lips. She shifted uncomfortably like a teen in a sexed class, "then the two of them are able to create a life. With their magic," Snow finished up with her eyebrows raised to her hairline. She stared straight ahead of her with disappointment written clear across her face.

David put his hand on his daughter's shoulder, "But it's fine. We understand –," he looked her up and down uncomfortably. "You're an adult. But we're going to help you through this. As soon as the baby's born we'll get custody of that child too. And it will be like Regina never happened," he smiled brightly at her.

Snow beside her nodded emphatically, "No one ever even has to know."

Emma swung her head back and forth between the two. They were acting as if everything was solved and her life hadn't just turned itself upside down. Again.

The one thing Emma definitely understood was that her parents were confirming that Regina had been telling the truth. They had obviously made a child together. And Emma had run away before they had actually talked out the details of the situation.
Emma’s head swam as it processed this new information. Her neck swung back and forth as she took in the arrogant smiles on her parent's faces. They seemed so happy that they had figured out her life for her. Not just hers. Hers and her unborn child's. Again.

Even as the anger at their conceit grew inside of her something else was taking hold and blossoming. A sense of wonder and excitement as she looked at the ultrasound photo that her Mother was still clutching. With trembling hands she snatched it away and stared at it.

She grew cross-eyed as she stared hard at what to her at first looked like nothing but a bean on a string. But the longer she looked the more she could see that it was more than that. There were the beginnings of what was obviously a head and arms. Her heartbeat sped up as she began to accept the possibility of something that should be completely impossible. A baby? Her baby? Hers and Regina's?

Emma tongue darted out to moisten her dry, chapped lips, "Are you saying – this – this is my baby? Mine and Regina's?" Emma's voice quivered as she asked skeptically. Her mind continued to war with itself as she took in something that she knew had to be wrong. It had to be.

And yet. There was nothing about anything that had happened in this town that was what it appeared to be to someone looking in from the outside. Regina was the Evil Queen, her parents were Snow White and Prince Charming, they were living in a town that had been cursed for the past 28 years, and Henry's book of fairy tales were true.

"It doesn't matter," Snow said as she shook her head bringing Emma back to the present. "Once the baby's born we'll bring it home where it belongs. Your father and I will, of course help you raise it," Snow beamed. Her Father nodded emphatically to confirm his consent.

Emma stared speechlessly at her Mother's obliviousness. She couldn't be that thickheaded that she really believed that was okay. The very thought that Regina would just allow anyone to walk up and take her child out of her arms was laughable even to her.

And yet – wasn't that exactly what had happened with Henry? But no, she shook her head as her mind made itself up. Henry had made his own choice. He had wanted to be with her. And Regina had obviously seconded his decision. Which was why she was giving Emma full uncontested custody of him. Emma still wasn't sure how she felt about the situation. But it made her heart hurt to think that she had some culpability in the situation.

The reality, she knew, was that you can't go backwards. She had always envisioned being reunited with her child and getting to know him one day. She had been pleasantly surprised that day had come a lot sooner than she had thought.

Henry wasn't like her. He wasn't a child who'd never been wanted nor cared for. He had only the one parent, one home, and one school his entire life. The current upheaval of his life had been of his own freewill. But Emma knew it hadn't made him as happy as he'd convinced himself it would months ago.

Her parents were another subject altogether. They seemed to quite obviously care more about their possession of the children than the kids themselves. She didn't want to think too deeply about the hows and whys.

She shook her head and rose. She went into her room and jumped into a lukewarm shower. By the time she was done, her headache meds had kicked in completely and she was starting to feel as close to normal as she could get in these circumstances.
After her shower, she quickly dried herself off and got dressed. She began to pack herself an overnight bag as she thought over her gameplan. She already knew from experience that the number Regina had given her was disconnected. She'd tried drunk calling and drunk texting her all night once the alcohol had started to kick into her system. It wasn't until the fourth time she'd called and forced Ruby to verify that she had the right number that she'd realized Regina had duped her again.

She'd left her with no way to get in touch with her now that she was gone. The only lead she had to find her was the name and address of the law firm that had drawn up the paperwork giving her custody of Henry. Thankfully it was a Boston firm. Hopefully that meant that Regina was somewhere close. But for now she had no choice but to have a talk with them in person. She double checked her overnight and made sure she had everything she'd need to get by for a day or two. With a final look around she zipped it up and headed out.

When she walked into the living room her parents were still talking quietly to each other. She walked past them and over to where she'd thrown her jacket the night before. As she shrugged into it they took in the overnight bag she'd placed on the table with alarm.

"Where are you going Emma?" David asked.

Emma looked up from cramming the envelope her parents had nosed into in her bag. She glared at the both of them. "I'm going to talk to Regina. Henry's staying with you for another night or two until I get back," she said as she dared them to say anything else with her eyes.

Her parents both sat slack-jawed staring at her as if she'd lost her mind, "B- But – but why?" Snow stuttered.

"Because she's the mother of my child!" Emma yelled over her shoulder. She made sure to slam the door as she grabbed up her bag and walked out.

She walked to her car and got inside. She dropped her head onto the steering wheel as she closed her eyes and rested. She took deep steadying breaths trying to calm her racing heart and mind. Once she was calmer and her hands were steady she put the car in drive and headed out.
CHAPTER 14

Regina stared without seeing down at the paperwork in her hands. Her stomach was churning but this time it wasn’t from morning sickness. She’d had to deal with a lot of change in a short amount of time. And she was scared that it may be catching up to her.

She was plagued with a constant fatigue due to lack of sufficient sleep. Every night her time spent with Daniel would invade her dreams. She relived all over again the pure perfection that being with him made her feel. He had given her back her happiness even though it was for such a short time. And since he’d sacrificed himself for her happiness a second time it was hard to keep her mind off of him. She missed him.

But the dream always ended the same way. Daniel would always disappear again. She’d wake up with tears running down her face as she cried out for him. It was impossible for her to fall asleep again after that.

She absently ran her hand over her baby bump. It was barely perceptible. Emma hadn’t even noticed it just as she’d predicted. Still she was starting to feel little flutters that she knew meant her child was alive and healthy in there.

She couldn’t wait to meet Blue again. That child had been the living proof that she was capable of doing good. She had done well. She’d created a beautiful loving child who seemed to love her unconditionally. And this time she wouldn’t squander one second of that opportunity.

When Henry had first begun accusing her of being evil she had immediately shut down. While he wanted to go through her skeleton closet and have her choke on the remains, she merely prayed that if she ignored things that he would eventually get over himself and move onto something different. That was, until he showed up at her door with Emma by his side. He’d pushed her in the stomach away from him while declaring he’d found his ‘real mom’. The push had been slight coming from a small child and yet she knew from that moment on that her life would never be the same again.

Although she blamed herself more than she blamed him for the breakdown of their relationship, a part of her couldn’t help but feel had he not been a Charming then maybe he would’ve been a better person. As much as she hated to admit it, she felt one of her biggest failures was adopting him in the first place.

She should’ve been smarter when she’d found out who he was and all of the machinations that Rumple had played out to get him to her. Instead she’d convinced herself that as long as she loved him with everything in her that things would be alright.

But that hadn’t happened. No matter what she did it couldn’t compare to what his storybook had convinced him was true. The very simple edict of she being evil and his ‘real family’ being good
was all that he could understand as a child who’d been spoiled and entitled everyday of his life. Something else she blamed herself for. Henry didn’t even have what it took for him to understand anything past himself because she’d spent his life making it easy for him not to have to do so.

She really wished that Daniel had been Blue’s Father. Her one hope and consolation was her sister’s insistence that Emma would never be a part of Blue’s life.

Regina shook herself out of her trance and tried again to concentrate on work. She loved this job. Not only did it get her out of her own head but it allowed her to do something to give back to people who really needed it. And she was grateful to her sister for the opportunity and trust that it took to hand over such a huge project to her.

But it was a lot to take on. She continued to run a hand over her slightly rounded belly. Soon the pregnancy would make even more demands on her time and body. She wasn’t sure she’d be able to keep up.

She had given up her old vices, grudges, and pains. She went to individual and family counseling. Although there was a lot that she couldn’t get into this being a world that didn’t understand magic and all, she had tried to be as open and honest as she could. And it was paying off. For probably the first time in her life, Regina could say she liked herself. And she was happy.

But she knew that wasn’t completely true. She wasn’t completely happy about her circumstances. Pregnant with a Charming baby had her nerves on edge. It made her miss being able to drink for the next year.

Cora walked in to her home office to check on her and found Regina frowning down at paperwork. “Need some help?” she asked. Cora still felt like she was wading through sludge on a daily basis. She didn’t just have a case of culture shock. She also had to contend with time travel as well.

Though the girls had gotten their intelligence from her adapting to such drastic changes in environment was still a work in progress for Cora. She could use modern appliances now enough to cook, phone, and email. She could even type now though her speed was still a little slow. But her own child had actually put parental controls and blocks on almost all the electronic devices in the house to keep her out of things. She still wasn’t allowed to use the computer without adult supervision. Which for a powerful sorceress who was used to getting what she wanted when she wanted was as crippling and humiliating as you could get.

Regina smiled at her Mother. She knew her Mother was trying hard to figure her own life out for herself. She stopped rubbing her belly bump and instead put her elbow on the desk. She rested her head on her hand. She smiled sadly as she shook her head knowing that although her Mother was trying she’d instead do nothing but slow her down, “I’m okay. Merely overthinking everything as usual.”

Cora regarded her daughter carefully. They still hadn’t really talked about Regina’s recent suicide attempt. She wasn’t worried about a repeat because she knew that her daughter was looking forward to having her baby. Truth be told, having a little one around the house sounded like a great idea to her. At least there would be someone she didn’t have to apologize profusely to for her past deeds. And Blue had been a lovely child. She’d been open, loving, and friendly with all of them. She missed her.

Before she could open her mouth, her firstborn strode into the room. “Hey,” she looked around between her Mother and little sister. “How’s everything going?” Zelena asked as she walked closer to the desk in the room that Regina had converted into her study. She snagged a couple of grapes off the snack plate that Cora had brought in earlier. She popped them in her mouth as she looked over
her sister’s shoulder at her computer screen. She was working on getting all of the paperwork and licenses that they needed to open up the school for fostered and homeless youth.

“I’m swamped,” Regina answered as she began tapping away at the keyboard.

Zelena looked over her sister. She was pale and a little sweaty though the fresh air blowing in had a slight chill to it. She shrugged, “that’s what delegating is for.”

Regina’s fingers slowed down, “delegating?”

Zelena chuckled, “yeah. That’s what I did with you after all.” She grabbed a tissue and wiped off her hands and mouth, “Didn’t you do that when you were Mayor? How else did you run a whole town?”

“No,” Regina answered honestly. “I did everything myself.”

Zelena cocked an eyebrow at her, “Really? Wasn’t that overwhelming?”

“It was a town full of idiots dear. Trust me when I say the only way I could get anything done there was to do it myself,” Regina pushed away from the desk and turned her chair to face her sister and Mother. She regarded them thoughtfully for a minute. “But you’re right. I don’t have to do that anymore.”

Zelena was a little afraid to ask but she had to. The thoughtful expression on her sister’s face could be interpreted so many different ways, “what are you thinking?” she asked cautiously.

Regina nodded to herself as she made her decision. She stood up and faced her sister, “Come on. Let’s go.” Zelena was going to have to transport them there. Although Regina’s magic was working it still was nowhere near as strong as Zelena’s.

“Where to?”

“I just have a quick stop to make to see an old friend before we go,” Regina began putting on her coat. She glanced at her watch for the time, “they should just be at breakfast by now.”

“Who?”

Regina smiled at her big sister, “my new delegates.”

RQ

Regina and Zelena said their goodbyes to their Mother. Before leaving she hadn’t been nervous about their last minute excursion. But as soon as her sister teleported her to the front door butterflies in her belly began to act up. She waited for a second to orient herself. She ran her hand up and down her belly, “Ugh. Pregnancy and teleporting do not mix.” Her sister gave her a sympathetic smile. Regina took a deep breath to quell her insides. Then she conquered her nerves and rang the doorbell.

It was a little risky for her to be there. She could be spotted by almost anyone. Though the only people she really wanted to avoid were Henry and Emma. She smiled nervously back at her sister while they waited for the door to be answered.

Suddenly a head appeared in the side window. She saw surprise register across the blonde’s face. This was quickly followed by footsteps running and then the door was thrown open. Before she could say anything at all she was engulfed in a hug.
“Oh my God! You’re back! Where have you been? Why did you leave? Why didn’t you say anything to me about it? I’ve been so worried about you,” the questions came tumbling out rapidfire.

Regina smiled as she pulled out of Kathryn's tight embrace. She looked over at the only person she'd been able to call friend in the time she’d lived there. She stepped back nervously, “Hi Kathryn,” the two women smiled at one another.


Regina nodded her understanding of her friend ensuring that she was no longer living under her cursed identity. She turned to the redhead beside her, “This is my sister Zelena.” She held up a hand to hold back Abby’s obvious unasked questions, “it’s a long story. And not one I can tell you quickly. But to answer at least one of your other questions, I’ve been staying with her.”

Abby nodded even though her face still showed her clear confusion, “Okay. So what’s going on?” She held up a hand quickly, ‘wait,” she laughed at herself. “I didn’t even invite you in yet.” She stepped back from the doorway and waved them inside, “Come on. Come in.”

Regina was happy to have the door closed behind them. She had felt so exposed being outside. They were led into the living room where they all took a seat. She looked around the house, “you’ve been decorating again.”

Abby laughed, “always. Fred says I have OCD.” Then she calmed, “well?”

Regina raised an eyebrow, “well what?” she asked innocently.

Abby thrust her hands in her direction, “tell me! The last time I tried to see you, you slammed the door in my face.”

Regina reddened and bit her lip, “yeah. Sorry about that. It’s just – there was so much going on. The curse breaking, Emma, Henry.” She shook her head sadly as the flood of things she didn’t want to think about rushed at her, “I just needed some space.”

Abby nodded, “I understand. But a phone call still would’ve been nice,” she didn’t want to let Regina off the hook too easily. She had been a little hurt by the woman’s rebuff at her attempts to reach out to her. She looked her best friend over, “I’m glad to see you’re looking a lot better.”

Now Regina smiled, “a lot has happened. Which is what I came to talk to you about.”

Frederick walked into the room. He did a double take after seeing who was sitting in his home. “Regina,” he glanced at his wife as he came forward. “I didn’t know that you were here.”

Regina shook his hand with a small smile, “if you don’t mind, I’d prefer for no one to know about this visit.”

Fred and Abby looked at one another puzzled, “Oh?” Abigail waited eagerly for her friend to go on.
She had tons of questions for her. But she knew bombarding Regina wasn’t a winning strategy. Instead she prompted her to continue with gentle prodding.

Regina had now become nervous at her proposal. Suddenly she wasn’t sure if it was the right idea. But she’d come this far. She might as well see it through. She pulled her back up straight, “Look Kath – I mean Abigail.”

“Abby,” Abigail supplied.

Regina inclined her head. “I had a proposal of sorts. For you and for –Fred.” Abby nodded to urge her on. Regina took a deep breath. “As you know, I’m now living with my sister. I’m also working there. We’re based in England for now. I’m working on a few projects that I needed help with. My sister suggested I get some delegates. But the work is too important to leave the task to anyone. That’s when I thought of you two.”

Abby smiled happy that her friend hadn’t forgotten her. She leaned forward, “Tell us about it.”
Reconnecting

Chapter Notes

*** Here's a nice long one to tide you over for a bit. I still have to update all my other stories but rest assured I am working on them and the wait won't be much longer.

Also on a more personal note, I know of a few writers that I respected and whose work I loved who've left the fandom just in the past week. I know it's hard to deal with the differences in the fandom and the fact that the show is a letdown. It is really hard reconciling the two which is why I refuse to watch the show. It makes me feel the same way. Now there are way too many unfinished fics out there that we'll never know the conclusion of. I just really hope that I don't end up in this fandom alone. Please always remember that people are taking time out of their lives to share their stories with you guys. Letting them know it's appreciated goes a long way in keeping the stories that you all love coming.

Your anonymity is not compromised by giving them a kind word about the story. No one knows who blasphemy23 is just because you've left a review. It's not going on a permanent record. It's just a small thank you. When we don't hear from you it feels as if we're just pushing stories out into a black hole. Really doesn't motivate you to continue. And it seriously isn't asking too much to get some show of appreciation. I can testify to sometimes spending weeks and in some cases months agonizing over getting it right just for you all.

And now my rant is over. To all my fallen writers I say, you will be missed!

Enjoy :D***

CHAPTER 15

Emma stared at the address on the custody papers that Regina had given her. Then she looked back up at the address on the side of the building. Yep. She had found the place.

She drove around until she found a nearby open parking space. She shook her head at the exorbitant parking fees before walking the 3 city blocks back to the lawyer's offices. There was a lot she missed about city life. But the parking fees, cab prices, and all of the walking to get from place to place sure weren't any of them.

She left her beloved bug and went into the building. She stopped next to the elevator banks and found a directory. Ah! There it was. Wolfram and Hart Law Firm. She took the elevator up to the designated floor.

It wasn't until she was crammed in the elevator waiting for her floor to come up that she noticed the setting she was in. Leave it to Regina to pick out some hoity-toity place. A few women frowned at her wardrobe while too many men stared down at her tight jeans with creepy smiles on their faces.

Emma hadn't been concerned with her appearance before coming here. She just knew that she needed to speak to Regina asap. And she'd left her no way to be able to communicate with her aside
from the office heading on the custody papers. Her lips pulled into a thin line as she glared back at the hateful stares of women who made it clear this was not a place she belonged. She tugged nervously on the hem of her red leather jacket as she finally escaped the judgmental biddies and stepped out onto her floor.

She walked into the law offices and was immediately greeted cheerfully by a platinum blonde receptionist. She looked like the cheerleaders in school who'd looked down their noses at her. Emma hated her immediately.

"May I help you?" again Emma noticed the quick disapproving glance over her wardrobe.

Emma ignored it, "I'm here to speak to one of your lawyers. Lindsey Hart drew up some custody papers that were sent to me," she showed the woman her copy of her custody papers.

"Do you have an appointment?"

Emma nervously shifted her feet, "No. But I only needed a couple of minutes from him.

The woman frowned displayed her disapproval but she merely nodded. She took the papers from Emma before standing. "Wait here. I'll see if he has some time to squeeze you in."

Emma took a seat on one of the expensive looking sofas lining the walls. The place reeked of money and judgment. She couldn't wait to get out of there.

She stood as the receptionist walked back into the room. The woman just shook her head, "He's pretty backed up with appointments today. I could schedule an appointment with him for - ," she pulled out an appointment book and began looking through out.

But Emma cut her off shaking her head, "That's not going to work for me. I live a few hours from here and I'm going to need to get back home. But this matter is urgent. It's about my baby."

The woman's head snapped up at Emma's announcement. Whatever she read in Emma's face had her nodding. She gestured towards the sofa Emma had just gotten up from. "The wait could be hours. He's with a client right now and he has back to backs coming in the next few minutes," she warned Emma with her eyebrows raised.

"We're talking about my baby. It's worth it," Emma told her.

She received another nod accompanied by a fake smile that never wavered.  Emma could just see her putting Vaseline on her teeth and gluing herself into one of those ugly pageant dresses. The only thing missing was the 4 foot hair. "Would you like something to drink while you wait? We have coffee, tea, or water."

"No thank you," Emma answered while crossing her legs and settling down comfortably. She pulled out her cell phone and opened up her games app.

RQ

"… and then he was just gone. Right before my eyes. I ended up losing him all over again," Regina wiped at the tears that had fallen from her eyes. She smiled at her best friend, mother, and sister, "sorry. This little girl has my hormones going crazy."

Abby used the pads of her thumb to wipe away the errant moisture, "you lost your true love twice. It's okay for you to be emotional about it. I'm not sure I'd even be standing if I were you," her expression was sympathetic as she shook her head.
Cora and Zelena just nodded. They'd been through this various times with Regina already.

Dealing with Daniel being taken away from her twice was obviously hard on her. And this was on the heels of having to deal with the whole Emma and Henry situation. But at least she had Blue to look forward to. She couldn't wait to be reunited with her baby girl.

She ran her hand absently over her still almost unnoticeable baby bump. She had been doing that a lot more recently. She was starting to feel little flutters in her belly as if someone was tickling her from the inside out. It felt like they were reaching out to one another. The small thought brought comfort to her. She remembered how playful Blue had been. She couldn't wait to see her little girl again.

She had spent the past couple of days showing Abby and Fred around the town and explaining her current situation. She propositioned them and had been thrilled when they'd accepted.

Abby had sighed sadly as she explained that she really had nothing tying her to Storybrooke. Her Father refused to have anything to do with her. He was still angry about everything. With the curse, his daughter defying him and marrying a commoner, and being stuck in Storybrooke when he was supposed to be a King he had just turned into a mean, bitter old man.

Regina had blushed as she had declared that she was her best friend and she considered her almost a sister. And Fred had no family outside of her. Zelena would help return them home tomorrow to clean out their house and take care of any loose ends. They figured it would take them less than a couple of weeks before rejoining Regina.

Regina had been thrilled that they’d accepted the posts. She couldn't wait to work with Abby. She'd always considered the two of them somewhat kindred spirits. Their strengths and weaknesses complimented one another. And Abby had the same commitment to quality work that she had. This project was so important to Regina and her family. She knew nothing but the best would satisfy and that Abby would do whatever it took to ensure everything fit their designs.

For tonight she, Abby, Cora and Zelena were having a girls' night in her room. Fred was off in another part of the house having quiet time to himself.

Abby's eyes followed her movements. She smiled at her old friend. "You know, I thought if either of us got pregnant, it would be me."

Regina chuckled, "so did I."

All of the women broke out with laughter. Once they'd calmed down Regina took a deep steadying breath. “At least now I know that he’s in a good place. And we will be together again one day.”

Cora reached over and grabbed her hand. She gave it a small squeeze, “and you still have that beautiful little girl to look forward to. How are you feeling about that?”

Regina’s grin said it all. She stretched her back out before settling down again, “I can’t wait. I’m so excited. But I’m also nervous at the same time. I won’t let her turn out like Henry,” her face clouded over as her thoughts drifted. She shook her head to clear her mind and looked over at her Mother, "I am feeling a little peckish though. I think your grandbaby’s hungry,” she pouted knowing that her mother would leap at the opportunity to do something for her girls.

Her mother gave her a mock glare. She pinched her chin between her thumb and index finger as she planted a kiss on her nose. "Not fair my dear."

Regina gave her a smug smile, "well I am my Mother's daughter."
"That you are dear," Cora threw over her shoulder as she left the room to fix everyone a snack.

Abby smiled at the exchange. She knew almost all of the family history. When the curse broke she not only got her past memories back but also the new ones that had taken hold during the curse. She and Regina had talked many times about their families over the years. Though Abby had other friends, Regina had always been special to her.

She was still watching Regina's hand over her belly, "and what about Emma?"

Regina's motions stilled. She fixed her with a gaze that with anyone else who didn't know her well would've been a little scary. But even when she had been the Mayor who was rude to everyone else Abby had never been scared of her, "what about Emma?"

"Are you sure that she's just going to sign away her custodial rights? She did fight really hard to get Henry back," Abby had seen firsthand how much that had taken out of her best friend. She'd tried to be there for her during what she knew was a tough time but Regina had pushed her away. Next thing she knew Regina had disappeared and everyone was talking about having Snow step in as their new Mayor since many saw her as their Queen.

To which her father and a few of the other Royals who'd been swept up in the curse immediately protested. It was decided that Snow would be their Mayor pro temp until a real election could be held. Things had begun to get really ugly lately too. There was mudslinging from all sides as the Royals duked it out. The one thing they agreed upon was blaming Snow for the curse happening at all.

Snow, on her end, seemed to be running on a campaign of being the Savior's Mother. The entire town backed down as she made sure everyone knew and understood that Emma had broken the curse and that she was her Mother. The election wasn’t set for a few weeks and Abby was glad to now be spared seeing the conclusion of that situation.

Zelena shook her head, "she has no fight here. She has no rights at all. Regina's Blue's Mother."

Abby frowned at Zelena, "I understand." She turned her gaze toward her best friend, "but it's not just about custody here. Regina was in love with her," she locked her gaze on her in challenge.

Regina frowned. She wanted to yell NO! at her best friend but couldn't. She'd forgotten she told Abby everything while the curse was enacted. She figured it wouldn't matter since she'd just forget it all soon anyway. With the breaking of the curse that had clearly gone out the window. Her eyes cut to the side as she settled with a quiet, "Daniel was and always will be my true love."

The room was quiet as everyone settled into their own thoughts. Then Regina's phone began to ring. She glared at it but she was also confused. She had gotten a new phone after throwing her old one away right after she left Storybrooke. Not many people had the new number at all. And it was way too late to be work related. "Hello?"

SF

Emma shifted her body around trying to work out the kinks. She had spent almost the entire day on a sofa that was meant for looking and not really using. The receptionist, Harmony Winthrop, of the law offices had warmed up to her slightly over the time they'd spent cooped up together. She'd even gotten Emma some lunch when she'd gone for hers. And the two of them had eaten their meals in the company lounge together while they chitchatted about nothing.

Just as Emma had laid her head back on the sofa cushion behind her to get a little respite, Harmony
informed her that Mr. Hart would see her now. She shook off her weariness and frowned up at the clock. It was well after 4. She'd been there for more than 7 hours.

Harmony led the way to his office. She left them with a bubbly bounce.

"Miss Swan sorry for the wait," he said with not even a hint of sincerity in his voice or demeanor. "Today's been a crazy day. Please have a seat. What can I do for you?" Lindsey gestured for her to take the seat across from him. He reclined back in his chair with a bored expression on his face.

He wasn't like any lawyer Emma had ever seen before. He looked more like a wrestler or fighter. His nose looked like it had been broken a time or two and he sported a thick muscular build. He had long shaggy hair that was pulled into a ponytail. He looked like the kind of guy she meet in the dive bars she'd frequented in her life before Storybrooke.

"I need to get in touch with your client Regina Mills," again she held out the papers. "She has my baby. And I have no other way to get in touch with her. But I'm not signing those papers."

Lindsey barely gave them a passing glance, "this is a law office Miss Swan. We hold our clients' confidentiality as sacred. If there's a problem with any of the wording or anything then I'd be happy to go over it with you. But I can't break my oath to my clients," he informed her while not even bothering to hide his disdain for her presence.

Emma frowned. She'd had enough of these people for today. She hadn't been judged so much at first sight since leaving prison. After that she'd taken some time to get on her feet and adjusted to her new reality. She had been proud of her achievements before Henry showed up at her door. She'd built an entire life for herself with little to no help from anyone, "I have no problems comprehending simple words. But I will not be giving up one child for another. I need to speak to Regina. And the only reason I came here was because she's left me with no way to get in touch with her."

Lindsey gave her an unimpressed eyebrow raise. Emma already knew before he opened his mouth that he was going to try and put her off again.

"If you don't give me her number right now I'm going to scream my head off. Then we'll see how well your other clients appreciate their lawyer being a douche," Emma raised her chin defiantly at him. She knew being embarrassed was one thing people like him couldn't stand. They needed to convince themselves that they were above such things as bad manners.

Lindsey narrowed his eyes at her as he sized her up. Emma sat up straighter and met his glare with one of her own. He sighed and then he folded his hands on the desk and leaned forward. "I cannot and will not break my client's confidentiality. However, I can give her a call and ask her to speak with you."

"Do it," Emma commanded while nodding.

"I'll need the room," he said before coming around his desk. He opened the door for her then walked her up to the receptionist's desk. "Harmony can show you to our conference room. You can take your call in there if she agrees."

Harmony gave him a smug smile before bouncing out of her chair, "alright boss."

Emma missed neither the way their hands brushed as they went their separate ways nor the not so secret smile they shared. She rolled her eyes. She hated office politics.

Harmony showed her into a room with a long table and a couple of phones. Then she left her on her own.
Emma sat in the middle of an abnormally long table at the seat that was closest to the intercom system. She drummed her fingers nervously on the table as she waited. Today had been a long day. Her world had been rocked twice in the past 24 hours. She wasn't even used to her everyday life yet and now this. A baby made from magic? It really was almost too much. She rubbed at her eyes as she fought back her fatigue. She wanted nothing more than to crawl in bed and bury herself in it for the next 10 years.

Finally, the phone beeped. She heard Harmony's nasal voice directing her to press the button that was lit to connect her call. Emma took a deep breath before she pressed the button and held the earpiece up to her ear. "Regina?"

Regina frowned over at her sister and best friend as her lawyer explained to her the situation. He told her that he could just have her removed from the premises if she wished. “Thank you but that won’t be necessary. I’ll speak to her.”

Zelena and Abby picked up on her agitation. “What’s wrong?” Zelena asked anxiously.

“It’s fine. I’m going to take this outside,” she answered them before going out onto her balcony. She made sure she closed the door behind her. Next thing she knew, Emma was practically screaming at her.

She held the phone away from her ear, “I assure you I haven’t gone deaf since I last saw you. I can hear you just fine Miss Swan. Please stop yelling.” The nights in London carried a small chill with it. She wished she’d grabbed a jacket before heading outside. She settled for folding her arm across her ad under the elbow of the one that was holding the phone up to her ear.

“Sorry,” Emma muttered. She cleared her throat as she dried her clammy hands nervously on her jeans. Now that she had her on the phone she wasn’t quite sure where to start.

Regina waited but was only met with silence. Finally she raised her voice slightly, “spit it out Miss Swan. What did you want?”

Emma frowned into the phone at the Miss Swan. Sure it was hot when she whispered it in her ear during their lovemaking. Regina’s husky voice was like sex in the ear. But Regina knew she hated the formality when they were out of bed. She reminded herself this was about her baby. And for this she knew she had to play it cool.

They had always been oil and water. Or maybe fire and oil was a more apt description. Right now Regina held all the cards. So she took a deep calming breath, “Is that really my baby you’re carrying?” she blurted out in a high pitched squeaky voice. Clearly the calming breath hadn’t really helped.

Regina narrowed her eyes as she looked out over the gardens. She’d replanted her tree far enough away from the house that it would have plenty of room to grow but close enough that she could still see it. She inhaled a deep breath. The air had been fragranced with hints of her apples mixed in with flowers from the garden. It had a calming effect on her. “No. I’m carrying my baby.”

“And mine,” Emma insisted. She had accepted her parents explaining that their magic could create a life. But she still needed to hear confirmation from her.

Regina frowned, “you were a part of her conception. But that doesn’t make her yours.”

Emma’s breath caught in her throat as she became a little choked up. She cleared her throat loudly
even as she felt waves of relief flowing over her, “Wait, hers? Isn’t it too early to tell that what it is?” She hadn’t bothered learning the sex of her baby since she’d already known she was going to give it up as soon as she’d found out she was pregnant. But she’d been sticking out like a beach ball before her doctor had asked her if she wanted to know the sex. She’d only just left Regina a few days ago and she couldn’t deny she’d looked beautiful as ever. She’d seen nothing out of the ordinary with her appearance.

Regina huffed. “I’ve met her already,” a smile crossed her face as it always did when she thought of her baby Blue. “She has your hair and dimples. But she has my eyes.”

Emma’s face broke out into a smile as she closed her eyes and tried to imagine such a thing. Regina’s large, expressive brown eyes and her blonde hair was quite a combination. Confusion crossed her face as she began to frown again, “what do you mean you met her? How can you meet a clump of cells?”

She’d tried to avoid knowing as much about Henry as she could while she was pregnant. She took her vitamins and kept her doctor’s appointments to make sure that he was healthy. She hadn’t wanted anymore involvement in her baby than that. But she did remember some parts of biology class before she’d decided there was no point in her going to school anymore. Becoming someone important was never meant for a waste of life like her that no one would or could ever want. Or so her foster families told her repeatedly as they grabbed up their support checks they got for having to put up with her presence.

It was all still a little surreal. The last time she’d seen Regina she’d looked pretty much the same to her. Except she had been slightly glowing.

“Magic,” was the only answer that Regina could give her. She still didn’t know the specifics of her encounter with Daniel and Blue. She only knew that she’d lost the man she’d wanted nothing more than to spend the rest of her life with all over again. Once more he’d been sacrificed for her happiness. It still weighed on her and made the days difficult to get through. That’s when she’d receive a small tickle from Blue. She took that was a reminder to her that they’d be together soon enough.

Emma didn’t know how to respond to that at all. She was still new to this whole magic and fairy tales being real and other crap. She’d been dumped by the only woman who’d once been her refuge from all of the craziness that had become her life since stepping foot in Storybrooke. After they’d stopped fighting they instead took their frustrations out on one another in bed. No matter what they’d always been able to come together as equals there. The problems arose afterward.

But now Regina was clearly with someone else. Emma’s nose turned up as an image of her resting her head on that redhead’s shoulder flashed through her mind. She’d looked so peaceful that Emma had just wanted to reach out and make her hurt the way she’d been hurting. She shook her head to clear out the image, “Look. We have a lot to talk about. When are you coming home?”

“I’m already home,” Regina drawled.

“Huh? When’d you get back?” Emma was confused. She must’ve driven past her on the highway as Regina was heading back home.

Regina rolled her eyes knowing that Emma had gotten things wrong as usual. Emma trimmed but didn’t shave so she knew the carpet matched the drapes. She really was such a blonde. Unfortunately being a Charming meant that too much air flowed between her ears. Thankfully Blue had inherited her intelligence. “I meant I’m where my home is. And that is definitely not Storybrooke,” she made sure to clarify.
Emma frowned, “Well we need to talk. Give me your address and I’ll meet you there.” She hadn’t planned to be away that long. She’d told Henry and her parents – she still wasn’t used to that word – that she would be gone a day or two. But this was about her baby. She’d just have to let her family know she would be away longer. She wasn’t sure she’d ever get used to this having to check in with other people thing either.

“No,” was Regina’s prompt answer.

“No?” Emma clenched her fist as she felt her temper begin to rise. She took another calming breath and threw her head back to let her neck pop.

Regina huffed into the phone again, “You have the custody papers already Emma. Just sign them and we can be done with this.”

“I am not giving away my child! I won’t do that ever again for you or anyone else!” she screamed into the phone. “Now where the hell are you?”

Regina bristled as she closed her eyes and counted to ten. Then she began pacing around her balcony, “this isn’t a negotiation. The paperwork is pretty straightforward. You can keep Henry and Blue stays with me.”

“Blue?” Emma queried. She knew she was getting off track but hearing that she was having a girl was one bombshell. And now Regina just dropped another one onto her. She really wasn’t sure how many more she could take. She put her hand over her racing heart as if she could get it to slow down that way.

Again a small smile passed over Regina’s face as she thought of her babygirl. “Blue Ember. That’s what I’m naming her. Blue Ember Mills,” she emphasized the Mills part.

“She’s also a Swan! You said she has my hair and dimples. She’s just as much mine as she is yours. And I’m not giving her up,” Emma shouted into the phone. Harmony frowned through the glass door of the conference room on her way past it. Emma glared at her until she backed away.

Zelena came outside with a sweater. She placed it around her sister’s shoulders as she smiled gratefully up at her, “everything okay?” she asked quietly.

Regina nodded, “I’m fine,” she whispered. She muted the phone before telling her quickly. “It’s Emma. She’s refusing to sign the papers.” Zelena rolled her eyes as she took a seat on one of the outside chairs.

She unmuted the phone and went back to her call, “Look, it’s late and I’m tired,” Emma frowned as she looked at a clock across from her on the wall that read 4:35. “We’re going to have to just agree to disagree.”

“Not with my child we’re not. There is nothing to disagree about. That’s my baby as much as it’s yours. Or have you forgotten about Henry already?” Emma felt bad for throwing that in her face. She knew losing Henry had to hurt. She pushed the guilt and shame away from her as she stayed focused on the task at hand.

Regina only felt a curious numbness at the mention of his name. Once Henry had been her everything. But so much had changed since then. She’d put Emma and Henry as far out of her mind as possible. She instead chose to focus on herself, her family, and Blue. “That changes nothing,” she said quietly as she slipped her arms into the sweater her sister had put around her.

“Look Regina,” Emma squeezed her eyes shut as she rolled her shoulders trying to get some of the
tension out. “I’m not trying to fight you on this. I know this isn’t the same situation as Henry. But we have still have to talk about how we’re going to move forward with OUR baby,” Emma made sure to emphasize the ‘our’ part. She needed Regina to understand that this was nonnegotiable.

She was met with a silence that lasted so long she got worried, “Regina?!”

“I’m still here,” Regina answered. She glanced at her sister who was listening intently to her side of the conversation. “Look it’s late,” again Emma frowned as she watched the dial on the clock go around. She knew that could only mean one thing. Regina had to be in a different country which did nothing to alleviate her stress over the situation. “And I’m tired,” Regina continued. “We’ll have to pick up this conversation again later.

“I need your phone number and address,” Emma grabbed a notepad and pen that was sitting in the middle of the table. “Go,” she told her as she waited for the digits.

“I’m not giving you my phone number or address,” Regina argued with her. Zelena waved to get her attention. Regina watched her curiously as she ran back into the house.

“You’re not keeping my baby and refusing to let me know where you are Regina!” Emma yelled again. “This isn’t about you or your new girlfriend or anything else. This is about MY baby. She needs me. I’m her Mom.”

“She’s not yours!” Regina yelled into the phone. She hated that Emma always had this effect on her. She’d always prided herself on being in control until the day the woman with the enchanting green eyes showed up on her doorstep proclaiming to be her child’s mother. “And I’m not giving you my phone number nor my address. I think the more space between the two of us the better.”

Emma’s head was swimming but that one hit her hard. She’d been bombarded with so much information in the past 24 hours. And this phone call which had only lasted a few minutes hadn’t yielded too much in the way of help.

She felt saddened that they had come to this. She still had a hard time wrapping her mind around it. Regina was supposed to be a part of her happy ending along with Henry. But instead a curse had been broken and her life had exploded in her face. “I won’t be pushed out of her life Regina. You owe me this.”

Regina huffed at her presumptuousness. Leave it to a Charming to paint themselves as a victim.

Zelena, meanwhile, had come back outside carrying a sheet of paper. There was an email address written on it. When Regina looked at her puzzled she whispered, “it’s a way for you to communicate. You can write each other emails but don’t send them. That she can trace,” she warned. She was fully aware of Emma and her past career as a bounty hunter. “Just let them sit in the drafts folder.”

Regina nodded and gave her sister a grateful smile. “You can write this down. Babie_girl_blue@yahoo. The password is babyblue. Just leave whatever you want to say in the drafts folder. I’ll check it daily and get back to you.”

Emma took down the information but she also made her stance on the situation clear. “This isn’t over Regina. I will be a part of my baby’s life.”

“Whatever,” was the last thing she heard before the call was disconnected. She stared down at the paper she’d written the information down on. She was having a girl. The information made her grin her head off even as she was weighed down by the situation. Her little Blue baby. And no matter
what she was going to be there for her.
CHAPTER 16

Emma schlepped wearily into her house. This trip had accomplished next to nothing. She’d ended up leaving the lawyer’s office with more questions than answers.

She was having a baby girl! Emma still found it so hard to completely wrap her head around such a thing even as she simultaneously couldn’t stop the smile spreading across her face when she did. She had somehow created a life with another woman from the magic that flowed inside of her. It was a miracle.

Or it should have been. Except that the woman carrying her child just so happened to be the former Evil Queen who’d tried to murder her Mother. She knew she should completely hate her and her not allowing her access to her own child was just one more thing to add to the list.

But she’d also been the woman who’d raised their son. Henry was a kind, loving, smart, funny boy. She’d even let him go when it was obvious that’s what he really wanted. It had hurt Emma just as much to have to watch another woman go through what she had gone through when she’d given Henry up the first time.

Except the difference was she had given Henry up of her own free will. There had been no other choice. She owed it to him as his parent to give him his best chance. She knew that would be the only way he’d live a life filled with all the things she had never had.

But deep down inside of her she knew the truth. Regina hadn’t freely given him up. Henry had instead turned on her and Emma had given him safe harbor instead of trying to work something else out between the two of them that would benefit all 3 of them. Her guilt, shame, and embarrassment for helping be the tool to deal such a blow to someone she had sworn to love in whispers pressed against soft skin in the middle of the night threatened to overwhelm her daily.

Regina had left her with nothing. Except their son. And she had given her nothing. And now she was having a baby with this same woman.

Emma had no idea what to make of the situation. Regina held all the cards here and that was a place she didn’t like playing from. Blue would grow up under Regina’s care and this time Emma didn’t have biology or her enthusiasm to know her as a foothold that she’d had with Henry.

Honestly Henry had come to find her. Not the other way around. If she was going to be any part of her daughter’s life then she had to accept Regina’s terms and wait. Both of those things were bitter pills to swallow.

Not wanting to go straight home and face her parent’s judgement she’d instead opted for hanging around the city. She went to a bar she had frequented when she’d lived there. She’d made contact with a woman whose eyes weren’t as large or expressive as the ones she usually spent drowning in. And her hair wasn’t sporting the right perfectly coifed style. But she was there, ready, and willing. After a few drinks that had been all that Emma needed to help her get through the night.

As it was she had barely been able to drop her things on the floor of the apartment she shared with Henry before she threw her body onto the sofa. She pulled Blue’s sonogram picture out of her back pocket and placed it on the end table next to the sofa. Then she buried her face in the pillow and willed for oblivion.
Instead she got an unexpected visitor. Snow came sauntering into her apartment without knocking. Emma knew instantly that it was her without even bothering to lift her head. The woman somehow managed to even walk in a chipper way.

She noted that once again she let herself in with a key that was given to her with the explicit instruction that it be used only in emergencies. She contemplated momentarily asking for it back but she really wasn’t in the mood to argue right now. She frowned into the pillow but didn’t bother to lift herself up and acknowledge her.

“How’d things go?” she asked without any preamble as she sat on the chair across from the sofa where Emma was stretched out.

“Fine,” she muttered as she turned over on the sofa. She frowned up at the ceiling as she absently played with a few strands of her hair.

Snow perked up even more than usual, “so when is she going to hand the baby over?”

Emma snorted, “Regina won’t even give me her phone number let alone another child. And this one she actually wants.” She took a deep breath and sat up as she realized she didn’t even know her due date. She had gained nothing and learned nothing about Regina or the baby other than the baby’s sex and name.

Snow’s eyebrows rose to her hairline, “what’s that dear?”

Emma slouched back into the sofa, “she doesn’t want Henry anymore,” she said quietly. She ran her hand over her face not quite sure why everytime she allowed the thought to flow through her mind that it affected her so. It was a win for her. But it was a loss that Henry would remember for the rest of his life.

Snow’s face broke out in a wide grin, “That’s great Emma!”

“Yeah,” she muttered before lifting her head enough to glare at her Mother. “It’s absolutely perfect for a boy to know that his own Mother doesn’t want him.”

“You’re his Mother Emma!” she shrieked as if it was perfectly obvious.

Emma didn’t even bother to give that any comment. She sat instead blinking away the tears that had started to form in her eyes. She was angry at herself for even caring. Mary Margar - Snow was right. At least she had Henry. But for whatever reason that didn’t fill her with as much happiness as she had at one point believed it would.

“And now that we have Henry we’ll have no problem getting your baby back to you. Judge Hastings is from the White Kingdom. He knows where his loyalties are owed. He did give us Henry and all,” Snow grinned pleased with herself and the way she’d wrapped everything up so neatly. She reached out and laid a sympathetic hand along Emma’s arm. “I know that’s why you’ve been so grouchy. But it’s fine dear. You’ll see. You’ll soon have both your kids here with you right where they belong.”

“Blue,” Emma muttered. For the most part, she had already tuned her Mother out. But her Mother’s voice had a way of finding its way inside her head despite how much she prayed otherwise.

“What was that dear?” she asked as she moved to sit on the sofa beside Emma.

“Blue,” she said louder. She cleared her throat and lowered her voice after watching Snow’s eyes widen at her tone. Even in her own home with a woman she still didn’t know well, Snow seemed to
have a power over her that she couldn’t explain. She made her feel like a child and an idiot all in one. It must be a trick she’d learned from Regina. “Regina’s going to name her Blue. Blue Ember Mills.”

Snow chuckled, “Blue Ember,” she said as she laughed to herself while shaking her head. “Regina always did have a thing for fire.”

“What?” Emma was thoroughly confused as to what her name had to do with fire.

“Blue is the purest form of fire dear. When you see the fire burning white it’s actually the purest clearest blue there is. It’s just our human eyes can’t see that high up on the color spectrum,” she shrugged her shoulders at her. “Regina always did have an obsession with fire. It makes perfect sense.”

Emma nodded as she warmed more and more to the name. She reached for the picture of the sonogram from the table beside the sofa where she had dropped it earlier. She stared down at her daughter. She knew the pregnancy was still in its early stages. “Blue Ember,” she said aloud as she continued to strain her eyes to make heads and tails out of the bean shaped object. “I like it,” she smiled at Snow.

“I’m going to go and start dinner,” Snow rose from beside her. “I’ll let Henry know you’re home and send him over after he gets out of school. You two can give me about an hour and a half before coming over.”

Emma frowned not liking the sound of that at all. She had moved out of her parent’s apartment but once more she questioned whether it was actually wise to move directly across the hall from them. The point of having Henry and getting the two of them their own space was for her to step up more with him. She felt embarrassed at how much she had let things slide since the curse broke.

“Uhh, thanks but no thanks,” she said as she stood and faced her Mother.

Snow had reached the door and turned with a curious expression on her face, “what - ?”

“I’m going to take Henry out for dinner instead,” she explained. “I think it’s time we talked about Regina and the baby anyway.”

Snow nodded thoughtfully before turning back to the door again. “Well, don’t make a habit out of it.” Emma refrained from rolling her eyes and groaning aloud. “I might be a bit busier with having to clean up the mess Regina left in the Mayor’s office and all,” at this Emma did roll her eyes. “But I still expect our family to stick together.” Emma began to give her a small smile before Snow just had to ruin the moment. She opened the door and looked back over her shoulder, “you know the election’s coming up. We’re going to need everyone’s support in defeating those tyrants.” Snow left with as loud a bang as she came in with.

Emma stared blankly at the closed door. She slumped back down onto the sofa. “I hate my life.”

“Hey kid,” Emma stopped Henry from running ahead of her back to their apartment. “Why don’t we take a walk?”

Henry had stopped when her voice called out to him. Though he had homework to do he knew Emma didn’t mind if he put it off. He grinned and shrugged at her. “Sure.”

They walked along the sidewalk towards the park in silence. Henry had spent the entire time they
were having dinner at Granny’s talking her head off about every second of his life that she’d missed in the past two days. If he noticed her mind was elsewhere he didn’t show it.

Emma dug her hands into the pockets of her red leather jacket. Even though winter was officially over, the nights still held a chill to them. A small smile played across Emma’s face. She recalled as they walked along that was one of the things that she and Regina had in common. They both loved inclement weather. As long as there was a storm raging or snow falling, they were happy. It was the perfect excuse for the night for them to cuddle closer.

When they got to the park, Henry plopped himself down onto one of the benches. He began swinging his legs back and forth exuberantly as he sat enjoying the cool air wash over him. Emma gingerly took the seat beside him.

Normally Emma loved spending time with Henry. She almost kinda missed the days of their secret rendezvous and talking though their walkie talkies during the curse. But for some reason lately he’d begun to sap more of her energy than usual.

Emma cleared her throat loudly as she stared straight ahead of her. She began to play with her fingers nervously. She was angry at Regina for forcing her to have this conversation with him at all. “Henry - ,” she began but then she just stopped. She scrunched up her nose, “do you know what a pregnancy is?”

Henry rolled his eyes as only a Mills could, “duh!” his head shook as he smirked at her. “It’s when a woman has a baby.” He looked her up and down suspiciously, “are you and my dad - ?”

Emma frowned. The only time she saw or heard anything about Neal was when Snow insisted on inviting him over for dinner despite her obvious disapproval. Since she’d gained custody of Henry she’d been avoiding the family dinners as much as possible. “Your Dad and I aren’t like that Henry. And we never will be ever again.”

“But you could be,” Henry insisted. “You don’t have a boyfriend and he doesn’t have a girlfriend.”

Emma shook her head, “It’s not that simple Henry. I don’t have feelings for him in that way and I’m sure I never will ever again. That part of my life is so over,” Emma flicked her wrist at him.

Henry scowled at her and began to swing his feet again, “But it could.”

She lightly shook her head in response. She moistened her lips as she fidgeted on the bench. “Henry,” she began again but Henry cut her off.

He was staring straight ahead at the empty playground. “I’ve decided this year is going to be Batman and Superman,” he continued to casually kick his feet back and forth.

Emma stared at him puzzled, “this year is going to be Batman and Superman?” she repeated trying to work out the meaning of the words.

Henry turned to her and nodded with a smile on his face, “for my birthday next week.” Emma’s eyes widened and she inhaled a shaky breath as she began to berate herself in her head. “Every year Mom and I pick a theme and then she decorates it all. This year I want Batman vs Superman,” he grinned up at her. “Like the movie that’s coming out. We’re going to have to get up really early to let her know.”

Emma frowned down at her son, “Let her - ?” She began to shake her head. “Henry, your Mom’s not coming back.”
“Of course she is. She’d never miss my birthday,” Henry stated as if this was a formality that was already taken care of. He rose from the bench and stretched. “But she needs to know about Batman vs Superman so that she can get everything ready. She can be Batman since she loves him best and I’ll be the new Superman,” he said through a yawn. “We should go now. I’m really tired and I still have homework to do.” Henry turned and began to make his way back to the apartment.

Emma rose and followed him at a much slower pace. Her head was lowered as she gathered herself together. She had been trying to tell Henry about his baby sister. Instead he’d dropped his own bombshell on her.

She’d completely forgotten his birthday was coming up. At least he’d reminded her before it had passed.

She caught up to Henry waiting beside their door as she unlocked it. Then he ran inside presumably to get started on his homework. She walked over to the sofa and pulled off her boots. She threw them across the loft before going into her room and changing out of her skinny jeans and into something more comfortable.

She went back into the living room and sat on the sofa. She pulled her laptop onto her lap and began to boot it up. She leaned her head back and popped her neck muscles. Finally, once it was booted she went to the email address that Regina had given her. She hit the compose button and began to type.

Regina,

Hi.

Emma sat staring at those words for what seemed like eternity as she concentrated on saying what she wanted to say. She took a breath and squared her shoulders.

How are you? Hopefully you’re doing fine. Blue too.

Snow told me that her name means the color of fire. Blue Ember. I’m really starting to love it. I try picturing her as you described her but it’s still hard for me. All of this is hard for me…..

Emma ran a frustrated hand through her hair while blowing a frustrated breath out. She stared at the line repeatedly trying to gather her thoughts into coherent words to describe how she felt inside.

You were wrong though. She’s not just a Mills. She’s a Swan too. And we both deserve that. She and I both do.

Emma rose and crossed her arms over her body. She paced back and forth in small circles while biting her thumb nail and staring at her words typed across the screen. The biting was a filthy habit that she’d been ‘cured’ of by one of her foster Mothers. She’d fill her mouth with hot sauce everytime she did it in front of her. It only flared up now when Emma was extremely agitated and beyond caring about consequences.

She went into the kitchen and searched through her cabinets before finding a clean glass and pulling the vodka out of her freezer. She poured herself a glass and then added cran-grape juice while staring at disgust at the pile of dishes in the sink. She had been going to get around to them. But then her parents had confirmed Regina’s insistence that the baby was hers. That had immediately taken priority over everything else in life.

She finished her drink and poured herself another. She brought it with her as she poked her head
into Henry’s bedroom. Her parents had helped him unpack his room and it looked almost exactly as it had at Regina’s. Except it was a lot smaller. They were going to have to make some decisions about what would stay and what would have to go.

She stared at the back of his head as she continued to contemplate her life. Henry was lying lopsided in the bed and was snoring a little loudly. She put her glass on his desk as she gently maneuvered him back underneath the sheets being careful not to wake him. She was straightening out the blankets when something slipped out of his hand and onto the floor.

She picked it up and held it in the light that was streaming in through the open doorway. It was a picture of him and Regina dressed up as characters she recognized from his video game World of Warcraft. His birthday cake sat in front of him moments before he blew the candles out. The decorating was elaborate. She was sure Regina had done that on her own. That had been his 10th birthday. The last one the two of them would ever spend together.

Her chest tightened up as the tears she’d been trying to hold back forever finally spilled forth. Her head dropped to her chest as she pressed her hand against her mouth to help try and muffle the sounds of her grief.

She found herself sitting heavily at the end of his bed watching him sleep. Tears continued to pour down her face as she looked around at the mess that had become her life since the curse had broken.

Everyone had been thrilled that they’d gotten their lives back. They were adjusting well to life post curse and were happy. She was the Savior who had brought back their happiness. And her son looked at her as if she were a real life super hero.

But inside she felt empty. This curse had taken everything from her. She’d spent a miserable childhood growing up alone without anyone to love or care for her. And she’d almost lost her son to this madness.

Even though it was broken the curse was still continuing to take and take with no end in sight. Her entire life had changed overnight. She had lost a woman that she’d been in love with. And now she was being asked to hand over her baby. She just couldn’t do this anymore.

She sniffled and wiped her eyes with her hands. She grabbed her drink off of Henry’s desk and walked briskly into the living room where she’d left her laptop. She finished off her drink in one shot grimacing as the alcohol burned the back of her throat. She put the glass down on the coffee table in front of her and pulled her laptop back onto her lap.

She took a minute to read over her earlier words before continuing.

*I tried talking to Henry about his sister today. But he reminded me that his birthday is coming up next week. He wants a Batman v Superman birthday party since that movie’s coming out soon. He says that you can be Batman since he’s your favorite and he wants to be the new Superman. He was pretty adamant that you’d be here since you’ve never missed a birthday before.*

*He and I are both expecting to see you at his party. And we will have a long talk about my daughter. I’m not okay with communicating through email when my baby is at stake. I need your phone number and address so that we can have this conversation directly. You’re going to need to come home this week so that we can air all of this out. There are two kids who are more important than this mess you’ve left behind you.*

Emma began rubbing her thumbs across her fingertips as she stared at the words she’d just written.
She moved the cursor over to the heading and subject that she had left empty. In the subject line she typed **Kid Discussion**. Then she saved the draft. She put the laptop away from her as she sat with her back leaning against the arm on the opposite end of the sofa. She pulled her knees up to her chest and stared at the screen willing Regina’s response to show up soon.

**RQ**

Regina bolted upright in her bed. She had awakened in a cold sweat again. She was clammy and the sheets were twisted around her. Her hair was plastered to the sides of her face from a light sheen of sweat. She groaned as she rolled over and began to push her hair out of her face.

She unwound her legs from the sheets and swung her feet down to the floor. These nightmares had become so common that she’d started to keep a bottle of frozen water next to her bed knowing she’d need to drink like a camel to help cool her off. She grabbed the sweaty water bottle next to her bed and quenched her thirst.

She rose from her bed taking her water along with her. She walked over to her balcony and stepped outside. The night had been a good one in London’s terms. The weather had been nice throughout the day. Now it carried with it silence on the back of a nice cool breeze.

Regina sat on one of the outside loungers. She leaned her head back as she stretched her feet out before her. She closed her eyes and allowed her breathing to slowly return to normal along with her heartbeat.

She received a little kick as if to say ‘we’re in this together Mommy.’ Regina smiled lovingly at her baby bump as she lightly applied pressure to it in a caressing motion. She got a caress against her hand in reply.

Regina’s spirits began to lift as the baby and the cool air began to work its magic on her. She opened her eyes and stared up at the stars.

The same dream-mare as she had come to describe it had been plaguing her for the past couple of weeks. It had begun right after her meeting with Emma. She had already taken everything away from her. Now it seemed she was even ruining her sleep.

She would fall asleep with a smile on her face as she brought to the forefront of her mind the time that she had spent with Blue and Daniel. It had been wonderful. Everything she ever could’ve imagined and more. She lay in bed with her two most favorite people in the world. Blue would be lying across her front while Daniel held Regina against his side. Regina would absently stroke Blue’s back as Daniel ran his hands through her hair. It had been absolutely perfect. He would lean over and give her a kiss with such love, kindness, and adoration flowing through his beautiful dark lash fringed eyes her insides would practically burst from the sheer bliss that would flood her system.

Then the dream would morph. Daniel would pull back and instead of falling into his blue eyes she’d start drowning in a pool of green with blue floating through it. The smile and love Daniel had worn on his face would become the frowning hurt and confusion that had been the lasting impression Emma had imprinted onto her after their last night together.

She hated it. The last thing in the world she wanted was to be reminded of any of the Charmings. She was trying to start her life over and turn over a new leaf. She’d sworn to Daniel to let go of old pains and only embrace her happiness. He’d left her willingly to allow her to this last chance at life. By honoring that she was honoring him.

Still the thoughts of Emma persisted. She knew that she was ultimately responsible for most of the
things that had gone wrong between them. She didn’t even blame Emma for choosing her parents over the mess their lives had exploded into after the curse lifted.

But Henry was a different matter. He had done everything humanly possible to pull away from her. His last rant of how much he hated her and how she was ruining his life was the last straw for her. So she did what any good Mother would. She gave him exactly what he had been dying for. And she had given up and walked away.

She knew it wasn’t exactly that simple. And at the same time it was. Blue was her second chance to get things right. And she wasn’t going to squander a second of it.

She looked at the table where she had left one of her tablets earlier. She turned it on and checked her emails. She began to lose herself in her work. Abby wouldn’t be back until the end of the week so she was still flying solo for a while and there was so much to do.

The sun came up and her bladder began to kick in letting her know that she had spent hours out there. She started to put the tablet away from her thinking she’d lie down and try to grab a few more hours of sleep before remembering the email system she’d set up with Emma. She logged onto the account and read over Emma’s letter.

She pulled her back taut as she took a deep breath. Then she moved her cursor to the subject line and wrote Reply in front of the kid discussion Emma had typed. She changed the color of her text to her favorite color purple. She added in a page break to make it clear and then began her reply. She reminded her yet again that she had no intentions of ever returning to that town. Her hands hovered over the keyboard as she figured out what else she wanted to say. In the end she settled for short and simple.

**Blue and I are both fine. I will take care of my child and I suggest that you take care of yours. I would suggest that you make that clear to Henry also. I can’t help you with anything else.**

She saved the draft and turned the tablet off. She used the bathroom and washed her hands and then her face. She wearily climbed into bed hoping she could squeeze in a few more hours of sleep. She conjured up images of her, Blue, and Daniel again. As usual, she fell asleep with a smile on her face hoping the nightmares would stay away.
***Just to let ya know I put up another fic. For those of you who haven't checked it out yet you should. It's just as good as all my other ones although I think this one will be more on the suspense and intrigue side. Enjoy :D***

CHAPTER 17

Regina walked around the mannequin repeatedly. She held up cloths here and there deciding on their placement.

Cora stood back from it frowning at the costume, “It only needs a belt. Then I think we’re done.”

Zelena walked into her room and frowned at her sister and Mother, “what are you doing?”

Regina continued to frown at the mannequin ignoring her sister. “Hmm?” she asked absently as she folded an arm over her expanding middle and tucked her hand underneath her elbow. She tilted her head back as she narrowed her eyes at the mannequin.

She’d gotten up from bed the day after receiving Emma’s first email and headed to the nearest fabric store. She’d taken her Mother along with her as she was also a seamstress. Sewing was one of the requirements of being raised a fine high born lady in the Enchanted Forest.

They had to go to three different shops before collecting all of the supplies. After a quick lunch, Regina had gotten down to baking. She had crafted Henry a birthday cake to fit his Batman vs Superman theme. She’d decorated it all herself by hand with some help again from her Mother. It had taken her almost three days with all of the detailing of pieces that it took.

After she’d finished with the cake, she’d moved onto the costumes. She had fashioned a Superman costume for Henry based on his size. Or what she could remember from the last costume she’d made him. Then she’d moved onto the Batman costume. She had designed it with Emma’s body in mind.

The nights they had spent together had afforded her to know every part of Emma’s body intimately. They’d spent every spare moment they got memorizing each other’s curves, likes, and moans with their hands and tongues. And they each had special toys that they enjoyed using on the other.

She sighed. She thought the costume looked alright. But it was still missing something she couldn’t quite put her finger on.

“What is that?” Zelena asked as she too began to walk around the mannequin. “Are you making a superhero costume?” she asked her sister incredulously as she alternated gaping at the suit and her little sister. She’d heard that pregnant women lost brain cells and could even become a little crazy during pregnancy. But if she was planning on fighting crime in her time off then she figured she and her Mother needed to have a chat about getting her some serious help.

Regina’s eyes finally moved from the mannequin. She took in her sister’s shocked look and began laughing. “I’m not fighting crime at night if that’s what you were thinking.”
Zelena started to laugh and nod her head, “that is what I was thinking.”

Regina began laughing harder. Then she stopped cold. Her face took on an expression of pure shock. She placed a hand over her stomach. “I think my bladder’s breaking down,” she said as she sprinted to the bathroom.

Zelena and Cora turned back to the mannequin as they waited for her to return. The handiwork was actually quite excellent. Cora had ensured as a child that Regina had the finest tutors they could afford to help turn her into a Queen. She’d spared no expense since she was certain that one day her daughter would be Queen. And sure enough she had.

“What’s this about?” Zelena gestured to the mannequin.

Cora began collecting the fabric scraps that were lying about. “It’s for Henry’s birthday.”

“Henry’s birthday?” Zelena frowned at her Mother. “What do you mean?”

“She means that I’m making the costume for Henry’s birthday. It’s tomorrow,” Regina replied as she rejoined her family at the mannequin that was tucked into a corner of her room. “I was going to talk to you about it but you’ve been so busy lately.”

Zelena gave her a patented Mills family eyebrow raise, “you’re going back to Storybrooke?” She’d just returned herself a couple of days ago with Abby and Fred. They’d packed up their home and said their goodbyes to all their friends and family back home. They had a suite of rooms in Zelena’s home until they could find something for themselves permanently.

“No,” Regina shook her head sadly. “I can’t. But I needed to get these back to Emma for his birthday on Saturday. If you don’t mind?” she asked her sister knowing she’d taken her generosity to great lengths already.

“No,” she shrugged. “That’s no problem for me. When are you going to be done?”

Regina’s expression turned devilish. She lowered her already husky voice until it took on a villainous quality. “After you put it on so we can see how it looks.”

Zelena scoffed so her sister ramped up the pleading, “Pretty please? You and Emma are about the same size and shape. I just need to make sure that it’ll fit.”

“Fine!” she gave in and began to remove her heels. She was confused as to how her sister and her Mother managed to have this effect on her. She had never considered herself such a marshmallow before. But all it took was a little flitting of their lashes over warm chocolate covered eyes and she became an instant pushover.

Regina grinned her delight.

Emma and Henry were finishing up their bowls of cereal when Snow made her way into their apartment followed by David. Their arms were loaded down with boxes. “What’s that?” She frowned with her nose upturned hoping it wasn’t more of her parent’s surprises.

So far her mother had taken to ‘gifting’ her some of the ugliest most garish clothing and accessories she’d ever seen. But she wore them anyway. At least that one time. Then they made their way into a heap in the back of her closet where she hoped the sheer hideous mess would never be discovered.
“I was hoping you’d tell us honey,” Snow said as she brought the box she was carrying over to the table and set it down.

David followed with a couple of bigger boxes of his own. “They were just sitting outside your door.”

She was trying to make a bigger effort to step up for Henry. She was the only parent he had left. She’d taken the challenge of throwing his party together and making it the best he’d ever had. There were still a few last minute things she needed to take care so she’d asked her parents to take him out for the day so that she could get to them. But she had no idea what this was about.

Emma frowned wondering what in the world it could be. Snow was already busy opening them up before she could say or do anything else.

“Wow,” she stared down into the box. She opened it fully and stepped back.

“My birthday cake!” Henry cried excitedly. “Thanks Grandma and Grandpa,” he yelled as he stared down at it. “You got them both just right,” he stared down at the tiny replicas of Superman and Batman crouched in menacing positions facing off against one another. There was even Wonder Woman in the background there with Lois Lane. Emma wasn’t sure if they were edible but they looked as if an artist had put everything together.

Henry pulled out the phone that Emma had gotten him as an early birthday present for emergencies and friends. He snapped a pic before running towards his room. “I can’t wait for the party to start!”

Emma frowned at her parents, “You knew I was picking him up a cake from Granny’s,” she pouted. She had ordered it special. Granny had told her that Regina was the one who’d made all of Henry’s previous cakes but she would do the best she could. She let her know that she was no artist but she’d at least be able to write Happy Birthday Henry in as neat a scroll as possible.

Emma had thanked her and proceeded with the rest of her shopping for Henry’s birthday. She had the decorations tucked away in the back of her closet. The plan had been for his grandparents to take him out so that she could decorate and then go pick up the cake. Now there was no way anything Granny made could compare to this.

“It wasn’t us dear. It was sitting outside the door when we walked over. So was this,” Snow began to open the boxes that David had brought in.

Emma slammed the lid shut and ignored her Mother’s hurt expression. This was supposed to be her chance to give her son an awesome birthday. She’d waited eleven years for this and they were ruining it already with their insensitivity, “Hrmph!” she grumped as she pulled the box over to her and opened it herself.

She opened it slowly not knowing what to expect. “Hurry up!” Snow cried impatiently.

Emma tore the lid off and stepped back in awe. “Wow.” Inside were two costumes. One was obviously a Batman costume. Or batwoman since it appeared to have soft breasts on the front of it. And the other was a small boy’s Superman costume complete with a red cape and even matching red boots. She turned to the last box and ripped it open. Inside seemed what looked like a piñata of Batman on one side and Superman on the other. Hmm… she hadn’t thought about that. She had only recently found out that Henry was fluent in Spanish when he mentioned that Regina loved a novella that was on during channel surfing.

Henry rejoined the family just as Emma began pulling the items out of the boxes and holding them
up. He ran up and grabbed the costume out of Emma’s hands. “Wow! Thanks Mom,” he cried before wrapping his arms around her waist tight. Emma patted him on the head awkwardly while giving him a small smile. “I’m going to go and try this on. When Mom gets here she can wear hers,” he grinned before running back into his room with his boots and costume.

Emma’s belly dropped as she stood gaping after her son. Her parents however were busy glaring at her.

“What is this Emma?” David asked. His face was beginning to redden and Emma knew he wasn’t far from one of his speeches about how Evil Regina was and why she wasn’t allowed back into his town.

“I have no - ,” Emma broke off as she spotted an envelope inside one of the boxes. It was addressed to Henry but she recognized the scrawl. She pulled out the card inside and read it quickly. It merely said Happy 11th Birthday. I hope you find your happiness. There was a small present in with it. From the way it looked it was obviously either a game or a movie.

Emma huffed but knew now wasn’t the time or place. She was starting to get angry at Regina. After that reply she’d left her a week ago she’d gone radio silent. Emma’s anger over the situation was quickly turning to anxiety about the future of her and her two kids. A future that it seemed she had to navigate alone.

Emma had spent the past week trying to commit to some sort of routine for her and Henry. She’d switched her work schedule to daytime. There was no crime in Storybrooke other than Pongo breaking loose or Ole Ms. Boots swearing someone was spying on her. When Emma would go to investigate she’d eventually find herself being dragged inside and rewarded with a talk that could last hours if she didn’t shut it down. She’d listen as patiently as she could as she was practically held hostage while the woman discussed her woes at being the only one there to raise all 13 of her children alone.

She’d also committed to making sure that Henry got his homework done and went to bed at a decent time. They had dinner together from Granny’s until Emma could get around to fully furnishing the kitchen. Sometimes they’d stay at the diner and other times they’d come home and spend the night engaging in video game wars. For the most part things were working.

Emma started clearing up the breakfast dishes. She threw everything into the dishwasher while her parents read through Regina’s note.

“She’s not coming here to disturb us is she? This is Henry’s special day. You’re going to have to put your foot down with her Emma,” Snow informed her as she shook her head at the card before letting it fall back onto the table.

Emma brought over a wet cloth and began to wipe off the table. “That’s what she’s been saying,” she gritted through her teeth. She wasn’t up for anymore of her parents lectures. She threw the cloth over toward the sink and began to make her way into her bedroom.

“Emma! Where are you going? We still have to talk about this!” David roared after her.

Emma just ignored him and kept going. When she got to the entryway of her bedroom she turned back toward him, “I’ve already told you everything you need to know! If you could take Henry with you when you leave I’d appreciate it,” she slammed her door shut.

She raised her fists to her temples. She wasn’t sure if she wanted to scream or cry. She had no idea what this meant. But she was hoping Regina had changed her mind and would make one of her
dramatic entrances at the birthday party. For her sake and for Henry’s.

SF

Emma stood back and placed her hands on her hips as she surveyed the loft. Not to toot her own horn but it looked great.

Henry had come in to say bye to her and show her his costume. He really did look adorable in it even though she could see it was a little on the small side for him. Her son was turning 11. He was technically an adolescent now.

She’d snapped a pic and given him a hug and kiss goodbye. She’d waited until her parents left using the time to straighten up her room. Then she moved into the other rooms of the loft.

She’d phoned Granny’s and informed her about the cake situation. Granny had scoffed after telling her she’d already decorated it and it was sitting in the fridge waiting on her. Emma told her she’d be in later to pay for it before suggesting she just hand out slices to her customers free of charge in honor of Henry’s birthday. That had seemed to appease her.

The place was spotless and looked better than ever. She’d placed the chips and candies into a bowl. She had preordered pizzas for later. She’d filled the grab bags and the piñatas. Then she threw together some cans of Hawaiian punch with chopped fruit floating around inside of it. She put out a few bottles of wine, beer, and liquor for the adults along the kitchen buffet.

After pinning a Happy Birthday banner up to the ceiling so that people would see it as soon as they walked in she stood back and examined her handiwork. The place was looking damned good.

Suddenly, the door flew open and all she saw was a red cape streaming through before the door slammed. She turned to the front door of her place and saw her parents staring at her with guilt written across their faces. She squeezed her eyes tight and counted to ten, “What happened?” she asked through gritted teeth even though she really didn’t want to know.

“He insisted on going to Regina’s house. We tried talking him out of it but he really does have a one track mind,” David began explaining. “You might want to work with him on that Emma.”

Emma gave a dry chuckle knowing that was true. Henry really did seem only capable of handling things in small bits and pieces.

‘When we got there,’” Snow finished up, “he hurt himself running into a barrier of some sort. We checked him over and he seemed fine. But he started yelling about her not being there. Then he got quiet and went back to sit in the car. We didn’t know what else to do so we brought him back home.”

Emma’s nodded even as her head drooped. She silently cursed Regina for not showing up. She too had been hoping that she would make it there. You only get one birthday a year. She was hurt and angry at her about this and the entirety of their situation.

Before she could say anything, the doorbell rang. Emma glanced at the clock. “Aww damn. I didn’t realize it was that late,” she dropped her face into her hands. She slid her hands down her face and wrung them out. She began to make her way to Henry’s room. “Get that will ya?” she called over her shoulder to her parents.

When she entered Henry’s bedroom he was lying on his bed staring up at the ceiling. She heard her Mother greeting some kid at the door. She closed the door quickly as she looked at her son. He wasn’t crying but he didn’t look like he was far away from it either. “She’s not coming,” he said
sadly in a broken voice that tore at Emma’s heart.

Emma walked over and sat at the foot of his bed, “No she’s not. But Gram and Gramps are here. And your friends are starting to arrive,” she said as upbeat as she could. She plastered a smile on her face as she lightly scratched over his belly, “Come on. We’ve gotta show them our costumes,” she prompted hoping that would pull him out of his funk.

Henry turned toward her, “I thought that was Mom’s costume,” he frowned clearly not pleased at the idea of Emma standing in.

Emma moistened her lips, “If you don’t want me to wear it then I won’t. I just thought – we could match,” she smiled and shrugged at him.

Henry sat up and let his legs hang over the side of the bed. He stared at the floor for a minute saying nothing.

Emma waited him out. She let him process through whatever. Then the doorbell rang again. Still, she knew rushing him wasn’t a good idea. But something else was maybe. She sat on the bed beside Henry. “Henry, your Mom obviously isn’t coming. But if you want you can send her a message and wait and see what she has to say back to you.”

Henry was confused, “how? I thought she didn’t want you either.”

Emma winced at his words even though she knew he didn’t understand fully the reason why, “She gave me an email address. I leave her messages and she gets back to me. You can leave her a message and she’ll send you something back. You can say anything that you want to say to her.”

“Really,” Henry began to get excited.

“Really,” she smiled at him. The doorbell rang again. “But it’ll have to wait until after the party. I think it’s important we get out there. Sounds like your party’s starting without you.”

Henry grinned and hugged her. She returned the hug and gave him a kiss on the side of his head, “Now go! Hurry the party can’t start without the guest of honor.”

Emma followed Henry out of the room. Then she went into her bedroom to change. When she came back out in the Batwoman costume everyone seemed to enjoy it. But she noticed Henry’s shoulders droop and his mouth quiver before he was able to compose himself. He gave her another sad watery smile then turned back to his friends.

The rest of the party passed uneventfully. People seemed to really be enjoying themselves. A few of the woman asked about the costumes and cake but she waved them away quickly. She didn’t want to rain on Henry’s party by having to spend the entire time defending Regina or why she wasn’t the Evil Queen anymore and merely the only Mother Henry’d known until then. After the happy birthday song, the cake was cut, the pinatas were broken, and presents were open, everyone made their farewells. Emma handed out the grab bags on the way out the door. She was thrilled when the last party guest left.

She frowned at her parents as they continued to bustle around the apartment. During the party they acted as if they were holding court. It had irritated her but she’d brushed it off once more not wanting to create a disturbance. But now it was time for her and Henry to have a heart to heart. And she knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that they wouldn’t help the situation at all.

Henry walked over to her expectantly, “can we do it now?”
“Do what?” Snow asked as she picked up some of the scattered paper plates.

“It’s private,” Emma threw in quickly. She took a deep breath, “You can just leave that,” she took the stack of plates from Snow. David looked over at her and frowned.

“We’re trying to help you Emma,” he threw in as he came to stand behind his wife.

“I don’t need help right now. I’ll get to the cleaning up myself. But for right now Henry and I really need some time alone. So could you two please - ?” she gestured to the door.

They both looked at her like they wanted to argue. But they made their way to the door anyway.

As soon as it closed Emma put down the stack of plates she was carrying. She went over to her laptop and booted it up.

Henry followed her and sat anxiously beside her. He kept fidgeting around.

Once the computer was booted up she pulled up the email account and stated a new message. She turned to Henry, “do you want to type or do you want me to?”

Henry shook his head at her, “I was thinking it’d be better to send a video message,” he grinned at her. “That way she could see us in our costumes.”

Emma nodded, “good thinking kid.” She opened her webcam app and set it up. Then she handed the laptop over to Henry, “I’m going to finish getting this place in order. Let me know when you’re done.”

Emma began cleaning while Henry sat and spoke into the camera to Regina. He was clearly nervous at first but over the course of the conversation he began to relax and get into the idea of a video between him and his Mom. He started telling her every last detail of his life that had happened since she left. He even told her about getting in trouble at school because some of the kids had said mean things about her. He’d lowered his voice during that one but Emma had still heard him loud and clear although she kept cleaning so that he wouldn’t get thrown off. She frowned and was a little upset since this was the first time that she’d heard about it.

Finally, he began to wrap it up. Emma heard his voice choking up with emotion, “I really miss you Mom. I really need to know when you’re coming home. And - ,” his eyes drifted around the room. “Emma wore your costume because you weren’t here,” his voice cracked on that one. It made Emma start to tear up too. She buried her head in the garbage bags so that he wouldn’t see and become more upset than he already was. “But – it’s still yours,” he wiped at his now reddened tear drenched eyes. “I love you Mom. Bye.”

Emma came out of hiding after she heard the mouse click signaling the end of his message. She looked up as he put the laptop aside. She tried to put on a happy face for him, “you all done?” she asked in a voice that to her rang with pure saccharine. She inwardly groaned. She sounded like her Mother.

Henry nodded as he stood up slowly. He began to shuffle along toward his bedroom with his head and shoulders drooping, “I’m tired. I’m going to go to bed now.”

“Are you sure? We could watch a movie while we pig out on the leftovers,” Emma tried to cajole him in hopes of cheering him up. “We could watch the new one your Mom sent.” Regina’s present had turned to be a copy of the Batman vs Superman movie. She knew it was something he’d been looking forward to seeing. Or at least he had been until today.
“No,” he shook his head before reaching his door. “I’m really tired. I just want to sleep. Good night Emma,” he said before going into his room.

Emma stared after him. He had been calling her Mom ever since the curse had worn off. Now she was back to Emma. She wasn’t sure if that was good or bad.

She finished cleaning while she played over the last few weeks in her head. So much had happened and she really had no idea what she was doing. Life had been so much easier before the curse had been lifted.

Once the kitchen was clean she opened up her laptop. She attached Henry’s message and closed it up for Regina. Then she activated the webcam again and began to record her own message.

She opened and closed her mouth repeatedly before she finally squeezed her eyes shut. When she opened them again she began speaking in a voice that was so steady it surprised her.

“Look Regina,” she looked away for a second before focusing again, “You and I have made a huge mess of this entire thing. Neither one of us are all right or all wrong. None of what happened before is important. All that is important is that there are two children who need their parents. You ignoring me and Henry isn’t going to make us disappear. And you refusing to have this conversation like an adult just makes you a coward. I promised Henry I’d stop running. And I have. Now it’s your turn.”

Emma rose and moved off camera for a minute. When she returned she carried with her a sheath of papers. “Here’s my answer to this screwed up custody arrangement you came up with yourself,” Emma made sure she could read the first page that stated that it was a custody agreement. Then she began to rip them up. “I will NOT give up either one of my children. EVER!!!”

She took a deep calming breath, “There are a whole slew of things we need to talk about. I need to know my baby’s due date. I need to know that you’re taking your vitamins and what the doctor says about her. I need to be there the next time you have an appointment with him. Or her,” she flexed her brows. “What I’m saying is that I want to be there every step of the way. From all of her ultrasounds the first time you feel her move,” Emma ran a hand over her now bleary eyes. “And on to her first words and steps all of the way up until graduation. She’s my baby. And I won’t be banished from her life. And Henry’s as much your kid as he is mine.”

Emma squeezed her eyes tight before opening them up. They were now red-rimmed and had tears pebbled in the corners. “I’m really sorry that I said you were nothing to him. I knew I was wrong when I did it. And I never mean it. I was just so scared for him. I let my emotions get away from me sometimes to the point where I just see red and have no idea of what I’m going to do next. I hope one day you can forgive me for that,” Emma’s lips were quivering but she did her best to come up with a watery smile, “Maybe you and I are too much alike. And that’s where the fire and oil comes from,” she shrugged her shoulders.

“But we can’t make these kids pay for how messed we are. We have to do better than that. I promised myself that my children would always be happy. And right now,” she looked off camera at something far away. “Now we’re both failing,” she said quietly as a few tears managed to make up with a watery smile, “Maybe you and I are too much alike. And that’s where the fire and oil comes from,” she shrugged her shoulders.

She took a deep breath and focused back on the camera. “But not anymore. We owe it to them to get past all of this garbage between us. It’s nothing but toxic and I don’t want to live this way anymore.”

“I hope you’re okay. And I hope to talk to you soon. Preferably face to face,” she reached over to
turn the camera off. But before she did she looked into the camera once more, “take care of yourself Regina. And Blue too.”

Emma clicked the camera off. This time she didn’t hesitate. She immediately attached the message so that Regina could read it. She saved it in the drafts folder.

She got up and threw away the torn paperwork. Then she made her way wearily in bed. She fell asleep that night with dried tears on her face.

RQ

Regina stared at the messages. She’d played both of them through twice. She couldn’t believe what she was hearing.

Her fingers began to curl around the keyboard as they hovered over the mouse, “damn her.”
CHAPTER 18

“I don’t understand.”

Regina stared at her sister with waterlogged eyes. She shrugged and ran her hand across her forehead, “what part don’t you understand?”

“I mean – why?”

Zelena had come to her rooms after she’d gotten home from work. She liked having someone to check in with when she got home. They had chatted for a few minutes about how their work was coming along. And then Regina, as always, dropped a bomb on her out of nowhere.

Regina closed her laptop and came around her desk. She sat in the chair that was across from her sister. “I have to see him,” she said with a voice thick with emotion.

Zelena began shaking her head.

But Regina continued, “I have to. I just – I have to see him.”

“But Blue -,” Zelena motioned to her sister’s bulging belly.

“I meant afterward. Once the pregnancy is over and Blue’s here. Will you? Please?”

Zelena searched her sister’s face for a clue as to what it was she was thinking. Aside from the tears shimmering in her eyes she gave nothing else away. She looked past her as she collected her thoughts.

They had already talked about the dangers that were involved with spirit walking. She should’ve known that this was coming sooner or later though. She’d known the stories of her sisters’ exploits long before she’d met her. They were seconded only to her own and their Mother’s. Apparently upsetting a Mills woman wasn’t conducive to anyone’s health.

Regina had spent centuries and cursed an entire town after her loss of Daniel. She should’ve known she wouldn’t give him up so easily now.

Zelena sighed before dropping her head. She gave her a sister a reluctant nod, “Yes I will teach you. After -,” she held her finger in the air before her sister’s undeniable joy would carry the two of them away, “my little niece gets here,” she patted Regina’s rounded belly.

Regina grinned her thanks at her sister. They were all still getting used to this. Having family, depending on one another, and helping one another out. It felt really good to finally not be alone in the world. She threw her arms around her sister’s neck, “Thanks Zelly.”

Zelena rolled her eyes at the newly christened nickname. “Yeah, yeah,” she muttered before returning the embrace. They pulled back from one another when Blue gave them a little kick. She had been doing that a lot lately.

Zelena placed her palm along her sister’s midsection, “the force is strong in this one,” she waggled her eyebrows while grinning at her sister. Regina rolled her eyes and gave an exasperated sigh. “You’re headstrong like just like your Mummy aren’t you my pretty?”
They both waited a minute to see if she would respond. After about a minute they got a small kick in response.

Regina grinned and nodded as she ran her hands over her protruding belly. “Smart as a whip just like her Mother too,” she exclaimed proudly.

RQ

“So?” Abby asked with a big smile on her face.

“So what?” Regina asked as she kept her eyes on their waitress. She was walking toward them carrying her slice of salted caramel apple pie with a pretzel crust with whipped cream and a thick wedge of cheddar along with it. She thanked her then waited for her to walk away before returning her attention to her food. She drizzled the side of extra caramel sauce over it before she began to dig in. She moaned and closed her eyes as the salty sweetness exploded in her mouth. She opened her eyes and grinned over at her best friend.

Her cravings had been getting out of control now that she’d entered her last trimester. She had sworn to not be one of those pregnant women that pretended a baby was the cause of them overeating. She hadn’t accounted for the hormones that were flooding through her system constantly. No matter what techniques she used to distract her, once the cravings started she was powerless to deny them.

That and today was special. She and Abby were having a celebratory lunch. They’d gotten the last of the permits that were needed to start construction on a couple of their buildings. Soon they’d break ground on what would become the school and shelter for the kids and animals they were expecting to take in. They had just finalized the plans with the architect when Regina’s latest craving had kicked in. She’d immediately announced a celebratory lunch was in order.

“How are things with Emma?” she prompted excitedly.

Regina paused mid-chew and grimaced.

Abby quirked an eyebrow at her, “that good huh?”

Regina sighed before returning her fork to the side of her plate. Things had been going so well for her lately. The school would take about 6 to 9 months to finish building but the no kill animal shelter was already up and running. They had already hired some teachers and were in the process of interviewing for the other open positions. Everything was perfect. Except for her personal life.

She had been thrilled to find out that Blue had been real and would soon be returning to her. But Emma was insisting on complicating the entire parental issue. She was making demands about co-parenting as if they had that kind of relationship.

Regina placed her ankle up on her opposite thigh and wrapped her fingers around it before she began to gently massage it. Now that her stomach was bigger than her reach, crossing her legs was out of the question. This was the closest she would be getting to do that for a few more months. “They could definitely be better,” she shook her head before returning to her pre-lunch dessert.

Abby pursed her lips as she watched her best friend with an amused look on her face, “I wonder.”

Regina knew she was digging and that she didn’t have to be prompted before continuing. Obviously she had something on her mind.

“The last time I saw Emma she wasn’t doing that well,” Abby told her watching carefully for a
reaction from her.

Abby had only found out that Regina had left town after being confronted at the diner by a clearly upset Emma as to whether or not she knew of her whereabouts. She had been to Regina’s house countless times since the curse had broken but each time she’d sent her away.

Emma had laid on a thick story about how upset Henry was about her disappearance as she studied her to see if she was hiding anything. She’d told her truthfully at the time that she hadn’t seen nor heard from Regina in weeks. But Emma knew that they were close friends. She wasn’t sure if she believed her or not but she did finally stop questioning her about it.

The waitress came over with their order. She laid the ribs, pickled eggs, and fried shrimp in front of Regina after collecting her empty dessert plate. She asked if they needed anything else as she put Abby’s Cobb salad down in front of her. Then she discreetly left the women to themselves again.

The two ate in silence until their hunger had been sated. They made a little small talk about much of nothing until they were done with their meal. It was while they were waiting for the waitress to bring them the check that Abby decided to restart the conversation.

Regina sat back full and happy as she absently rubbed her belly. Abby’s eyes caught the movements and she smiled at her. Regina rolled her eyes, “Just say what you have to say so that we can be done with it.” She knew from experience that the blonde could be like a dog with a bone until she’d gotten what she wanted out of you.

“Fine, I will,” she crossed her arms atop the table. Regina shook her head and sighed knowing this meant their peaceful celebratory lunch was over.

“You know what all we’ve been going through in trying to start our little family.” The two women had talked frequently about her wanting a baby. She and Jim were still trying and keeping their hopes up. But she’d confided that she was becoming frustrated with the entire situation as she watched a woman who wasn’t supposed to be able to conceive grow bigger by the week. “You’re getting to have all of these little Mommy moments like hearing the baby’s heartbeat, feeling her kick, bonding and communicating with her already. If it were me - or even you – would you want to be missing out on all of this?”

Regina started to protest but Abby cut her off, “and don’t pretend you’re the victim here. You’re not. You’re about to have two children together. You can’t be the baby here. I mean, Emma doesn’t even know why you tried to put her in a sleeping curse to begin with. All she knows is that one minute she was telling you that she loved you and wanted more than your little sexcapades and the next minute she was watching her son keel over. It’s not fair Regina and you know it.”

“Not fair?!!!? How about her plans on kidnapping my child from me and disappearing?!!!? How fair was that???” Regina shot back angrily.

After Archie told her that Emma was planning on taking Henry and leaving Storybrooke and that he would be on her side if she did, she’d had no choice. She had to do something to protect herself and her son. She obviously didn’t want her dead. She had been trying desperately to deny the feelings that she’d had for the other woman for months. And Emma’s ultimatum of them having a real, honest and open relationship or else she was walking did nothing to make it easier. She had always hated ultimatums. She was tired of others controlling her life and leaving her no choice but to accept what they were demanding. But she couldn’t let her just do that to her. The sleeping curse had been the only thing she could think of during those moments of sheer panic and devastation she’d felt at Emma’s betrayals.
But then Henry just had to put himself in between them. He’d spent the past year cruelly making his point. She was not his Mother. And he didn’t love, care for, or want her.

All of her desperate attempts to remind him of the life and love they’d shared between them before his storybook were all in vain. Upon his waking from the sleeping curse he took every opportunity he could to make sure she understood he felt nothing for her but pure hate.

And Emma kidnapping her son by having a judge who felt that her Mother was his rightful Queen, she was the Evil Queen and Emma was the savior was the last bit she could take before she went over the edge.

Her thankfully failed suicide attempt had ended up saving her life. It made her re-evaluate what was important in life. And that she still had more to offer to herself, the people who loved her, and to the world. She now had a loving family, a beautiful loving baby to look forward to, and a hopefully bright future. She’d left all of her pain and resentments behind her when she moved forward to embrace a new life. And still Snow White and her whelp were insisting on ruining everything.

The waitress finally appeared with the check. Regina grabbed for it and laid out the correct bills plus a generous tip on the platter. She made her way out of the restaurant without another word to Abby.

She strode ahead of her with a quick forceful pace and remembered too late that they were in England. Driving was backwards there. She had to scoot around her to the other side of the car since - due to her pregnancy - Abby was doing the driving.

She waited impatiently for her to unlock it before climbing into the driver’s seat. After getting into the driver’s seat Abby turned to her holding up her hands to show her peaceful submission, “I didn’t mean to upset you. I just think that things don’t have to be so black and white. Are you really going to be happy if you each take a kid and pull them in opposite directions? And just - I mean, how are you going to explain all of this to Blue? She will ask one day you know.”

Regina glared at her as Blue began reacting to her Mother’s anger. She began a relentless stream of steady kicks. Regina tried calming her down by rubbing her hand along her belly. Usually a light massage helped when she got overactive. But today Blue wasn’t having it.

Abby shook her head, “I’m just saying. I think you should think with your head instead of your anger. And now I’ve said all I needed to. I promise you that I won’t bring it up again,” Abby put the car and gear and pulled out.

Regina continued to fume all of the way home and well into the next couple of days. It was only two days and two sleepless nights later due to her soreness since Blue refused to let up on the kicking that her anger finally abated so that she could think things through clearly.

There was no getting around the truth. She knew Blue would one day ask about her other parent. And she was going to have to tell her everything. She just dreaded how that would end up being received.

Before she could change her mind she pulled out her tablet. She opened up the account that she used to speak with Emma. She opened up an email and began to type.

Emma,

I’m not entirely sure about whether or not this is a good idea. It would be easier to just pretend we had never existed. But then I wouldn’t have Blue. And right now her and her happiness are the most important things in the world to me.
I won’t try to keep you out of her life. I won’t do that to you or her. But until she’s old enough to make the decisions for herself I can only allow you access on a limited supervised basis.

I don’t need to be accompanied to my doctor’s visits. I think that would be too much intimacy between us. But I will make sure you are there when she’s born. And the visitations we can work out later. Hopefully these will be enough until then.

She read and reread it three times. Finally she opened up her pics and videos folders. She attached a few of the ultrasounds, some of the videos they’d taken of Blue punching and kicking her where you could make out her hands and feet, and some other random photos of her pregnancy.

She hit send before she got cold feet about the entire thing. She looked down at her sore belly. Blue had finally stopped kicking her to death. She ran her hand over her baby bump, “happy now?”

She wearily fell into bed. As always her last thoughts were of her, Blue and Daniel. And how perfect everything had been between them in their little isolated world. It was the first restful night of sleep she’d gotten in days.
CHAPTER 19

"I don't understand."

Henry continued to stare at the picture on the open laptop.

Emma rubbed her eyes as she fought for the right words to say to explain the situation.

It had been an odd good day. Work had been slow lately since apparently they'd beaten back all of the big baddies. Pongo hadn't bothered to run away and the town was quiet. She'd spent the day napping, taking lazy patrols around, and chatting with Ruby at the diner in between her tables.

After picking up Henry from school she had decided that she would try and make dinner for her and Henry on her own tonight. They'd gone to the store and picked up the ingredients for American tacos. It was Regina who had taught her that what she considered to be a taco definitely did not qualify in Latin American countries. But this was a simple enough dish that even she couldn't screw up.

After dinner she'd sent Henry to do his homework. She should've known better than to turn her back on him though.

She had been doing the dishes when she'd heard a gasp. Her head had instantly risen from where she stood in the kitchen to where Henry had been at in the living room. She saw him staring with horror at the open laptop and knew things were about to get bad.

"Henry, what's going on?" she called as she began to rinse her hands. She used a kitchen towel to dry off her hands as she made her way into the living room.

Henry turned with his mouth ajar. He stared at her with blank eyes before turning back towards the computer screen.

By this time, Emma had made her way over to him. She sat beside him and pulled the laptop over to her. She cursed herself for not remembering to password protect it.

"My mom's having a baby?"

The words hung in the air for a moment as Emma searched for the right words to say. She continued to stare at one of the many photographs that Regina had sent her. She was standing next to a calendar that seemed identical to a growth chart that you'd find in children's rooms. Except this one seemed to track the size of her belly as her pregnancy progressed. She was grinning happily as she stood with her blouse raised to show off her burgeoning baby bump. The tape next to the marker pointed out that she was in her 29th week.

Honestly Emma had no idea what to make of it. She had told her that she wanted to be more involved with her baby. But she'd never thought about what all that entailed. She scrolled through the other photos of what appeared to be a new ultrasound and older photos of her belly from around the time she'd first told Emma about the pregnancy until now. She'd even sent videos. It wasn't what Emma wanted but she knew it was what she had to live with. For now.

"Did you know about this?" Henry's voice broke through the thoughts and emotions that were flooding through her as she took in the sight of her baby developing into her own little person.
Emma turned toward him and blinked back the tears that were threatening to fall. Seeing her baby always took her breath away. "What?" she asked him numbly.

"Did you know my Mom was going to have a baby?" Henry repeated slowly as if she was slow.

Emma squeezed her eyes shut and shook her head to clear it. She took a deep breath and exhaled it slowly. "Yes," she answered him honestly before turning to face him. "She's having my baby."

"What?!" now Henry sat gaping at her as if she were a three headed alien. His eyes bulged and he blinked rapidly repeatedly at her as he sat with his mouth hanging wide open. Clearly he was in shock.

She paused a moment as she waited for him to digest the news.

"I don't understand," Henry shook his head at her. He had only wanted to check and see if his Mom had sent him a message back. He hadn't heard anything from her. Even though he'd noted that the message was to Emma he'd thought it would be okay for him to check it. He never would've guessed what he did find.

Emma let out a big breath. She pushed her hair behind her ears as she let her neck snap back. She squeezed her eyes shut before turning back to her son, "You see Henry - ," she started then stopped unsure of what to say next. Once she'd gathered herself again she moistened her lips before continuing, "When two people care about each other they use their bodies to show one another."

"I know what sex is!" Henry burst in as if it were the most obvious thing. "But you and my Mom?" he shook his head.

Emma nodded, "yes me and your Mom."

Henry still couldn't believe what he was hearing. "Girls can't make babies together! Only a man and a woman can. Like you and my Dad."

Emma gave him a watery smile, "Unless they have magic," she held her hand up and wriggled her fingers around. "Your sister – Blue – she came from the magic that your Mom and I shared between us," she explained.

Henry turned back to the pictures on the screen. He watched as they became a slideshow in front of his eyes. He saw his Mom's – Regina's – belly become larger as his sister (he wasn't sure when or how he'd get used to that one) grew inside of her.

He hadn't seen his Mom – Regina – look that happy in quite some time. Definitely long before his storybook entered the picture. Even squeezing his eyes shut tight and concentrating hard he couldn't remember the last good day they'd shared. But now there she stood grinning away at the camera. And it wasn't him who'd elicited that response from her.

His heart began to speed up and his breathing became more labored as he stared at her smiling face. She was so beautiful when she smiled. How had he forgotten that? Her skin was glowing and the sadness he had always known was just underneath the surface had seemed to disappear. It made him feel – saddened.

He swallowed thickly. His stomach began to roil as he swung his gaze from the screen over to Emma's face. She had a small smile on her face but he could sense her sadness just as he'd always known about his Moms. "She left you too," he stated knowing the words were true even as he felt the tears sting the back of his eyes.
Emma grimaced. She took a deep breath and let it out slowly through her mouth. "Yeah. I guess she did."

Henry's eyes became red rimmed, "And she's not coming back is she?" This was posed as a question. But Emma understood it was a statement he was only just now beginning to understand and accept.

She shook her head sadly at her son, "according to her – no."

Henry's face melted as he began to feel the weight of those words tumbling down on him. His Mom was gone. And she was never coming back. He swallowed thickly and willed his tears back as he rose and began to walk quickly to his room.

"Henry," Emma called out to her son.

"I have homework," was the only thing he said as he continued to move toward his room. He went inside and shut then locked the door behind him. He couldn't take dealing with Em – he meant his Mom - tonight.

He climbed on his bed and pulled out one of the last pics that he had taken with his Mom without having to plaster a fake smile on his face after learning the truth. He kept it hidden underneath his pillow. He didn't know why but having it made him feel a little better at night.

It was photo of the two of them from Christmas almost a year ago. They were both sitting in front of his pile of presents in front of the tree grinning away. His Mom held his measly present on her lap and was grinning just as she had in the photos of her and her new baby. Even though he'd only been able to give her nothing but a new picture frame. Inside he'd placed a photo of one of the last times he'd helped her out in the kitchen. They'd made homemade tortillas to go with his Mom's special pollo con mole. The counters in the kitchen were covered in flour. And the two of them were holding up their flour covered hands at the camera that she'd set up in the corner. The gift was nothing really. But his Mom had acted as if it was the greatest treasure in the world to her.

Then he'd received his storybook. And all he could see or understand from there on was how wrong everything was. She wasn't his real Mom. And he didn't belong with her. He had a real family out there that the Evil Queen had separated him from. And as the son of the Savior it was his job to reunite them so that they would all get their happy endings back.

But this – this didn't feel like a happy ending. He had wanted this. Dreamed about it really. This life with his real family. He had thought that having his real Mom in his life would change everything. But it hadn't. Not really. The only thing that had changed was his address. He even still slept in basically the same room. Just with a lot less space to put all of his things.

Because everywhere he looked all he saw were reminders of his real life. His life before Emma and the curse and his storybook. A life with the woman who'd looked at him the same way he'd seen her look down at her large belly as her hand rested lovingly across it on the computer screen. A life he knew was gone forever. Because of him.

He'd wanted her gone. Since getting his storybook he'd decided that he'd hated her for what she'd done to him and his family. She was the Evil Queen. And she needed to be punished. And that's when he'd come up with Operation Cobra.

Now he had everything he'd worked so hard for. His real Mom and even a Dad he didn't know was out there. He had grandparents. But he also had a gnawing emptiness that was in the pit of his stomach when they had to ask him things that his Mom would've already known the answers to.
Like what his favorite colors were. Or what he liked to eat.

But they didn't even know to ask the other things. Things like; did he need help with his homework? How was he feeling? Was he happy?

They didn't even check his homework let alone care whether or not it was done. Emma had merely chuckled once when his Grandmother had asked him once about it saying that he did better in school than she'd ever done. Henry didn't bother to correct her that she'd never even seen his report cards before.

He didn't even realize he was crying until the photo began to blur. He angrily swiped the back of his hand across his eyes. He didn't know why he was crying. He had everything. And yet after seeing that his Mom had moved on from him, he was finally beginning to understand that breaking the curse had been a gift. But that gift had come with a heavy price. One that he was just now beginning to understand that he was having to pay.

SF

Emma and Henry were kicked back with their feet on the table as they engaged in one of their video game battles. She knew it was getting late and he needed to be in bed but one more game wouldn't hurt. Anyway he was a smart kid. His grades were better than any she'd ever gotten.

She had wanted to talk to him about the new baby and get a read on how he was doing. Before the curse had broken Henry had been like her little sidekick. But he had been building walls between them lately and she really wasn't okay with it.

Emma had made sure that he understood that this baby wouldn't replace him at all. It was just more family to love. Henry had been silent throughout her speech. But afterward he'd only asked about dinner.

They'd had dinner with her parents that night since Mary – she meant her Mom had guilt tripped her into it. She'd decide to declare Tuesdays and Thursdays mandatory family dinner nights. Ordinarily Henry would've been jumping for joy over that one. But instead he'd just continued eating.

Emma thought that maybe the video games would relax him enough to open up. But Henry only wanted to concentrate on the screen.

They were nearing the end of the round and Emma had already given Henry a warning that it was time for getting ready for bed when suddenly, a plume of green smoke began to fill the apartment. Then with a small pop in the air, a figure stood staring down at where they were slouched down on the sofa. Emma recognized her as the woman Regina had been with at the marina and on the videos that Regina had sent her. "What the – ?!"

"Regina's in labor. She asked me to come and get you," the redhead spoke with a haughty English accent. It made Emma dislike her all the more. She looked down at the slim gold watch that circled her slim wrist before looking back at Emma. "You've got 5 minutes before I leave here with or without you," she crossed her arms over her chest and began to tap her foot.

Emma blinked at her repeatedly before the shock of her entrance and the words she'd just spoken clicked with her. "Oh!" she threw the controller down and then stood up. She put her hands on her hips and looked around as she tried to force her brain to process through.

"My Mom's having the baby?" Henry croaked out after he'd paused the game. He had no idea who this woman was but Emma didn't seem to be worried about her in any way. He threw his controller
down, "I'm coming too." He began to race to his room.

"You're not coming anywhere with me," Zelena informed him before he could get too far.

Henry turned back to her with his jaw set. He narrowed his eyes as he stared intensely at her, "I'm coming with you," he ground out though his teeth. Then he turned on his heel with his back ramrod straight and walked out of the room. Classic Regina.

Emma and – whoever this woman was – watched him go without another word. It wasn't until they saw the light from his room flood the hallway before Emma turned back to her. "Isn't this too early?" She had thought that Regina wasn't due for another few weeks.

Zelena nodded her head, "Yes but only a few weeks. The doctor's aren't panicked." She checked her watch again, "you now have 4 minutes."

Emma grabbed her boots from beside the sofa where she had kicked them off earlier and put them on quickly. Then she grabbed a bag that she had picked up just for her daughter and slung it over her shoulder. It was already filled with items she had been picking up here and there for her, "I'm ready."

"Me too," Henry called out as he came speeding back into the living room. He was now wearing a backpack with an anxious looking expression on his face.

"You are not coming with me," Zelena repeated before looking at her watch again. "You now have 2 minutes."

Emma huffed and turned to Henry, "Henry you're going to have to go with your grandparents."

'No! I'm go - ," he began.

Suddenly he was airborne. The door behind him opened and so did his grandparents. He was thrust into the living room where their startled expression greeted him before the doors were slammed shut again.

Emma turned on the redhead, "Don't you e - ," she began. Then her wrist was grabbed. Next thing she knew her stomach began to roil, her knees became weak, her breathing became shallow puffs. When the sensations passed she was barely able to stand on her own legs which felt like spaghetti noodles before she was thrust away. She tried to catch herself on the wash basin of the bathroom they had landed in but missed it. She'd ended up on her bum instead.

She panted as she willed the dizziness away. She put her head between her knees and took shallow breaths like she had seen suggested on movies.

Zelena smirked at her crumpled form before leaving the bathroom. Emma glared after her.

When she could stand without the threat of retching she made her way to the door. When she cracked it open and glanced out she realized she was in an en suite off of a hospital room.

For the first time she realized that she was about to see her baby be born. Her mouth became full and her palms began to sweat and she had to swallow repeatedly to try and push back her queasiness.

Then she realized it wasn't only her baby she was about to meet. For the first time in months she would come face to face with the woman who'd broken her heart. She took another moment to steady herself. Then she straightened her back and walked fully into the room.
**What the - ?!!??**

Chapter Notes

*** For those of you who keep asking, I don't know when I'm going to get around to updating any of my stories. It was really hard pushing myself to do this. I make no promises any other way. When you see a new post up then you'll have your answer for those of you who keep asking. I can only say honestly that I do want to see them all through to the end. But there are a few new ones up for those of you who haven't check them out. Enjoy! ***

**CHAPTER 20**

When Emma opened the door and walked into the room her jaw dropped as the air in her lungs rushed out. She could do nothing but stand there and gawk at the woman who was quite obviously in the middle of labor.

Regina’s face was shining with a light sheen of sweat. Her cheeks were reddened with exertion and her breathing was labored. Her hair was pulled back in a ponytail which now hung low with tendrils that had escaped and were now curling around the sides of her face. Emma thought she had never looked more beautiful than in that moment.

She sat bent over in a bed that looked like it had been made for a Queen. In the king sized bed she lay in the midst of silky sheets and a beautiful black and purple comforter that had been kicked off to the end of the bed. Had it not been for the stirrups at the end of it where Regina’s legs were upraised, one would’ve thought that they were in a luxurious private home.

Though the room was decorated with the same attention to opulence, elegance, and luxury that she had always associated with Regina, there was also medical equipment set up on one side of the room. And Regina was hooked up to wires and monitors all around her. It was a lot to take in. And in true Charming fashion, Emma hid her emotions poorly behind a slack jaw and bulging eyes.

When Emma walked into the room, Regina’s breath caught in her throat. She had been watching the door since her sister had left after what felt like hours ago but was probably no more than a few minutes worrying and wondering how the two of them would greet one another after so long apart. If not for the beeping of the machinery she was hooked up to she would’ve sworn that her heart had stopped.

Her emotions were in hyper drive. She was experiencing such a rush of different things all at once that they threatened to overwhelm her. She was awash with joy, trepidation, anger, confusion, and frustration. This was precisely what she had wanted to avoid from the moment that she’d first met Emma. Even then their connection had been strong from the very first moment their eyes met on her front porch. And despite all that they had gone through over the past few months it obviously hadn’t dimmed.

She had always known that the intimacy between the two of them would be her downfall. And it had. But as Blue grew inside of her, it had also become her saving grace. And for that alone, she would never be able to deny that there was something real there between them.
Emma now stood in the doorway to her hospital room in true Charming fashion. Her eyes were widened and her mouth hung slightly open. She looked the exact way that Regina felt.

Before she could say or do anything though, another contraction tore through her body. She doubled over gasping for breath as she tried to control her breathing the way she’d been taught in her childbirthing classes.

Seeing Regina bent over and gasping for breath knocked Emma out of her stupor. She quickly made her way from the bathroom doorway that she was standing in and over to the bed. She reached out and latched a hand onto Regina’s arm to help steady her as she rubbed her back with the other hand, “are you okay?” she asked with worry etched across her face.

Regina gave her one of her trademark glares, “of course I’m not okay. I’m in labor.” The idiot was blatantly implied in her response.

Emma was about to reply when the door opened and in walked what appeared to be a nurse. She had on scrubs, a facemask, and her hair was up in a net. She did a double take in surprise at the new guests before she began speaking in French to Regina.

The two of them had some discussion back and forth while Emma frowned and tried to wrap her mind around what the hell was going on when the red haired woman turned toward her. She pointed to the scrubs that the nurse was holding out toward her, “We have to get cleaned now. As soon as the doctor comes back in, Regina will start pushing.”

She led Emma over to a curtained off area in a corner of the room. The two of them stripped off their clothes and began to put on the scrubs and hairnets. Then the redhead directed Emma over to the bathroom that held two sinks. The two of them began to vigorously wash themselves.

“Why didn’t you let me know earlier?” Emma asked stiffly as she sniffled loudly. Obviously Regina had been in labor for a while if she was ready to start pushing. She could’ve almost missed the birth of her baby. That alone had her gnashing her teeth.

Zelena shrugged, “Regina didn’t want you here until it was absolutely necessary.” Emma’s head snapped around as she pushed past her on her way back into the delivery room. “Neither did the rest of us,” she said just before walking out of the bathroom.

Emma’s jaw tightened as she quickly finished washing up and put her facemask on. She bit back on the anger that was beginning to swell and overtake the fear of what was yet to come as she made her way back into the room.

By this time, the doctor had entered the room. He had just taken a seat on a stool between Regina’s upraised knees and was poking around down there. Emma hurried over to the side of Regina’s bed that was unoccupied and grabbed her hand.

Emma shrugged, “You can squeeze as hard as you want. I can take it,” she told her sheepishly as her cheeks stained a pretty shade of pale pink. She had spent a lot of time trying really hard to forget having Henry. But she did remember how terrified and how painful the labor had been. Though there was still a lot that needed to be worked out between the two of them, she didn’t want Regina to have to suffer anymore than necessary and she would do all that she could to make this time as easy for her as possible.

Regina gave her a strange look but she didn’t pull her hand away. She was glad to have Emma’s support. Even though she hated to admit it, it gave her a small amount of comfort.
She had begun having contractions days ago. At first she’d tried her best to ignore them since her
due date wasn’t for another month passing them off as Braxton hicks. She’d finished going about
her day but the pains never did let up. She’d gone to bed early trying to shake off the nervous
energy and pains that were collecting inside her body hoping that they’d soon subside.

It had worked temporarily. But less than an hour after she’d finally fallen into a fitful sleep, she’d
awakened in a pool of liquid. She’d known instantly that her water had broken and began to scream
for her Mother and sister.

Her Mother was the first to arrive since her rooms were closest to Regina’s. She’d taken one look at
her harried state before she’d turned and ran back down the hallway calling for Zelena.

Thankfully due to Regina’s meticulous need for order and control, her bags had already been packed
and she already had a birth plan in order months ago. While her Mother helped her in the shower,
her sister had already woken her fiance Hades, showered, dressed and called the doctor. By the time
Regina needed help getting dressed, her Mother was able to get herself showered and dressed and
she too was ready to go by the time Zelena was ready to poof them all away.

She’d chosen a hospital in Paris because it catered extravagantly to their patients. There were
concierge services, gourmet meals, a hairdresser and stylist for you and your baby’s first picture, and
you were allowed to stay in a luxurious suite for at least 3 days and even more if you deemed it
necessary after the birth. All of that plus she’d fallen in love with her OB/Gyn. He was a sweet,
patient, lovable man who insisted they call him Papa Pope.

Even though she hated the idea of it, she had allowed her sister to poof them over to the hospital.
She had planned to go to France via train and car when it came time for the baby to arrive. But like
most things in her life, the decision had been taken out of her hands and poofing was the fastest
mode of travel.

She’d immediately been shown to her suite and the doctor had been called as soon as she’d arrived.
But in the meantime, she’d had to settle for a pimply teenage looking young person that she’d
mistakenly taken as a man. Turns out she was a woman. But she’d tended to Regina with care and
the level of quality she’d expected in her position and Regina had appreciated her nonetheless.

“Okay,” Papa Pope rubbed his hands together. He’d made sure that she was fully dilated and
checked over the monitors to ensure things were safe for the final steps in the labor process. He’d
seen nothing that would alarm him. Now it was time to get this new family member on home. With
a thick French accent he said, “Now Maman I’m going to need you to push.”

Emma nodded encouragingly as Regina glanced at her before following the doctor’s instructions.
Sweat began to build up on her body and her face contorted with determination as she pushed
repeatedly with small rests in between to catch her breath.

After 20 minutes with no results, she shook her head, “I can’t do this,” she cried. Her last epidural
injection had worn off and she was feeling everything. She was exhausted and her entire body was
hurting in places she never even knew existed. She just needed this to be over already. She lay back
against the pillows panting. She was completely spent.

Emma shook her head at her. “Of course you can. It’s for our baby Blue. You can and will do
anything for her.” When Regina looked at her surprised, Emma began to push her in the back until
she was leaning forward over her belly. She climbed into the bed behind her with one leg straddling
each of her sides, “come on. You got this,” she said as she scooted closer behind her and pulled her
upper body back to rest on her. “Bring our baby home,” she grabbed one of her hands and rested her
other hand upon her belly feeling the muscles expand and contract beneath it and her little girl
kicking her protest at being disturbed so violently. She pushed away the pain that squeezed at her
heart that this was the first and last time she’d ever get to do that.

It still took 4 more pushes before the doctor cried out that he could see the head. And another 2 after
that before Regina felt a tugging down below and then a slurping noise as their daughter came into
the world.

She threw a bright grin to her Mother who was rubbing her arm and her sister who was rubbing her
leg on the other side of the bed. The tears that had originally been born of pain had now turned into
tears of joy. She craned her neck trying her best to catch her first glimpse of her.

“You did it,” Emma whispered proudly in her ear. She squeezed the hand that she had been holding
the entire time. She was also trying to see her baby girl. But so far all she’d caught was a purple
squirming body covered in goop.

Regina shared a quick, small smile with her before turning her attention back to the end of the bed as
their daughter began to protest loudly this new world she’d been thrust into. Her cries sounded like
the mews of a kitten. To her, it was magic to her ears.

“You would one of you like to cut the cord?” Papa Pope asked as he held up a pair of scissors to the
women surrounding the bed.

“Emma will,” Regina said definitively. She twisted her head around to look up at her, “won’t you?”

Emma’s eyebrows rose to her hairline, “Yeah?” she asked nervously. When Regina nodded her
consent, she scooted around from behind her and nervously walked to the end of the bed.

“Here you go,” the doctor handed her the scissors and guided her trembling hands to the part of the
cord he needed her to cut.

Emma’s eyes clouded over as she watched the little body squirming in the doctor’s hands. She had
finally turned from a mottled reddish purple color to slowly becoming pinker as her lungs drew in
more oxygen. She wanted nothing more than to reach out and grab ahold of her. But she knew she
had to let the doctor finish his work first.

She was so nervous her hands wouldn’t stop shaking and she became paralyzed with fear that she’d
end up hurting her baby. Thankfully, the doctor helped guide her hands to the proper place. And
she guessed she did it right because next thing she knew a nurse had taken the baby from the
doctor’s hands and began cleaning her and taking her measurements in a corner of the room. Emma
followed close behind her not wanting to let her baby out of her sight as she called out her
measurements.

Blue weighted in at 2.1 kg, and 42 cm long. To Emma she looked really small but she wasn’t sure
about the conversions. She still worried about the preemie aspect of the situation though. Vaguely
she heard the doctor and Regina dealing with the afterbirth. But she refused to tear her eyes away
from her babygirl.

That was, until the nurse turned to her with and held her baby out to her, “Would you like to bring
her to her Maman?” she asked in a heavy thick French accent.

Though stunned, Emma managed to nod her head stiffly as she became flooded with mixed
emotions. She had never wanted to hold Henry because she’d feared that she wouldn’t be strong
enough to do what she knew she needed to in order for him to have his best chance if she had. But
that wouldn’t be the case with Blue. She was hers. Though they still hadn’t discussed how this
whole co-parenting thing was going to work in the long term she knew she would allow nothing to get in the way of her being there for her baby. When the nurse eased the baby into her trembling arms all she could do was bury her head in the crook of her neck and cry as a tiny hand wrapped around the finger she had placed in her palm.

On shaky knees she began to walk her over to Regina. She handed her over but Blue continued to keep a vicelike grip on her finger.

Regina turned to look up at her Mother and sister, “she’s beautiful isn’t she?”

Cora pulled the mask she’d been wearing. She smiled down at her daughter and granddaughter as she ran a finger lovingly along the top of her tiny head.

Emma did a double take at the woman she’d been somewhat aware had been in the room the entire time but had passed her off as another nurse in scrubs and face mask. She nearly fell off the bed where she perched beside Regina and her baby. Her trembling began anew and her face was as white as a sheet, “You!??! You’re supposed to be dead!”
Cora pulled down the mask she'd been wearing. She smiled down at her daughter and granddaughter as she ran a finger lovingly along the top of her tiny head.

Emma did a double take at the woman she'd been somewhat aware had been in the room the entire time but had passed her off as another nurse in scrubs and face mask. She nearly fell off the bed where she perched beside Regina and her baby. Her trembling began anew and her face was as white as a sheet, "You!? You're supposed to be dead!"

The entire room was silent as all eyes turned to Emma.

"Lucky for us all your Mother tends to fail more than she succeeds," Regina rolled her eyes at her. Emma's cheeks reddened and she bent her head to hide her embarrassment. Eventually everyone went back to what they were doing previously.

Zelena snorted, "You procreated with that?!" She put away the camera she'd been using to film the birth and took a seat in one of the luxurious armchairs that were scattered around the lavish room.

Emma's face reddened further before she glared at Zelena, "and she enjoyed every minute of it too!"

Zelena grimaced and she put her hands over her ears, "Eww. Spare me."

Before Emma could reply, a nurse came over with some ID/security tags. She placed one around Blue's foot and another around Regina's wrist. She held up the other in askance of who would get the last one.

"She's my baby," Emma quickly thrust her wrist out. "I should have one of those." She glared around the room daring anyone to challenge her.

Zelena rolled her eyes, Cora frowned and shook her head slightly, and Regina merely sighed. They were all beginning to realize now that the labor was over, things were about to get even more complicated with Emma.

After securing the wrist tag on her arm, the nurse turned to Regina, "Excusez-moi but we still have more tests to run on the baby. You can have your bath while we clean her and the bed? No?" she asked with a thick French accent.

Regina frowned slightly then nodded. She knew it was necessary. Ensuring that her baby was
healthy despite her premature status was of utmost importance. But she could already tell that parting from her even for a few minutes would fast become a huge problem for her. She took a deep breath to steady herself. Then she kissed Blue repeatedly while rubbing her back, "Mummy will be right back. The doctor's just want to make sure everything is perfect for you okay? But I'll be right here," she handed the baby over reluctantly as her eyes became misty. "I love you my little princess," she called out as the nurse walked away with her baby.

Emma quickly bent and kissed her daughter before she was taken from the room. She too was anxious about her health as she watched them take her baby away. Her heart hammered in her chest and she had to tell herself repeatedly to calm down. This wasn't like with Henry. Blue would be coming back to her. But the pain of regrets and lost moments still continued to eat at her. Especially with so many things still being unsettled between her and Regina in regards to custody.

She knew that was going to be another conversation that opened up a can of worms. But it was one they had both been avoiding for months. Time had run out on both of them. Because there was no way that Emma was leaving there without her baby.

"Come dear," Cora held out her arms to help her up. "Let's get you cleaned up."

Regina leaned heavily on her as the postpartum pain thrumming through her body made it hard to manage on her own. The two of them disappeared into the bathroom.

Housekeeping soon came in and began to strip the bed and protective covers. They quickly set about cleaning the room and getting everything put back together.

Zelena sat on one side of the room and began to alternate between tapping away on her phone and downloading the birthing video to her laptop. Emma sat on the other side of the room alternating glaring at her and texting the news to her family. She'd realized she'd forgotten to even snap a pic. She wanted a copy of the footage that the redhead had taken but she wasn't about to ask her for it. So she explained to her family and to Ruby and Granny that she'd send them some pics along shortly.

She noted that the time on her phone said that it was 3:59 a.m. Saturday morning. When she'd left home it had been Friday night. Obviously her phone had adjusted itself to the new time zone. She had been right. There was no way they were still in the US.

She shrugged and made a mental note to talk to Regina about that amongst all the other things they had to talk about. Then she set a reminder for Blue's birthday into her calendar.

After that, there was nothing left to do but wait for her baby to get back. She decided to take in as much about where they were as she could so that she could find her own way back there if things didn't go as she had planned with Regina.

The room was definitely one fit for a Queen. Seems Regina hadn't lost her need to be surrounded by luxury. The room was bigger than some of the apartments she'd had. It was actually better than the apartment she currently shared with Henry. Even Regina's mansion seemed like a dump compared to this place.

The furniture was dark cherry stained wood and the color scheme was black, white, purple and silver. There was a living area complete with a beautiful sofa, loveseat, and a couple of reclining chairs. There were 2 large screen tv sets. One was set in front of the king sized bed and the other was set in the living room space. They both looked like they had complete entertainment and surround systems. She thought she even spotted a couple of gaming consoles in the entertainment centers.

The dining area included a 4 person table. There was even a kitchenette set up on one side of the
room that held all the appliances you’d expect to find in a home. There was a small stove that had 2 burners and the oven seemed big enough to fit a turkey inside. The refrigerator was smaller than one you'd find in a home but still, it was a fricken’ hospital room with a friggin’ kitchen. There was just no room for complaints.

And all around the room, tucked away in corners or set up discreetly were various medical carts and equipment containers. The IV that Regina had been hooked up to hung on a pole that had been designed to appear to be part of the décor.

As she was digesting all of this, there was a light knock at the door. Emma perked up hoping that it was the nurse returning with her baby but instead some guy poked his head into the room, "is it safe?" his head swung around the room before he landed on the redhead. For some reason Emma couldn't remember her name.

Zelena beamed at her fiancé, Hades. After dating off and on for years he had finally asked her to marry him a few months ago. They were in the middle of planning the wedding when she had found out she was pregnant. Everyone was thrilled that their family would be expanding even more than previously believed.

As Hades walked toward her and bent down for a kiss she wrapped her arms around his neck and held him closer. For some reason, this pregnancy was making her more emotional than she had ever been in her life. It also brought out this weird craving for him that seemed to get stronger as the months passed.

Emma was horrified as she watched Regina’s – well – whatever she was – embrace someone else. She looked between the pair who seemed thrilled with themselves and the bathroom door. She really hoped that Regina would come out and catch them. Then she'd see the real Evil Queen in action and the stupid broad could high tail it back to merry ol' England.

She was feeling antsy as she bounced her knee up and down and waited for her baby to be returned to her. But after watching the two lovers make out for a while she'd had enough. "I'm going to go and see what's taking them so long with my baby," she said to no one in particular. Then she headed out the door.

Once outside the door, her suspicions were answered. From the signs on the walls and ceilings she surmised that they obviously were in France. Thankfully, the signs also had English translations printed underneath the French.

Emma had traveled the US before. Well, she'd been as far north as New York and as far south as Florida. But she'd never been anywhere that her car couldn't take her. For a woman who'd never been outside the US before stepping into a different country was like stepping into a different world.

Regina's room had been ridiculous enough. But this place left her breathless. It looked more like a museum than a hospital. There was furniture, art and paintings all over the place that she knew cost more than she could make in 50 years. The front desk – if it could be called that – was more of a reception space for a grand hotel or something. Even the lighting figures made her feel frumpy in comparison.

It wasn't often that she felt as inadequate as she did in that moment. She had worked hard to build a life that she could be proud of. And she appreciated everything that she had. She picked nervously at her jeans and simple top. In that moment, she felt an overwhelming rush of insecurity that she hadn't felt since her years as a foster kid.

She stumbled as her anxieties got the better of her. They made her question how she could ever even
think to be enough to compare in the eyes of her daughter who would grow up with this as a part of her everyday life. But she pushed it aside and stepped over to the rounded desk where the nurses were going about their work.

"Excuse me," she cleared her throat loudly. "English?"

The nurse on duty chuckled, "You Americans. You only speak one language poorly," she shook her head as she answered in a thick accent. Emma colored before she pulled herself together and stood tall. "How may we help you?"

"I wanted to know how my daughter is. And when are they bringing her back?" she stared the woman in the eye refusing to be intimidated.

The nurse whose nametag read Aimee nodded, "she is still being evaluated. Because of her prematurity, there are concerns over her breathing and development. Once she has been cleared, she will be returned back to the room shortly and the doctor will explain all to you."

Emma didn't like the sound of that but knew she had no choice but to wait, "is there someplace where I could get a coffee?"

The nurse scrunched her forehead in confusion, "there is a menu for your room service needs inside Madam. And the refrigerator has plenty of options for you. And here," she opened up a drawer and pulled out what looked like a map. "We are located here," she marked an X on the spot. "And the shops are here for your conveniences."

"Oh, thanks," she took the map and studied it closely. There were a variety of shops located on the map. Seemed the hospital had its own mall inside of it. She nodded her thanks then quickly beat a retreat as she headed back into the room.

When she entered the room again, Regina had returned from her bath and was tucked snugly back into bed. She held in her hand what appeared to be the menu that the nurse had spoken about. She also noted that the redhead's boyfriend seemed to have disappeared. She hadn't even heard him leave behind her. Oh well, she wasn't going to be the one to out her to Regina. She figured she'd find out about her girlfriend two-timing her soon enough on her own.

"We were just talking about that," Emma said as she walked nervously over to the bed trying her best not to openly gape at Cora. Without Blue there as a buffer, an awkward wall of weirdness had been erected between her and Regina's family.

"Well I haven't eaten since yesterday. I'm starving," Regina handed her the menu. "Let me know what you'd like and I'll call in the order."

Emma took the menu which helped her focus her stare away from Regina's newly resurrected Mother. She wasn't sure how long it would take her to get used to that. The last she remembered of the situation, Regina had been as terrified of her Mother as everyone else had. Now they seemed to be the best of friends. With the shocks she'd received in the past few hours, she was surprised she hadn't had a heart attack yet.

After perusing the menu which bragged about its Michelin star rating, Regina phoned in the order. Everyone fidgeted impatiently and an awkward silence descended on the room as they waited for their order to arrive. After the waiter handed them their covered dishes Cora, Zelena, and Emma sat around the dining area to eat while Regina used the rolling tray that was set up across her bed.

They made idle chit chat about weather and other mundane things as they ate. Emma had never even
heard of a Croque Monsieur before but she wasn't hating it. It had the perfect blend of salty and sweet that satisfied her just right.

They had just finished their meals and the waiter was on his way out after collecting the empty trays when a nurse wheeled in an isolette with Blue inside. The doctor followed close behind. Emma jumped up from the table and quickly made her way over to the bedside.

Blue lay inside looking impossibly tiny. Emma could hold her in one hand and still have room leftover. Her breath caught and she again became teary eyed as she took in her baby girl.

She appeared to be just waking up as her large chocolate eyes blinked repeatedly. Her limbs flailed slightly as she squiggled around. She was wearing nothing but a diaper that even for a preemie still seemed to swamp her tiny body. There was a tube going into her nose and electrodes on her chest. The IV running into her foot looked painful but Emma again told herself it was necessary to keep her safe. They had also placed a small pink cap with a little bow attached to it over her shocking headful of tufted tow-colored hair.

The doctor began speaking in French before Regina held up her finger and tilted it toward Emma. "English please." Emma smiled gratefully at her.

"Oui, oui," he smiled at Emma then resumed speaking in English. "Your baby is in fine overall health. She is precisely where we expect her to be. She will be needing the – how do you say – warmer? To help her body stay at the right temperature. She has the IV and oxygen to make it easier for her to breathe and for," he ran his hand up and down his sternum, "to hydrate her system." The family nodded to show they understood.

He nodded to the nurse who began to take Blue out of the isolette. She handed her over to Regina who held her cradled close to her. Emma ran her hand over her tiny puckered cheek being mindful of the tubes running in and out of her tiny body. Cora and Zelena stood opposite trying to touch her as much as they could from their positions. "You may hold her when you please. And it would be best for her to have the skin time?" he cocked his eyebrow.

Regina nodded understanding that he was talking about the kangaroo care that they'd discussed while she was in labor. She and her family had already taken a crash course in it just before Blue showed up in the world. The doctor had already explained that some of the risks with a preemie were the inability to hold their body temperature, difficulty breathing due to lung underdevelopment, which was why she'd been on steroids for the past couple of days, and difficulty swallowing or eating. They had been prepared for all eventualities. But it seemed that Blue's outlook was pretty hopeful in comparison to what they had originally thought.

She adjusted Blue so that she was making as much skin contact with her as possible. Not only would it help with her prematurity issues but it would also help bond the two of them together.

"When she is not on the skin, it is important to keep her in her bed. There are sensors attached to her, as you can see, so that you and she will continue to be monitored." There were more nods from all of the family even though no one bothered to raise their eyes from the baby. After making sure there were no more questions and congratulating them all around, the doctor left the family alone.

Blue shifted in her arms and scrunched up her face and body as though she were about to cry. Regina looked slightly panicked before the nurse interjected, "I think she may need something to eat." She gestured at the way that Blue was burrowing her head toward Regina's body searching for something while smacking her lips. "If you need anything else then please, use the call button. If you want for us to keep her in the nursery then all you must do is to please let us know."
"Oh," Regina quickly lowered the strap of her blue silk nightgown. She massaged her breast as she'd been shown previously in her prenatal classes then gently nudged Blue's bottom lip with the tip of her nipple. She winced slightly at the uneasy feeling of the baby latching on before Blue's appetite kicked in and she began to suckle greedily. She smiled down at her baby, "I think we'll be okay here. I'm sure we won't be using the nursery at all," she told the nurse.

Nurse Aimee smiled and nodded before leaving the family alone.

Emma was mesmerized by her baby's every little breath and movement. She watched with an amused look on her face as her daughter made faces while concentrating all of her energy on eating, "How'd you know to do that?"

"I've had months to prepare," Regina reminded her with a slight smirk on her face. "And this isn't the first baby I've raised. I had already read all the books when I'd decided to adopt Henry. But I've always found new things that I hadn't noticed before when I reread them."

Emma frowned as she felt that little stab of pain from all of the things that she should've been happy about but never got the chance to. There had always only been the one decision when it came to Henry. She hadn't been in the right place to raise a child. She had had nothing at all to offer him except her hopes and dreams that he'd have a better life than she'd had.

This time with Blue, she vowed everything would be different. She scolded herself internally for not thinking ahead and doing more reading on her birth. She had done some research online but with all her other duties, she guessed she'd slacked off. But, no excuses, she told herself firmly. She was firmly committed to being there every step of the way for her baby. Blue would know her from this day until her last.

"I brought her some stuff," she said as she stepped away and went over to the bag that she'd been preparing for the past few months. The first thing she pulled out was a white knitted blanket that was identical to her own. It had a lavender ribbon around it instead of a blue one like hers had. Granny had gifted it to her along with some booties and a cap. She brought it over to Regina who glanced at it suspiciously before tucking it around the baby while she switched sides.

Emma smiled as she went back over to her bag. Her hand landed on a manila folder that contained important papers her Mother had insisted on. She'd already decided she'd do the nice thing and try to work things out with Regina first. But if her notorious stubbornness kicked in then she would have no choice but to hand them over.

She pushed the folder to the side and pulled out more items. "I brought these for her a while ago. I hope she likes them," she smiled shyly as she presented them to the family.

Regina, Cora, and Zelena all stared wide eyed at the things in Emma's hands. They recognized the items from their trip to the nether world. Blue had carried them around with her the entire time they'd been there as if they were sacred artifacts. They each exchanged shocked looks before turning their attention back to the baby.

Emma frowned at their reactions but placed the stuffed swan into a corner of Blue's isolette anyway. She placed the Ugly Duckling book on the bedside table to read to her daughter later.

When Blue's feeding had slowed down and her large chocolate eyes began to blink heavily Regina shifted her in her arms. She laid a diaper across her shoulder then placed Blue's head on her shoulder. She began to pat her gently on the back until she heard the satisfying small roar of a belch followed by smaller belches from her daughter. "Good girl," she kissed the side of her head.
Emma beamed, "takes after her Mom," she bragged.

Regina rolled her eyes. Though she wanted nothing more to do than to stare endlessly at her baby and never let her go, the adrenaline from her birth had worn off. She had been up for almost 2 days straight with small bits of respite in between. And the labor had taken almost everything else she had to offer out of her. She tried in vain to fight back a yawn as exhaustion began to invade every fiber of her body.

"I'll take her," Emma immediately held her hands out for her baby.

Regina didn't want to hand her over but in the end common sense won out. She knew she had little to fear. Her Mother and sister were there to watch over both of them. Still she was thankful that her magic had once again returned to her. She muttered a small spell under her breath that would ensure that Blue couldn't be taken from the room.

But she knew she also couldn't last much longer. And from what she remembered from raising Henry, sleep was the only thing that would keep her sane during however long it would take Blue to be able to sleep through the night.

Reluctantly she passed her over. "Careful with her head," she ordered before sliding lower into the bed against the pillows. Despite her valiant efforts to fight the weariness that was fast overtaking her, she was asleep within minutes.

"I've got you little one. You're Mommy's swan princess," Emma kissed her baby's head as she moved over to one of the comfortable recliners beside the bed. She bent and inhaled a lungful of that baby smell she couldn't get enough of. She laughed lightly as Blue blinked up at her before doing a full body stretch and then settling down into an easy sleep.

She could feel Cora's and Regina's girlfriend's eyes following her every move. But as she sat staring at her daughter, the entire rest of the world faded away into oblivion.
CHAPTER 22

Emma startled as she felt a presence above her. Instinctively she tightened her hold around her daughter while blinking rapidly as she tried to orient herself.

“It’s me Emma,” Regina said as she kept her hand secured around Blue. Emma had fallen asleep with her snuggled inside of her top. She started to try and lift her but Emma’s arm immediately flew out and clasped her tighter to her.

Regina sighed before pulling back, “It’s late Emma. She needs to eat and you should get some sleep.”

“No - ,” Emma shook her head stubbornly. “I’m f - fine,” Emma stammered out in a sleep thickened voice. But the yawn that she couldn’t stifle said otherwise.

“I need to feed her Emma. And everyone else is already asleep,” she gestured around the darkened room.

The curtains had been pulled but you could still see the sunlight bleeding slightly through. It produced enough light to allow Emma to see that Cora and Regina’s girlfriend were laid out in the King sized bed beside the empty space that she must’ve just vacated.

“The sofa turns down into a Murphy bed,” she offered. She walked over to the sofa and removed the two back cushions. Then she pulled up the lower cushions and placed the back ones back on top of them. She activated the remote that lowered the bed. Apparently the pillows that had lined the back of the sofa now gave the bed extra support. Emma stared wide-eyed in wonder as the decorations that had been on the shelf above the sofa folded down and became a Queen sized bed that she could tell just from looking was extremely comfortable. The shelf that had been above the sofa now lined the foot of the bed.

“I laid out some clothes you can use for pajamas in the bathroom. There are plenty of toiletries in there already,” Regina came back over and held out her arms in askance for her baby.

“Oh okay,” she mumbled as she lowered the recliner legs and awkwardly rose to her feet. She cradled Blue close and gave her a kiss upon her head before reluctantly handing her back over to Regina. “I’ll just be in the bathroom if you need me.”

Regina took her baby and cooed down to her. She walked over to the bed and climbed back in beside her Mother. She pulled down the strap of her nightgown and offered Blue her nipple. This time, she latched on immediately and the sounds of her suckling greedily began to resonate throughout the room. She clasped one of Blue’s tiny hands in her own as she spoke softly to her.

Emma breathlessly stood watch for a minute. Watching Regina take care of their baby was a beautiful sight. When Regina looked up she quickly turned away.

She hadn’t planned for this part of the situation at all. She hadn’t given much thought to anything outside of the labor. Now that that was over, she had no idea where they’d go from here. But watching Regina in such a vulnerable position reminded her that they were all in a vulnerable position.

She walked into the bathroom and saw the clothes and toiletries Regina had referred to. She quickly
washed up and went through her nightly routine. She decided to forego a shower until the morning.

Or – well – whenever -, she thought as she stared down at her phone and saw the time was 8:18 a.m. She groaned. She’d had no idea you could have jetlag from poofing. Then again it was probably still technically night time for her in her own time zone. She’d figure out the conversions eventually.

She scrolled through the missed calls and texts from Ruby, Granny, Henry, and her parents. She sighed as she sent them a group text letting them know she’d get back to them when she could. Then she turned her phone off so that if they did try to give her a ring it wouldn’t disturb everyone else.

When she finished her nightly routine she walked back out into the darkened room. She stood awkwardly in the doorway silently watching Regina lift Blue and began to burp her, “I can take her again if you want,” she offered. And it was only partially because she was finding it hard to be without her daughter even for the few seconds they’d spent apart so far.

After Blue gave a belch that was 10 times bigger than she was, Regina grinned at her babygirl before switching to her other breast, “We’re fine Emma. I’m going to finish feeding her then put her back in her bed and grab a few more hours myself.”

At her hesitation, Regina gestured to the bed, “Trust me. Sleep is the only thing that kept me sane when Henry was this size. When you’re taking care of a baby who depends on you for everything, you can’t forget to take care of yourself as well.”

Emma nodded and ran to the side of the bed. She bent over and kissed her daughter’s head gently, “Goodnight Princess Swan.”

She walked over and climbed into the Murphy bed which was unbelievably comfortable. The mattress felt like being on a cloud. She was out like a light.

The next time Emma awoke, it was to find out that she was the last to get up. The bed was made and Regina was nowhere to be seen. Cora was busy changing Blue’s diaper. Zelena stood beside Cora playing peek-a-boo games with Blue who was staring at her as if she was stoned.

“You snore,” she turned up her nose when she noticed Emma’s stare.

Emma’s cheeks stained bright pink, “sorry,” she muttered. She sat up gingerly and gave a big yawn as she took stock of her surroundings.

It was later in the day that was for sure. Judging from the sun, it was close to late afternoon. She had really crashed. She hadn’t even realized she was that tired.

The door opened and a blonde head peeked inside. Emma got the first of many shocks from that day.

“Hi,” Abby smiled a greeting to Cora and Zelena as she walked into the room. When she noticed Emma sitting up in the corner, she gave her a shy nod of her head. “Hi Emma,” she gave her a small casual wave.

Emma’s mouth dropped open at the sight of her. Then her mouth compressed into a thin line as she fought back the accusations threatening to erupt.

She had known that Kathryn and Regina were best friends. And when Regina had gone missing,
she’d asked her multiple times if she had any idea where she was. Each time, she’d stood in Emma’s face and bald faced lied. Emma’s lie detector never even dinged.

“Aww,” Abby gasped as she drew closer to the bed. She stood the suitcases she’d been wheeling along behind her up and folded down their handles. She stared down at the baby in awe as Cora finished fastening the last snap on the cloth diaper. She ran a hand through the tufts of errant blonde hair, “Hi precious. You’re finally here! We’ve been waiting for you for so long!” she bent down and planted a kiss on her forehead.

“You and me both,” Regina said as she came out of the bathroom.

Abby squealed before racing over to her and giving her a hug. Emma sat stupefied as she took it all in. Regina clearly was still in discomfort from the labor. She returned the hug but with a lot less enthusiasm.

“Sorry,” Abby pulled back while gingerly placing a hand across her belly.

“’s okay,” Regina answered as she walked over to a recliner and took a seat.

“Hi pretty girl,” Abby returned her attention back to Blue. “Can I hold her?” she held her arms out for the baby.

“After you wash your hands first of course,” Regina admonished lightly. Abby rolled her eyes and grinned at her before heading for the bathroom.

When she came out, Cora smiled and passed the baby over. Abby cradled her in her arms as she ran a finger over her cheek.

“You have to keep skin on skin contact with her,” Regina warned. “She’s still not able to keep her body temperature steady.”

“Well, let me get comfortable first,” she handed Blue over to Zelena who was closest to her at the time. Zelena rocked Blue and cooed softly to her as Abby took off her coat. She unbuttoned the first button of the blouse she wore before holding out her arms for the baby once more. Once Zelena handed her back over carefully, she walked over to the rocking chair in the corner of the room that held a carful of Blue’s things and sat down. She began talking softly to her as she rocked the two of them gently.

“I’m going to jump in the shower,” Emma said as a way to avoid the situation. She wasn’t too happy with sitting there watching a liar paw all over her kid.

Abby’s head turned toward her slightly though she kept her eyes on Blue, “Regina asked me to pack a few of Zelena’s clothes for you since the two of you are the same size.”

“What?!?” Zelena turned to scowl at her little sister.

“It’s true. And she needed some things. I’m sure she didn’t come prepared to be here this long,” Regina’s forehead scrunched up and she tilted her head as she thought that one over. “Or are you ready to go back home.”

‘I vote for home,” Zelena yelled out and put both her hands high in the air.

Emma turned up her nose at her and deliberately turned her back on her. She turned to Regina, “how long are you going to be here?”
Regina shrugged, “It’s customary to stay in hospital in France for 3 days. I could take as long as I wanted since this is a private hospital. The doctor already came to see Blue for the day and though they’re happy she’s been able to eat without any problems, she still will need some support. So I will be here for as long as she is.”

Emma nodded emphatically, “then so will I. And we still need to talk about custody.”

Regina shook her head and turned back toward her Mother speaking softly.

“Your suitcase is the Dior one,” Abby pointed it out to Emma.

Emma picked up the suitcase, ignoring the continued dirty look on Zelena’s face, and wheeled it into the bathroom. She shut the door behind her and leaned against it as she took a deep breath.

She noticed her phone that she’d left on the counter last night. Or rather this morning… or whatever. She picked it up and turned it on. As she waited for it to boot back up she began to sift through the suitcase seeing what she could use and discard.

There was brand new underwear inside, still with tags on them so that gave her a sigh of relief. It’s not like she hadn’t worn used underwear before during her time in foster care. But that was then. She had definitely moved up in the world since then.

She found some jeans that looked comfortable and t-shirts, hoodies, tank tops, casual tops, pajama bottoms, socks, and other comfortable clothing. She pulled out a few choices and inspected the tags hoping that things would be easy. Damn it! The tags were either in French, European, or Italian sizing. She shook her head ruefully as she added this pile to the amount of other conversions she had to figure out.

She held a few choices up to herself and eyed herself in the mirror as she judged their size when her phone dinged with a list of text and missed calls alerts. She was busy trying to scroll through them when a call came in.

She rolled her eyes as she answered, “Yes Mary Margaret? Uhh – I mean – Snow?”

“Emma?!?!? Where have you been?!?!? We’ve been so worried sick!” her Mother’s voice squealed frantically.

‘Is that Emma?’ she heard a voice she recognized as David’s in the background. She heard Snow shush him as she scowled at the phone while she pulled it away from her ear. She could just picture him coming to lean over her shoulder as they shared the receiver.

She turned down the volume to ¼ of what it was before. “What are you talking about?” She huffed as she leaned back against the vanity. She folded her arm underneath the bent elbow of the one that held the phone to her ear, “I texted you numerous times last night about watching my baby being born.”

“Henry said some woman with red hair just poofed into your apartment and made an announcement about Regina being in labor. He said she had green magic and she’d forced him into our apartment instead of taking him with you to watch the baby being born. He’s extremely upset.”

Emma sighed loudly and nodded, “Yeah. Apparently Regina has a new girlfriend or something. I don’t know how she knows magic. I’ve never seen her in our town before. And I thought I knew everyone by now. Or – well – too many people know who I am now,” she frowned not exactly happy about that one.
Growing up in the system, she’d learned to be a guarded person her entire life. Now she had strangers leaping at her at all turns wanting to have conversations about everything under the sun with their Savior. It still gave her the skivvies.

“She didn’t hurt him did she?” Emma was momentarily worried. “She poofed us away so fast I never got a chance to make sure things were okay.’

“No, no,” Snow assured her. “Physically he’s fine.” She lowered her voice to a whisper, “I’m glad he got left behind. He’s demanding to see Regina. He even called her his Mom again. It’s important you get Blue and get back here as soon as possible.”

Emma frowned, “Yeah that’s going to have to wait. The doctor’s haven’t released her from care yet. Apparently in France you get to stay in the hospital for three days,” she frowned as she remembered how quickly she’d been shuffled out of the hospital and back to the prison after delivering Henry. She’d barely gotten a 24 hour in-stay.

“And Regina’s still got tons of money and her taste for expensive things. So she can pay to stay here as long as she wants. You should see this place,” her eyes roamed over the bathroom that looked like it belonged in some huge mansion covered in gold or something. “It looks like the Taj Mahal.” Emma had never seen the Taj Mahal herself. But just judging from the pictures she’d seen over the years it seemed safe to say that this was what she imagined it would look like.

“Wait for how long Emma?”

Emma started to get impatient, “for however long it takes. I’m not leaving until my baby leaves. She still needs oxygen and skin on skin care. Plus she’s so tiny, I can hold her in one hand,” she heard an intake of breath and figured it was her Father just about to rush in and defend his wife’s honor and she didn’t want to get into it. She moved on quickly, “I trust Henry will be fine with you for a few days.”

“Of course Emma. We love him. We’re so glad you got him away from the Evil Queen. Now you just need to bring our baby back to us and we can all be one big happy family.” She lowered her voice again conspiratorially, “Maybe you and Neal could spend some time together.

Emma gritted her teeth and began to rub her temple. How in the hell did this phone call go down the tubes so fast?!? “Whatever. Look, I gotta go.”

“Pictures Emma!” Snow screeched out. “Don’t forget about the pictures!”

“Yeah, yeah, tell the kid I’ll give him a call later. Right now I need to jump in the shower,” she rang off the phone.

Emma gathered up her toiletries and bypassed the whirlpool bathtub that was the size of an indoor pool. She turned toward the shower and entered. This too was made up of an elegance she had no chance of ever being able to afford no matter how hard she worked in her entire life.

It was extremely spacious. The color scheme was different shades of blues, black, silver, and white. There were a handheld shower unit hanging off of the wall. But the main showerhead was a ceiling unit that fell down into the middle of the shower like a rainfall.

There were various beautiful plants that gave off a scent she wished she could bottle up and take with her forever. She placed her things down on some of the built in ledges that lined the shower stall and began to adjust the heat levels to the water. It took a minute to figure out how to go about but once she watched the rainfall shower startup she knew she was in heaven.
She stripped quickly as her excitement at trying this stuff out grew. She noticed a switch on the side of the stall and despite hearing Regina’s voice in her head telling her to keep her hands to herself, the excited girl in her drowned her out as she flipped the switch. She cringed as she waited for the worst. But all that happened was the ambient lighting in the room dimmed and the showerhead began to give off a blueish glow and the water flowing down reflected it. She grinned and didn’t hesitate a moment before jumping into the shower.

She had just finished the world’s greatest shower ever when she noticed another small stall next to the shower. She stepped into there and began to hit switches as she waited to see what would happen. She grinned as she felt warm air blowing from all around her drying her off from head to toe. She didn’t even know such a thing even existed. She held her arms straight out and spun around as the wind whipped her hair all around her. She’d have to look into getting some of these amenities. Well, first she’d need to find a home for her and Henry with an extra room for Blue. And they would definitely need some kind of outdoor play structures. Before she got lost too far in dreamland she finished with a few pats of one of the plush towels and exited the shower.

She got a handle on herself and gotten dressed in Regina’s girlfriend’s clothes - which amazingly did fit her well. She was snapping pics of the room when her phone began to ring in her hand. She groaned as she saw Henry on the caller ID.

“Hey kid. How’s it going?” she asked as she began to brush out her hair.

“Emma what’s going on?” Henry’s voice sounded annoyed. He seemed on the verge of one of his rants where he began to dominate the situation because the adults were obviously too stupid to be allowed to make decisions for themselves.

“Nothing kid,” she frowned at his unspoken chastisement. She grinned as she told him, “But your new baby sister is so perfect. I told your Grandparents to let you know I would call you when I got the chance. I was going to do that right after I snapped some pics to send to you all. How are things there?”

“I want to talk to my Mom,” he demanded.

Emma frowned at the curt voice he was speaking to her with but shrugged it off not wanting to get involved in an argument with him right now. “She’s busy in the next room. I’m just finishing up my shower. When I’m done, I’ll let her know that you’re waiting to hear from her. Now, how are things going on there?”

Henry’s voice became hesitant. She knew he wasn’t happy about the situation but there was nothing that she could do to change it at the moment. “Fine,” he answered in a bored voice. “When are you coming back home?”

“Your sister’s not going to be released for a few more days. She still needs help with breathing and keeping her body temperature steady so for now she’s getting kangaroo care,” she said in a comical voice that elicited a giggle from him. “I’m going to stay here with her until she’s released,” she informed him.

“And bring my Mom back home too?” he asked hopefully.

She shifted nervously from foot to foot. She didn’t know how to have this conversation with him over the phone. Regina had made no mention of returning to Storybrooke. And Blue had only just come into the world. She knew that it needed to happen sooner rather than later but she figured their talk of long term plans could wait for another day or so.
She settled for, “I’ll see what I can do about it. Either way, you get a new gorgeous baby sister. Isn’t that great?” she tried to keep her voice cheery.

“Yeah, sure,” he answered unconvinced. “How much longer are you going to be in the bathroom? Can’t you just yell through the door at my Mom to pick up the phone?”

“I’m still getting dressed Henry. I told you I’ll let her know as soon as I get out of here.”

“But you’ve already seen each other naked. That’s how you made Blue. I’m sure there’s nothing she hasn’t seen on you by now anyway.”

Emma blushed as her mind conjured images of her and Regina sharing the bed, sharing showers and baths, and everything in between. A heat she hadn’t felt in a long time began to pulse in her core. “Look kid, you’re just going to have to wait!” she yelled a little louder than she meant to.

“Fine,” he answered and rang off without a proper goodbye.

She put her phone down and continued getting dressed. Kathryn had also thought to add a few cosmetics to the bag. Emma wasn’t a big makeup user but she smeared on a little tinted lip balm and mascara anyway. After finishing up with her hair and tidying up the room, she exited the bathroom.

“Thank god,” Regina’s girlfriend huffed. “I thought my bladder was going to burst while you swam across the English channel and back,” she picked up her suitcase and brushed past Emma. She slammed the door shut behind her.

Cora was sitting in a recliner going through her bag which was open on the floor before her. Regina was feeding Blue in the bed. Abby was sitting beside her flipping through the TV channels.

Emma rolled her suitcase over to the side of the sofa where her bed had already been put away. She sat and idly watched Abby channel surf as she jiggled her knee up and down. Now that everyone was up and about, and Blue was already here yet occupied by Regina and her family, she was feeling a little anxious. She hated that outsider feeling while she was inside a room filled with people she knew. It was one of the many things about no longer being in the system that she definitely never missed.

“I forgot to tell you,” Regina finished feeding Blue and put her over her shoulder to begin to burp her. “There’s a laundry service here. You just place your things in the laundry bag in the bathroom and they’ll wash them for you.”

She pulled at her casual top that she’d covered with a hoodie. She smiled as Blue let out a string of low burps. “They actually do fit well. Thanks for that at least Kathryn.”

Abby frowned at her but didn’t bother picking up the bait. “Abby,” she provided. She smiled at her, “My name is Abigail. And Fred should be along shortly.”

Emma scowled and turned her attention to her baby. Regina had finished burping her and was headed to the changing table area. She jumped up, “I need to do that.”

Regina looked at her skeptically but handed Blue over without fuss.

Emma grinned at her babygirl. “Hi my li’l Swan Princess,” she softly pressed kisses to her face and head.

She laid her down on the changer and then looked in confusion at Regina. She had never had the opportunity to do this before. When she’d been forced to play Mother to the younger kids in the
foster homes she was in, they were lucky to have enough disposable diapers to last them throughout the night let alone a fancy set up like this one. It was stuffed to overflowing with cloth diapers and inserts, powders, rash cream, wipes, and anything else someone who had to money could afford to shower their kid with.

“You have to get the table ready before you lay her down,” she began to grab a new cloth diaper and insert. She added baby powder that read talc free in large letters on the side of it and some baby wipes that were in a box that kept them warm.

“You can strap her in so that she won’t fall over,” she pointed to the straps. “But for now just make sure you keep a hand on her at all times. That should work just fine since she can’t move much anyway.”

Emma placed a hand lightly on Blue’s squiffy body. Her large brown eyes roved around but repeatedly landed on Regina. She couldn’t move much but she also didn’t exactly stay still. Her limbs continued to flail all around. She smiled down at her girl as Blue stared up at her intently. She took a deep breath and then dove in.

She began to open up Blue’s diaper and then recoiled at the smell, “geez kid. You don’t even eat real food yet,” she blew out through her mouth after turning her head to get a whiff of clean air through her nose.

Regina grinned, “It won’t get any easier when she does.” She began handing Emma wipes.

Emma grabbed Blue’s teeny tiny legs in one hand as she lifted her body up and began to clean her. She removed the soiled diaper from underneath her and replaced it with a clean one. She poured on the powder and then did up the snaps. She grinned at her handiwork.

“Wait, let me get a picture of your first diaper change,” Regina walked over to the nightstand beside the bed and grabbed her phone. She walked back over to where Emma stood holding Blue beside the changing table and raised her phone. “Smile big,” she adjusted the view of the camera. When she had Blue and Emma centered perfectly she snapped the pic.

“Wait, I need one of those,” Emma handed Regina her phone. She posed giving a thumbs up as she smiled at the camera with Blue snuggled against her. Her next pose was of her staring down at the changing table in horror. “Wait, one more,” she begged as she lifted Blue’s bottom to her face while scrunching up her nose.

Regina laughed as she snapped the pics. Her eyes locked with Emma’s and she saw an intensity there she had been trying hard to avoid since she reentered her life. She shyly handed her phone over and began to collect the remnants of the diaper change.

She picked up the messy diaper and headed into the bathroom to toss the contents into the toilet while ignoring her sister singing in the shower. Then she came back out with the diaper and threw it all into a pail beside the changing table so that the diaper service could pick it up later. Since they were in the hospital the pickup and deliveries were daily. But once they were home again the service would only pick up and deliver the clean ones 3 times a week.

Emma scanned the pics on her phone, “Hey, could I get a copy of that birthing video?” she asked as she sent the pics off to Granny, Ruby, Henry, and her parents.

“Oh, yeah, sure,” Regina pulled up her email account where her sister had sent it to and attached it to an email that she sent over to the email she shared with Emma. “There you go.”
“Oh, I forgot to mention, Henry wants you to call him,” she glanced up to see Regina’s face get that closed off look she used as Mayor to keep people at arm’s length. “He wanted to come but your girlfriend refused to bring him.”

Regina’s face twisted with confusion at the girlfriend part and she opened her mouth to speak but before she could, the door opened and in walked a couple of men loaded down with things. “Whew,” they said as they began unloading their arms. “How could a premature newborn need all of this stuff?”

Emma recognized Frederick right off the bat. And the other guy was the blonde she’d seen Regina’s girlfriend kissing.

Fred greeted Abby and Hades waved at Cora and Regina. He was holding the leash of what looked like a small brown and white border collie pup who began straining to be let loose. In his other hand he carried a cat carrier.

Regina gasped, “My babies! I didn’t know you were bringing them!” she exclaimed as she stooped to pet her dog. Emma stared speechless as she began to talk baby talk to the cat. She had only ever seen Regina with Pongo. And even though she always knew her pretending to hate the attention he gave her was just for show, she had never even thought of picturing her with a pet before.

“Well we didn’t want to just leave them at the house alone or locked up in a kennel somewhere. Especially now that it’s newly decorated,” Hades commented with a smile on his face to throw off the bite in his words. “And who’s this?” he asked as he stared at Emma. “Ohhh – wait! You’re the one responsible for this mess aren’t you?” he came forward and offered his hand. “Hades is the name. It’s nice for you to meet me.”

Emma shook his hand gingerly not really sure what to make of him. He kept a pleasant smile on his face but his words seemed to have an undercurrent of cruelty to them that defied his dimpled cheeks. “Emma,” she muttered and dropped his hand quickly after a brief shake.

“Hi Emma,” Fred nodded his greeting at her. Emma returned the nod while holding Blue closer to her. She pulled off her hoodie with one arm and placed her inside the low necked top she was wearing.

Regina and Cora had gone about unpacking the animals and their belongings. They set their food dishes and pet beds around the room within easy access before Regina bothered to let the cat out of her carrier. Slowly almost shyly, a multicolored muted calico stepped out and began to survey her surroundings. Regina had just scooped her up and was fawning over her when the bathroom door opened and Zelena came out. “Oh, good,” she exclaimed as she grabbed Lenny’s litter box and headed toward the bathroom. The puppy followed obediently behind her with his nails clicking on the floor and the leash trailing behind him.

“I guess it’s my turn in the shower,” Cora picked up her suitcase and followed her daughter.

Zelena went to her fiance and threw her arms around his neck. Emma gaped in horror as they began to kiss. She wrapped a hand around Blue as she scooted to the opposite side of the room awaiting a storm of fireballs when Regina got back into the room.

But to her surprise, when Regina returned she gave them nothing more than a passing glance. She walked over to the table where the room service menus had been left. “Anyone else beside me starving?”

Everyone grumbled their approval. She marked off what she wanted and then began to send the
After Emma marked off her order, she walked over to where Regina was seated at the dining table. “You okay with that?” she nodded her head in the direction of the canoodling couple.

Regina’s face registered her confusion before she followed Emma’s pointed gaze. “Well, as far as I’m concerned, Hades is an enormous ass but she seems to think her love for him is enough to make him a better man.” She reached out and lightly scratched Blue along her chest where she had fallen asleep tucked inside Emma’s top. “And this one is going to soon have two cousins to go along with her big furry brother, Lenny and her big furry sister, Lola.”

“Cousins?!!??” The situation was causing Emma’s head to continue to swim.

Regina frowned up at her. “You do know Zelena’s my sister right?”

Emma’s mouth dropped open as she looked back and forth between them. “Why the hell would I know that!!!??! And when in the hell did you get a sister anyway?!???? I thought you were an only child.”

“So did I,” she glowered as she thought back to those dark days she’d worked hard to put behind her. “But life had other plans. And I’m glad it did. Things have been going pretty well so far.”

“Great,” Emma murmured while shaking her head at her and frowning deeply. She pulled her phone out of her pocket and unlocked it. “You can explain that to your son. Our daughter’s real human big brother,” she tossed it on the table in front of Regina. “He’s number 2 on speed dial.”

Regina stared at the phone as if it were a live grenade. She shook her head at Emma and walked back over to her bed. She sat down and pulled the duvet that had been folded at the foot of her bed over her legs.

Emma picked up her phone and followed her. She knew she was picking a fight but Regina’s laissez faire attitude regarding Henry was starting to piss her off, “he’s been waiting all day. I’d say you owed him a phone call by now. Especially since you just left him without even bothering to say goodbye and all.”

Regina stared at her for a long moment before she rose from the bed. She tossed the duvet aside and gave a low whistle. “Come on Lola. Let’s go for a walk girl.”

Lola began to get excited as she grabbed the end of her leash. She pulled her from the room without another look back.

Emma watched her go fuming. This was by no means close to being over.
Once the door closed behind her, Regina let out a huge breath. The room had become claustrophobic. She had been trapped in there for the past 3 ½ days. A walk to clear her mind was precisely what she needed.

“Come on girl,” she said softly as she pulled Lola along with her to the nurse’s station. “Excuse me. Could I please get this taken out?” she gestured to the IV that she had been dragging around with her for the past few days.

Nurse Aimee’s smile that she had greeted her with turned into a frown before she gave a nod to one of the waiting chairs, “I will have to confirm with the doctor. Would you please to wait?”

Regina walked over to one of the empty seats in the waiting area. She gave a surprised cry as Lola leapt up into her lap. Lola was estimated to be roughly around 5 months. Even though she was technically still a pup, she was already starting to get to the point where she was bigger than Regina’s lap. She absently stroked her head that rested on her shoulder as she watched Nurse Aimee make a discreet phone call to her doctor.

Her head perked up as Nurse Aimee made eye contact and smiled her way while nodding. She put Lola down and grabbed her leash as she made her way back over to the nurse’s desk.

After disconnecting the call, Nurse Aimee turned toward her, “Since you are not in any danger, the doctor has agreed that your discharge is warranted,” the nurse came around the desk carrying some alcohol, a bandage, and gauze. She had Regina lay out her hand so she could remove the IV.

Regina hissed as her hand stung from the removal of the needle. The nurse had her hold the alcohol pad in place as she wrapped the bandage around it, “all done,” she singsonged as she patted it.

Regina began to shake the numbness away, “Thank you so much,” she smiled her gratitude at the nurse. The caring staff was one of the reasons that she had chosen this place. “I just feel bad that my baby still has to have hers,” she crinkled her nose as she thought about the IV line that was running into Blue’s foot.

“Oui,” the nurse placed a comforting hand on her shoulder. “But it is helping to get her better. And she is getting better and not worse everyday. That’s what’s important.”

Regina nodded her thanks and understanding. She stood looking around her trying to get her bearings. She had visited the place many times throughout her pregnancy so she had learned the layout pretty well. “Well, we’re off. I think she and I both need some exercise.”

She was about to turn away when the nurse called her back. “Here are the papers for your bébé Blue,” she handed Regina over the application for Blue’s birth certificate. Regina took the papers and thanked her. She folded the papers up and put them into the pocket of her slacks.

The two of them exchanged waves as Lola excitedly pulled ahead in front of her. She had never considered herself a dog person before. But Lola had been special from the very beginning. She had been the first rescue that Regina had assisted once they had the animal rescue center opened.

She had taken the call about what had appeared to be a stray dog being hit by a car. She had collected the team and gone out to the site. There wasn’t a ton of traffic there but it had a steady
stream of cars coming and going. After doing some recon with some of the bystanders they had been able to piece together a picture of what had happened.

A dog had been hit by a car after pushing her baby out of the way. The baby had run off but after driving around for a while they had found the Mother on the side of the road. It was obvious that it was already too late for her but the story of this Mother who had given her life for her baby had broken Regina down. She’d sworn to the Mother - as she sat by her side with tears streaming down her face - that she would do everything she could to save her baby. Once she was gone, she placed a blanket that they’d stocked in the back of the van across her lifeless body.

After speaking with the original caller they were finally able to locate the pup. She had backed herself into an underground hole that they couldn’t get access to. She was in obvious distress and because of her terror, she kept digging herself deeper into a hole they weren’t sure was steady enough to support itself much longer.

Regina was the one who came up with the plan of bringing in her Mother to help lure the baby out. One of the crewmen drove down to retrieve her body. Then they brought her out and laid her in front of the hole.

Even in death, a Mother’s job is never done. As hoped for, the terrified pup emerged and lay down beside her mother as she cried. Right then and there Regina knew that she would give anything for Lola to be happy again. She was brought back to the shelter for a flea bath, food, and some much needed rest in a safe place.

Her mother had been laid to rest beside the shelter. Her tombstone marked the reality that the work they did was gravely important. Lola attended the funeral and spent the rest of the night crying to herself in a corner of her kennel. It broke Regina’s heart to leave her that night. But once she had been declared healthy and eligible for adoption, she had brought her home despite her sister’s protests.

Now, she was a happy little girl who loved life and lived it to its fullest. Lola was a great dainty princess who had never caused her any problems or discomfort. She was calm, healthy, and most importantly happy. Though she had been born a stray, she hadn’t yet developed a fear of people. She was incredibly friendly and she loved people.

She reminded Regina that there was more to life and the world than being trapped inside your own headspace and misery. Kept pet’s lives were so simple. As long as they had what they needed they didn’t allow anything else to bring them down for long. For her, Lola was a part of her new chance at getting things right.

The pup tugged on her leash as she ran ahead. Her excitement over the new smells, sounds and people grew with every step she took. She ate up all of the smiles, head pats, and attention passersby’s heaped onto her. She had accompanied Regina on many of her appointments so she knew exactly where she wanted to go. And sure enough, Regina soon found herself in the pet’s aisle of one of the stores.

Lola took her time examining everything before making her choice of what new toy she wanted. Regina didn’t mind. Watching her kept her away from delving too deeply into the mess she had just run from.

Once Lola had her new stuffed baby puppy plush secured in mouth, Regina grabbed a few treats and a couple of other toys for her and Lenny. She had the items charged to her room via the hospital bracelet that she still wore before dragging Lola along with her to finish up her shopping.
She picked up the ingredients for pollo con mole and tortillas since she was feeling in the mood for something spicy. She collected some other much needed toiletries. Though this world had made huge improvements in the health department, their ways of handling bleeding didn’t differ much from the ways in which the Enchanted Forest handled it. She had been told to expect the bleeding to last for up to two weeks. And she had already soaked her way through an entire box of product. After grabbing a few more boxes and picking up a more toiletries and staples, she began to make her way back to the room.

She chewed her bottom lip as she reflected on her life. Blue was going to need intensive care for at least the next couple of weeks. Until she could maintain her own body temperature, breathe on her own without needing oxygen, and at least double her birth weight she would be hospital bound.

All this meant that she was going to have no choice but to put up with Emma for the next couple of weeks. And today showed just how far the both of them had to go before they could be on friendly terms.

When it came to Emma, she still wasn’t sure ‘friendly’ was something that could be used to define the two of them. She has and always will care for Emma. But anything more between them involved having to deal with a past she wasn’t sure she wanted to rehash.

As for Henry, a Mother’s love was unconditional. And she had loved Henry from the day she got him until now and forever. But somewhere along the way, Henry had decided that what they’d shared between them wasn’t enough for him. And she had gotten tired of fighting him on it. So she had let him go in hopes that he could find his happiness. And slowly but surely she was learning to find hers.

It had taken her going almost to the grave and back before she was able to accept that she was just as worthy and deserving of love as everyone else was. Now she had enough confidence to be able to say that she was no one’s punching bag. She no longer flinched or avoided looking at herself too deeply when she looked in mirrors. She liked the person she saw looking back at her now.

She knew that Henry would be fine with Emma. And Emma would take good care of him. He had a semi-competent pair of grandparents and his father was none other than Rumplestiltskin’s long lost son.

It wasn’t lost on her that Neal had been the reason behind the curse. He was the reason that Rumple had decided that he needed her to be as broken as possible to cast his curse. And that Emma would become his Savior just so that he could have everything his way.

But he was also the reason behind Henry’s conception. And though she had already let him go – for her sake and his – she would never regret any of the time they’d spent together. And she had made peace with that in her heart.

Now there was Blue to worry about. Her baby was a miracle on so many levels. She’d never believed having a baby was even possible for her. During the curse she’d never even used birth control during her – fling, or whatever – with Graham. She’d cursed her own womb specifically so that it would never be a problem.

And yet Blue was beautiful and thriving. Emma really had broken the curse and set everyone free. And that included her. The least she could do was to return the favor to her.

She still missed Daniel with everything inside of her. Dreams about him, her and Blue being together is what had kept her afloat all of this time. While she was sweating and worrying away through the labor, she’d felt the absence of his presence deep inside of her. The pain of losing him
for a second time around still hit her as deep as the first.

She had asked her sister before to help her with her spirit walking. Carrying Blue had made it difficult for her to attempt it in her condition. She’d been terrified of how sick she’d become while they were in the spirit world. She prayed there were no long lasting effects from their time there.

But now Blue was here in this world. Since she was continuing to thrive maybe now was the time for her and her sister to have that chat.

SMF

Emma glared at the closed door after Regina. She could feel Regina’s family’s eyes boring into her back but she ignored them. She put her head down as she bounced Blue who had woken up and began to fuss after the door slammed. She cooed to her softly as walked past Abby, Cora and Zelena who were having coffee at the dining table and headed over to the rocking chair Blue loved so much. She gently rocked them both back and forth as Blue’s eyes began to blink slower and slower. Soon she was asleep once again.

“Oh, alright,” Hades clapped his hands together as he turned from the video game he and Fred had been playing. “You sure know how to clear a room,” he chuckled as he went back to playing the game.

Emma hadn’t known it was possible to hate a person that she didn’t even know more than she did him. But Regina’s assessment of him was the one thing she could agree with her on. He really was a major ass. She wasn’t sure because she’d only caught the odd glimpse but for some odd reason he seemed to be playing the game without even using a controller.

Abby smiled at her, “You’re really good with her.”

Emma scowled at what she took as an implied insult. “I’m her Mom. And I’m Henry’s Mom too,” she lifted her chin defiantly at her.

When she took Henry, no one in the town cared. They all thought that it was a great thing that she’d done. Not because of her or him though. It was just all about them being glad that the Evil Queen was feeling some of the pain she had caused to all of them.

But even then she had known that there were some who thought she was flat out wrong. She hadn’t care then or now. She had a right to be in her kid’s lives. She didn’t think she could ever forgive herself for missing being there to raise Henry. And that wasn’t a mistake she was going to make this second time around.

Abby regarded her pensively as she watched Emma clutching at Blue for dear life. Emma had been short with her the entire time she’d been here. She’d known that she wouldn’t be happy about finding her here with Regina after all the interrogating she’d put everyone through after her disappearance. But she’d done nothing wrong. “How is Henry? The last I saw of him, he was finally getting taller,” she grinned at the memory.

She had her original memories from her time in the Enchanted Forest. But she also had her memories from the time spent in Storybrooke during the curse. Henry had seemed to stop growing after the age of 7. Not because of the curse. It was just weird the way that boys developed so much slower than girls. But he was definitely making up for that now. Last time she’d seen him, he’d looked like he’d gained an entire foot.

“He’s fine!” Emma said more sharply than she intended. Blue frowned up at her and began to fidget so she rocked the two of them back and forth a little more until she settled into sleep once again.
“You’d know that if you weren’t sneaking around and lying.”

Abby and Fred exchanged frowns, “I never lied to you about anything Emma.”

Emma pinned her with her eyes not wanting to allow her or Regina to get away with anything else that they’ve done. She and Regina seemed to have created themselves a happy family. While she and Henry were left alone to struggle and pick up the tattered pieces of themselves so that they could move on, “I asked you repeatedly where Regina was. And you repeatedly bald faced lied to me. Don’t you dare try and pretend any differently!”

The door opened and Regina and her dog walked in just as Blue startled awake from the yelling. Her little face and body scrunched up and she opened her lungs in her first real cry. Emma’s face colored as she frantically tried bouncing her baby to console her. But Blue seemed to be having none of it.

Regina looked from her family’s stunned faces over to Emma’s panicked one and then back out to the Nurse’s station where shocked heads were turned their way. She pushed the door closed and hurriedly unclipped Lola’s leash from her collar before she put down her shopping bags. She had caught just the tail end of the conversation but it hadn’t been too hard to piece together what was going on. She strode over to where Emma had now given up on the rocking chair and was standing and bouncing Blue back and forth then up and down. “Give her here,” she held out her hands for her baby.

Emma tried waving her away but after glancing up at her face and seeing murder there she figured it was best to play nice. She allowed Blue to be gently taken from her arms as she took up residence over Regina’s shoulder.

Regina put Blue up to her shoulder and walked her back and forth while cooing softly to her. As she turned, she glared at Emma who insisted on shadowing her every step. Emma blushed and gave her more room. She still appeared freaked out over the entire situation and she continued to shadow her.

She took the now vacant rocking chair and sat down. She opened up her blouse and offered Blue her breast. Thankfully - once she got a sniff of her Mum’s scent – Blue calmed down and happily latched on.

Cora brought her over a diaper and draped it over her shoulder. Now that the worst was over and the baby had calmed, she turned to Emma, “what in the hell were you thinking?”

Emma was watching the two of them with wide eyes. Her expression turned sheepish as she began to fidget, “I was speaking the truth.”

Regina shook her head hard at her and pinned her with her eyes, “Abby had nothing to do with me leaving. And she had no more of an idea of where I was than you did until I asked her to move here.”

Emma looked away. She ground her teeth and her fingers curled up slightly but she remained silent. She sure as hell didn’t buy any of that story. Not all of it anyway. There was a lot that she and Regina had to talk about. But she didn’t want to upset her babygirl anymore than she already had. So to keep the peace she said nothing.

“As for the rest – we can discuss where we go from here after Blue gets better. If we’re going to be stuck in this room for the next couple of weeks I prefer that we do it as adults.” She lifted Blue from her breast and put her on her shoulder as she cupped her hands softly and burped her. “Agreed?”
Emma turned back but when she looked over towards her, her eyes latched onto Blue’s. They were large and brown just like Regina’s. And just like Regina’s did, Blue’s eyes also reflected deep emotion.

Though she had stopped crying, she was still sniffling here and there which made Emma’s heart drop into her belly. Upsetting her baby was the last thing she ever wanted to do. She dropped her head guiltily and took a deep breath. She toyed with Blue’s fingers and smiled as she wrapped her tiny fingers as far around her pinky as she could.

She hated to admit it but Regina did have a point here. They had to spend a few more weeks together. It would be best not to have to do it amidst an atmosphere of tension, anger, and unresolved feelings. Anyway, she had a secret ace in the hole if Regina even thought of fighting her. For once, she was glad that her Mother was a meddler by nature. Reluctantly, she nodded her head stiffly, “agreed.”

Regina nodded. Blue let out the smallest, cutest burp in the world. Everyone’s eyes turned toward the little girl who had been a miracle and lifesaver to them all. Though there was still plenty that needed to be said. For now everyone was happy to be able to focus on the little one who’d brought them all together.

RQ

Regina purposefully handed Blue over to her Mother after feeding her. This was a family occasion and she wanted everyone to share in it. Emma had a tendency to hog her whenever she held her. She would only let her go when she needed the bathroom or else she was feeding. She grinned as she snapped a few pics while she watched her family share in the love of this beautiful experience.

After a while, she began to get dinner started. It’s not that the hospital food was bad. It was quite the opposite in fact. The chef they had on staff was obviously well trained in gourmet cuisine. But she loved cooking. Plus she had a craving for mole and unfortunately there was no way to turn mole into haute cuisine.

While dinner cooked, she began to fill out the birth certificate form that the nurse had given to her earlier. She very carefully used her best hand to fill in her daughter’s family information. She sat back and smiled as she penned Blue’s full name. Blue Ember Mills.

The family was able to enjoy a cordial meal together. Then after dinner most of the family took their leave. Zelena and Hades along with Fred and Abby were going to stay in a nearby hotel for a few days. Cora would stay with Regina for however long Blue’s hospital stay ended up being. Regina felt melancholic as she watched them leave. But she was also at peace with it. After giving Blue another feeding, she settled down to some much needed rest.

SMF

Emma stayed up after everyone left cuddling with her baby. She had helped Regina give her first bath earlier. Now she sat blissfully in a corner of the room opposite from the bedroom area where Regina lay sleeping and Cora sat watching tv.

She had just gotten up after deciding that she too needed sleep soon or she’d pass out when she noticed a form on a counter. She hugged Blue close while gently bouncing her as her eyes blinked slower and slower.

She had just given the form a casual glance when she saw Blue’s name written out formally. She didn’t understand all of it since it was in French. But what she could read made her realize that it
was Blue’s birth certificate.

She frowned as she noticed that Regina had written out Blue Ember Mills as her given name. She threw a dirty look over in the direction of the bed before she picked up the pen that had been discarded beside it. In the space before Mills she carefully wrote out Swan. On the blank space that had parent 2 underneath, she wrote out her full name. Emma Swan. Now the form read Blue Ember Swan Mills.

She grinned at her craftiness. She put Blue back into her isolette and went back to the paper. She picked it up and walked it out to the nurse’s station. The nurse who relieved Aimee at night smiled as she took it from her.

“Bonne nuit,” which was as much French as Emma had picked up so far.

“Bonsoir,” she answered with a small wave.

Emma walked back into the room and picked up her suitcase. She headed straight for the bathroom and went through her nighttime routine. By the time she’d gotten out she found that Cora had finally succumbed to sleep as well.

Emma pulled out the Murphy bed and quickly made it up. Then she pulled Blue’s isolette closer to her so that she could keep an eye on her. As she watched her baby’s chest rise and fall with her every breath, she herself was lulled into sleep.

SMF

It was 2 1/2 weeks later before Blue was finally ready to go home. She had stopped needing oxygen a week ago. And she was now able to hold her own body temperature without needing kangaroo care.

She’d gained almost 2 kg in the time that they’d been there. She was still impossibly tiny. But she was healthy and getting bigger and better everyday.

As the family stood around awaiting her release papers, Emma finally turned toward Regina, “I think it’s time we had that talk.” She bounced her baby as she played with her fingers. Blue stared up at her with eyes that to Emma looked slightly stoned. But that’s what made it so funny.

Regina nodded. But before she could say anything Emma opened up the negotiations with what she’d considered a fair trade, “I know she’s breastfeeding so that will make things difficult at first. But I’m open to maybe swapping her on weekends. Since you are already storing milk for her and everything feeding her from a bottle 3 days a week won’t hurt her.”

Regina had purchased a new breast pump a few days earlier. When she nursed Blue, she also filled up a bottle and put it on reserve. She had already managed to fill up 2 of the jugs that she could keep in the freezer. This allowed someone else to occasionally take over feeding her so that she wasn’t so overwhelmed with having to do so every 4 hours.

Regina frowned at her and began to shake her head, “that’s not going to work for me.”

Emma’s head popped up sharply. She narrowed her eyes at her, “what bright idea did you come up with on how to divide up custody?”

Regina understood that Emma was challenging her but she refused to rise to the bait. She took a deep breath, “you’re right.” She moistened her suddenly dry lips before continuing, “it will be difficult for some time since Blue’s so young. I don’t have anything written in stone or anything. So
I thought we’d just play it by ear. I’d bring her to see you as often as I can. I just can’t promise you a set schedule right now.”

“What the - ,” Emma’s mouth hung open as she stared at Regina incredulously. “We are not playing anything concerning my daughter by ear!”

Regina flicked her hand up in the air, “You have to be reasonable Emma. It’s precisely like you said. She’s breastfeeding. And she’s too small for me to allow you to take her for an extended period of time. I promised you – and her by the way – that I wouldn’t keep the two of you apart and I meant it. I will do my best to ensure that the two of you see each other as much as possible. But as far as set parameters are concerned, I don’t have those to give to you.”

“My sister is pregnant,” she gestured toward Zelena who had her arms folded across over her front while leaning leisurely against a wall as she watched the argument with something akin to amusement. “She can’t poof back and forth constantly. I’ve done poofing while pregnant and trust me when I say - it’s not a very good experience.”

“And my magic is coming back slowly. But I’m not even sure how it’s working now. As far as I was aware Storybrooke is the only place in this world that should have magic.”

“No dear,” Cora jumped into the fray. “Magic has no boundaries. As long as there’s hope and possibilities, then there’s magic.”

Emma began to walk with Blue so that she wouldn’t get upset at yet another round of her parents arguing. She fought to keep her voice as calm and even as possible despite how fast her heart was pounding in her chest at this outrage, “there’s no way in hell I’m going to allow you to keep my baby from me.”

This was a fight she had no intention of backing down from. Her baby meant the world to her. And she’d be damned if she was going to give up another child that belonged to her ever again, “if you’re crazy enough to think I’m just going to allow it then lady – you’ve got another think coming,” she glared at her.

Regina took a deep breath and ran a shaky, frustrated hand through her hair. This is what she’d spent the past couple of weeks trying to avoid. She knew it wasn’t going to be easy. But after months of internally debating it really was the best she could come up with thus far. She shook her head sadly at Emma, “It’s either we wait and see when we can make time for the two of you to spend time together or you can just walk away. There is no other choice.”

Blue began to fuss so Emma began to bounce walk her around the room, “No you don’t have any other choice Regina! You don’t get to call the shots around here when it comes to MY baby!” Emma shook her head and headed for the bag she had used to store Blue’s birthday gifts. She reached into the side pocket and pulled out the papers that Snow had procured from her judge friend. “I didn’t want to have to do this. But you’ve left me no choice,” she handed the stack of papers over to Regina.

Regina stared at the offending papers and refused to give it an ounce of her energy. “What’s this?” she held the envelope upward in her hand as she crossed her other arm around her middle.

Emma locked eyes with her, “custody papers. If you refuse to listen to reason, then it says that I have full legal custody of Henry and Blue,” she averted her eyes.

Regina turned toward her sister. The two of them locked eyes with one another. A wicked grin began to spread across Zelena’s face. She pushed off the wall and stood up straight, “I think we’re
good here sis. You can go on ahead and Blue and I will be along shortly.”

Emma’s head swiveled sharply to her. She narrowed her gaze at her and began to move closer to the door. Zelena walked across the room and met her shortly before she got there. The two women squared off against each other as everyone else in the room remained silent watching the two of them.

Regina momentarily closed her eyes. She didn’t want to have to do this. But Emma had left her no choice. Though it saddened her, she and Zelena had unfortunately been prepared for precisely this situation, “I’m really sorry things got to this point. And what I said still stands. I won’t keep you two apart. But you will have to be reasonable about this.” She grabbed ahold of Lola’s leash and Lenny’s carrier. Cora took ahold of Fred and Abby. Hades grabbed up the suitcases the family had spent the past couple of weeks living out of.

Emma opened her mouth to reply but they had already poofed away. She turned her attention back toward Zelena.

Zelena looked down at her watch, “you’ve got 15 minutes to say your goodbyes.”

Emma pulled herself up to her full height and countered her, “or what?”

Zelena’s grin grew even wider turning into a full blown sneer, “or my pretty.” She chuckled as Emma gave her an involuntary flinch, “we will do things my way. You see my sister’s much too nice on you Charmings. I would’ve done away with you and your Mother years ago instead of allowing her to continue breathing. Because let’s be honest - ,” she leaned closer into Emma’s face. “Dying is really so much worse than anything else a person can do to another.”

Emma shifted until Blue was cradled on the one side of her that was farthest away from Zelena, “don’t you dare threaten me. Your sister was the Evil Queen for years. But I still took her down.” She tilted her chin upward, “I’m the Savior.”

Zelena threw back her head and cackled. Emma didn’t want to admit it but the woman really did scare the crap out of her. “Someone has an inflated sense of self,” she looked her up and down before turning her back on her.

“My little sister did nothing more than play dress up in her big sister’s clothes. I – on the other hand - ,” she turned back and planted her hands on her hips. She moved in toward Emma until they were practically nose to nose. “I’m the Wicked Witch of the West.”

Emma gasped and took a step back even as she cursed herself for being scared. She had nothing to fear. They were in a hospital room where someone was bound to walk in with Blue’s discharge papers any minute now. “You are not getting anywhere near me or my baby.”

She pointed to the papers that Regina had let fall onto the floor. “I have legal custody of Blue signed by a judge,” she walked over to her bag and swung it over her shoulder. Regina and her family had taken the suitcase she’d been using of Zelena’s spare stuff wherever they had poofed off to. She headed for the door and tried to open it but to no avail.

She looked over her shoulder at Zelena who was leisurely leaning against the wall again as she watched her. She began to pound on the door as she called out for help and tried to juggle Blue all at the same time.

“There’s no use in shouting. I put up a silencing spell. No one can hear you and you most definitely are not getting out of this room with my little niece.” Zelena glanced at her watch, “now you have
Emma’s heart picked up speed again but this time it wasn’t anger fueling her – but fear. Tears began to make their way down her face as she frantically bounced Blue who had started to cry from the tension in the atmosphere. She held her to her shoulder as she cradled her head and cooed softly to her, “shh baby. Mommy’s here. I’m not going anywhere.” She looked over Blue’s shoulder at Regina’s sister, “You can’t keep us trapped in here. And I won’t let you take my baby from me.”

The amusement was back as Zelena eyed her from her spot against the wall, “as my sister said you have no choice.” She rushed on hurriedly before having to listen to anymore nonsense from this daft woman. She had no idea what the hell her sister had ever seen in her. At least there was no denying they’d made one beautiful baby together.

“Because if you don’t hand her over peacefully,” she paused and fanned her lashes gleefully. “Then I will take my niece and drop her at home. After that I will take you back to your home,” she locked eyes with Emma enjoying her discomfort. “And while I’m there I’ll call upon the judge who absurdly signed those bogus papers,” she looked down at the envelope and noted the ‘from the offices of Judge Oliver Hastings’ across the front of it.

“I will bring him back here where we will go before a real judge and not some make believe imbecile who stupidly seems to believe he’s a real judge. And when we get into court we’ll allow him to explain why he would illegally take a child from its mother and give it to someone who had given him up for adoption years before. I personally would love to hear the moron go on and on about Snow White being his rightful queen and her daughter being the Savior.”

“But before we even got into court I’d also have no choice but to procure poor little Henry. My sister doesn’t want him. And I definitely don’t want him anywhere near me or anything that’s mine. Which means I’d have to find someplace to store him until we can get to court. Being burdened with him won’t make me happy in the least,” she grimaced and shook her head. “And when we finally do get into court the judge will make his own determination of how much of his insane story of his Mother being the Evil Queen and he’s the son of the Savior not to mention the grandson to Snow White and Prince Charming he’s willing to listen to.”

“And those are just a few of the highlights. There’s also the matter of you explaining Blue to someone outside of the world of magic,” she grinned again. “Good luck with that one by the way,” she threw her head back and laughed. “That will be the sight to see!”

Emma’s heart sank into her stomach with every word the woman spoke. By the time she was done her knees were practically knocking against one another. “You wouldn’t,” she whispered as visions of Henry forcibly being taken away from her began to play through her head. She didn’t even want to imagine him going into state’s custody. He wasn’t a little boy anymore. There were no guarantees he could ever be adopted again. “Regina would never allow that.”

“By that point, it would be out of Regina’s hands. You were told to stay away from her child and instead you got a judge to hand you over custody of him for no reason. Why - ,” she put her hand to her heart in feigned innocence, “I believe they call that kidnapping,” she gasped and raised her hand to her mouth while her eyes bulged. “And impersonating a police officer when you know you have a felony on your criminal record which means you have no right to have a job in law enforcement. My lord -,” she chuckled. “The charges against you just keep stacking up don’t they?”

The tears running down Emma’s face had turned into a full blown stream as the nightmare scenario Zelena created played out in her head. Not only would Henry be taken away. But if he insisted on talking his lunatic little head off about his storybook and the curse being true – and she knew he would since he hated being challenged - that was a one way ticket to not only being unadoptable but
a stint in the crazy house too. He’d end up being in a locked ward and medicated. And that was just for starters.

If Zelena went through with any of this not only would she wind up in prison again herself but kidnapping was a federal offense. Which meant FBI crawling all over a town full of fairy tale folk. Fairy tale folk who took their Queen and King act far too seriously. What would become of the judge? Or her parents? What would become of the townspeople when they gave their version of events? These people didn’t have any of the common sense that it took to exist in a reality outside of the Enchanted Forest. They were still barely able to reconcile the fact that they’d been cursed to a land beyond what they knew existed. And that was even with the knowledge that they’d already been here for 28 years.

She used her hand to dry the tears that had fallen onto her daughter as she fought the hysteria rising in her chest. “No. No, no, no, no, no,” she kept repeating as she pulled her daughter closer trying to stop both their tears. She kissed and shushed her and continued to say no even as her body began to shake. “I can’t,” she looked over at Zelena with wet eyes. “Please. I won’t.”

With a poof of green magic, papers appeared in Zelena’s hand. “You will sign away all of your parental rights on Blue. And in return you’ll be allowed to keep Henry. As my sister said, she will do her best to make sure that the two of you have some sort of visitation.” When Emma did nothing but shake her head at her while backing up toward the door before turning and trying to open it again she sighed and put the papers on the counter beside them. “It’s either you get Henry or you lose them both. And now you have 3 minutes left.”

Blue was in a full blown tantrum by now. Her face was red and she was screaming louder than Emma even knew she was capable of. Her body squirmed around as she lashed out with her arms and feet while contracting and expanding her tiny body. She was beyond inconsolable.

Emma placed her on her shoulder while continuing to repeat no. She closed her eyes and willed her magic to work but she felt nothing. “I love you my swan princess. Don’t you ever forget that baby. I will always love you. And I will find you.”

“One minute,” Zelena called out. She began walking toward the both of them but stopped just short.

Emma held her baby tight as she prayed for some type of intervention. But she received no help in answer. With a flash of green magic, Blue disappeared from her hands.

She fell to her knees, “NO!!!!” she screamed out even as her mind refused to process what she already knew to be true. She had lost her baby again. Her hands twisted in her hair and she pulled at it trying to externalize her inner torment.

After Henry brought her back to Storybrooke she realized she’d only been barely existing since giving him up. It wasn’t until holding Blue in her arms that she felt life beginning to return to her. She wasn’t sure that she could bear this pain at all.

Zelena knelt beside her with a pen and the papers, “now sign.”

Emma grabbed the pen and choked back the bile rising in the back of her throat. After staring into empty blue eyes she knew she had no choice left but to sign her name to the documents. It was the only chance that she had left to give. For Blue, Henry, herself, her parents, and the townspeople who depended on her as their Savior.

The next thing she knew she was back on the floor of what she recognized as her bathroom. She barely made it to the toilet before the contents of her stomach had spilled over.
After the sickness had passed, she fell to the floor in a shaky, snuffy, tearful mess. She hadn’t been aware of lying down but she was thankful for the feeling of the coolness of the tiled floor against her heated face.

She curled herself up into a ball and cried harder than she’d ever cried before in her life.
For everyone that I didn't/don't get to personally, please know and understand that I'm grateful for each and every one of your kind comments and reviews. It makes sharing my story publicly rewarding. I love and appreciate that you all love it as much as I do. So thank you very much. Please know that even if I forget to tell you personally that each one puts a huge smile on my face. C-ya on the other side! ☺☺

CHAPTER 24

When the bell above Granny’s diner chimed Neal looked past Henry to see who had just walked through the door. By the light that came over his Dad’s face he didn’t even have to bother asking who it was. His confirmation came soon enough. “There she is!” his dad squealed excitedly as if he were a boy.

Well – maybe he didn’t squeal exactly. Not like his grandmother anyway. But to Henry he might as well have. For him it was definitely the end.

Henry had been thrilled to finally have a Dad that he could spend time with. He’d never had one before and he’d always envied the other kids who had large families. His Mom was the Savior who’d brought back happy endings and ended the curse. And this was supposed to be his chance at getting his.

He and his Dad had spent time hanging out together for the weekend. Over the past two days they’d hung out at the arcade practically all day. Then they’d rented movies and ate pizza until they were so stuffed they couldn’t move. His Dad brought him root beers in the bottles while he drank his real beer. He’d given Henry a sip off the top and then laughed as he’d sputtered then chugged his root beer to get the acrid taste out of his mouth.

It had been gross. But he’d been thrilled that his dad had treated him as a man. After they’d finished laughing they’d kicked back in front of the tv watching movies and hanging out like guys do.

Henry kept his face averted as he glared at the now empty plate of food that sat before him as Neal stood to greet his guest with a kiss. He refused to look up as he heard her slide into the seat across the booth from him while his Dad scooted in after her.

“Hi Henry,” a feminine voice sounded opposite him before a hand was shoved out toward him. “I’m Tamara.”

Henry barely looked up and gave an almost imperceptible nod at the woman his Dad had just announced to him was going to be his wife. He’d even had the nerves to tell Henry that he wanted him to be his best little man at the wedding.

“How are you doing Henry?” she asked as if she cared.

Thankfully Henry was saved from answering when Ruby came over to the table to collect their
empty plates. “Anything else?” she asked as she loaded them up on a tray to take back to the kitchen.

Neal looked at his son, “How about some dessert Henry? I think there’re some pies over there that’re calling our name,” he grinned at him.

Henry swallowed but was still finding it hard to even look at his Dad after his latest bombshell. It was like adding insult to injury. Not only had he sprung a fiancé and a wedding on him. He’d also tried to turn his leaving and returning to New York - as if he and Emma were nothing to him at all - into a celebration.

Ruby’s friendly smile had turned into a frown as she looked down at Henry. The boy looked even more miserable to her now than he had during the curse. She forced out a chuckle and patted him on his shoulder, “He’s probably too busy being excited about his baby sister coming home. Your Mom should be back anytime now right Henry?”

Neal’s smile faltered as he took in Henry’s pained expression. He knew he wouldn’t be too thrilled about him going back to New York but he had no choice. Storybrooke wasn’t and never would be his home.

He’d made a new life for himself there that he loved. There he’d managed to turn all of his former bad habits around. It was a place that kept him firmly grounded in reality instead of lost amongst fairy tales, myths, and legends.

He desperately needed to get back there as soon as he could. This place gave him the same trapped feeling that he’d had while living in the Enchanted Forest. If he didn’t do something drastic and leave as soon as possible then something told him that he never would.

“No, I’m good,” Henry said quietly. He rose from the booth and threw his backpack that held all his things he’d taken with him when he’d spent the weekend with his Dad onto his back. “I’d better get home now. It’s getting really late,” he tugged on the end of his shirt nervously as he waited for his Dad to join him. He hoped that his girlfriend would stay behind but he had no such luck. Instead, she rose behind Neal and he threw his arm around her waist as they headed towards the front counter.

Henry waited with the door opened for his Dad to pay the bill. After he paid, Henry began to walk quickly ahead of him and Tamara to his grandparents place around the corner. Once he got into the building he ran up the stairs quickly and hurried to their front door. He walked inside without knocking because he knew that it wouldn’t be locked which turned out not to be such a great idea. He’d left one awkward situation behind him and run smack dab into another.

Snow hurriedly jumped off of David’s lap, “Henry! We weren’t expecting you back so soon,” she said breathlessly.

He stood irritably in the doorway unsure as to how to handle the situation. They had known that he was coming back today. It shouldn’t have been that much of a surprise. Now there was nothing he could do. He was already there and his Dad and fiancé were coming up right behind him. His stomach churned as he got the feeling of being unwanted once again.

It seemed lately that people were putting up with him but not really too pleased that he was there. It reminded him of a Snoopy cartoon he and his Mom used to watch together. He liked superhero movies but his Mom loved Peanuts. One of the cartoons was called Snoopy, Come Home. Snoopy had run away because he hadn’t been allowed in any of the places that his human friends were. He’d traveled far and wide only to keep coming across huge signs declaring No dogs allowed!
Finally, he’d ended up going back home and realizing that that was where he’d belonged the entire time. Since his Mother had placed a spell barring anyone from her mansion and shipped his things to Emma’s there was no home for him to go back to. He hadn’t felt this lonely and useless since before the curse.

By this time, Neal and Tamara had caught up to him, “I wasn’t sure when Emma was going to be back and I didn’t want to keep him away from anything important,” Neal said by way of a greeting.

Snow was busy wearing a frown at seeing Neal’s arm around a strange woman. She’d thought that he was single. She and Henry had a mini operation of theirs called Operation Swan. Since swans mated forever, they thought the name was appropriate to the mission. They were going to work together to get Henry’s Mom and Dad back together so that they could all have their happily ever after the way it always should’ve been.

Neal noticed her stare and smiled at her, “this is Tamara. My fiance,” he beamed.

Snow and David turned to each other with shocked expressions before turning back to him. He nervously shifted from foot to foot the same way that Henry was doing right now, “I just told Henry the great news and asked him to be my best little man. Right Hen?” he cupped his shoulder and gave him a slight jostle.

Henry frowned and moved aside until his father’s hand fell from his shoulder. He released a pent up breath and made a show of taking off his backpack to cover it up.

“Well that’s great news!” Snow’s voice rose to a screechy soprano that was so high that it was perfectly clear that she meant the opposite. She stood and walked over with her hand out. “I’m Snow. Emma’s Mom.”

Tamara smiled and shook her hand while nodding, “So I’ve heard. And you’re David, Emma’s Dad.”

David quickly followed his wife and shook her hand. Then he cleared his throat nervously and stepped back behind his wife.

“We had no idea you were engaged,” Snow tried to cover up the uneasy tension that was now in air. “I thought that you and Emma were - ,” Snow trailed off and left the question in the air.

Neal frowned, “Emma and I were over a long time ago. I’m grateful that we created a great kid. But that was almost an entire lifetime ago for both of us.”

Snow gave a nervous giggle, “Well… congratulations!” she threw her hands up in the air.

“Thank you,” Tamara nodded to her. “We had been planning before - ,” she gave Henry a sideways glance. “But – you know – life,” she gave a half shrug.

“Speaking of Emma,” Neal cut in, “do you know when she’s getting back?”

“Oh! She and the baby should be here shortly!” Snow squealed happily. “We can’t wait to meet her. From the pictures she’s sent, she’s a real beaut.”

“Like mother, like daughter I suppose,” Neal shifted and hooked his thumbs in his back pockets.

Henry frowned as he listened to them talk above his head. When he couldn’t take it anymore he blurted out, “I need to go and grab something from my room!”
The adults blinked at him in surprise. “Do you want me to go with you bud?” David offered.

Henry scowled at the ridiculous question, “It’s just across the hall. I think I can manage,” he quickly made his getaway as he left them to continue their chitchat.

MF

Zelena stared at her little sister as if she had 3 heads. She frowned as she watched her nuzzling Blue. Now that the stress and drama that she’d carried over the Emma situation was gone, you’d think she’d finally be satisfied. But no. She just couldn’t figure out what this obsession was all about. “Don’t you think maybe you should wait a while first? I mean – maybe when Blue’s older or something.”

Regina looked up into the tense faces of her family before her. She absently stroked the tiny fingers that were stretched out as if to reach out for her. Blue had already been fed and burped. Now she was just cuddling up in her Moms arms blowing raspberries, “I’ve spent every night for the past 6 months thinking about this. It’s all that I have been able to think about.”

Zelena and Cora exchanged worried glances. Regina was too busy playing with Blue to notice.

Cora shuddered at the thought of the pain that her daughters had endured. And how much of it was her fault. It was something that she was still having a hard time forgiving herself for. The weight of the guilt that plagued her seemed to press down upon her chest always. And at times like this her ribcage seemed to constrict and make it difficult for her to breathe. She licked her lips anxiously, “dear what we’re trying to say is – maybe you should wait before doing anything so drastic. I mean Blue needs you right now,” she gestured to her beautiful granddaughter. “Last time you went there, she became so sick.”

Regina rolled her eyes, “Blue was sick before because I was carrying her. The stress of my body and spirit being split in two was too much for her to handle. But she doesn’t need me like that anymore. And I just - ,” she trailed off midsentence and got lost in her thoughts as she stared across the room.

She didn’t know how to make them understand that she’d spent her entire life trying to get what she’d had with Daniel. There were very few instances in her life when she could say that she was truly completely happy and most of them centered around him.

At one point she’d thought that maybe she and Emma had a chance. But fate had other plans. She’d been on the brink of confessing everything to Emma right before Archie dropped the bombshell on her about Emma wanting to take Henry and leave Storybrooke for good. Then she could do nothing but curse herself for allowing her to get so close to her. So she’d reacted as she always did. With fists flying.

She’d given Emma the sleeping curse hoping that it would buy her some time to figure out how to handle the situation in the long term. But it had instead backfired in her face. Instead of Emma, Henry had fallen prey to the curse.

Her lashing out had ended up costing her Henry. Although she knew she would carry that pain with her forever she’d made peace with how things had turned out between them.

But with Daniel, she knew as she had always known that it was an entirely different situation. She and Daniel would’ve made it had her Mother not taken him from her the first time. And being with him and Blue in their netherworld had been a dream come true.
She shook her head slowly, “I don’t know how to make you understand what I feel. But I have always known that Daniel and I were meant to be. I just want – no I just need to see him. Even if it is just for a moment.”

Zelena looked across to her Mother who gave a slight nod to her head. Unbeknownst to Regina, they had spoken a few times about Regina’s state of mind before they’d found her and brought her to the nether. Though they could see her joy return to her eyes when she thought or spoke of Blue, they were still wary. The fear of what she could end up doing to herself if unchecked for too long still plagued them.

“Fine,” Zelena conceded. When her sister’s face split into a grin she held up her hand, “but I reserve the right to end it at anytime. Understood?”

“Of course,” she said before looking down at her baby. She kissed her multiple times on her head before holding her out toward her Mother, “will you please?”

Cora’s cheeks tinged pink with her pleasure at being handed her most prized possession by her baby girl. She stepped forward with a smile despite the worry eating away at her when her eyes fell upon her granddaughter. She’d fallen in love with her for the first time in the nether. And she’d fallen again when they’d met in this world. She caught one of Blue’s roving hands in her own as she cooed down at her baby. Blue gurgled up at her happily.

“Now let’s begin,” Zelena gestured for her sister to lie down.

Regina took a deep breath and closed her eyes as she got comfortable among the pillows. She allowed herself to be lulled away by the soft sound of her sister’s voice. Soon, it was fade to black.

CF

Emma had no idea how long she’d been on the floor. She didn’t even remember falling asleep but she knew time had definitely passed.

Everyone left her. Before moving here Emma knew this to be true. Eventually everyone left and she had learned to live with that as her reality. But her time spent in this town full of make believe, hope, and magic had made her lax in remembering this. She’d gotten too comfortable, had let her guard down, and hoped too hard for something that wasn’t to be. Not for her anyway.

She shouldn’t have been surprised by the turn of events. It was what it was. Still, the pain that flooded throughout her system was enough to cause her to breakdown. She felt as if she was losing her mind and welcomed it. At least she’d finally get a break from the hell that her life had turned into since the breaking of the curse.

She was meant to bring back happy endings. But she couldn’t even remember being this miserable as a child. The pain she’d experienced in the system was nothing compared to the pains she’d endured in this town.

If it wasn’t for Henry, she’d be out of here in the blink of an eye. Honestly, she still had fantasies of grabbing her stuff, jumping in her car, and taking off without ever looking back. The familiar twitching just under her skin that she hadn’t felt in a long time had returned. She couldn’t believe that this was now her life.

She got up and stared at herself in the mirror. There were the obvious telltale signs of tears. Her face was pale and puffy. Her eyes were red and have dark circles under them. Her hair was stringy and just hung there limp. She looked like death itself. And felt even worse.
She placed her hand across her chest trying desperately to remind herself that a heart can’t actually break. But what she told herself didn’t matter. She’d lost her baby. No. Even worse. She’d given her up. The fact that she’d done it to keep everyone else safe didn’t make her feel any better. All that mattered was that her baby was out there somewhere without her.

She swallowed thickly to force the sick feeling in her stomach away. She used every ounce of will she had to force her stomach to cooperate. She hadn’t eaten much in the past 24 hours. If she had anything left in her it would be nothing but dry heaves.

After her stomach settled down, she decided to get herself together. She washed her face and brushed her teeth in a zombie like fashion. Her head was pounding from crying herself out. She was actually grateful for the cotton mouth and chapped lipped signs of dehydration. If she had anymore water in her system she knew she’d do nothing but continue to cry it out.

She walked into the kitchen and grabbed some water and aspirin. After swallowing the pills down, she lay down on the sofa and went through her phone just for something to do. She watched her little girl grow and interact more and more as she went from the first pictures of her to the last ones she’d taken. She opened up her videos and began to watch each of them starting with her angel’s birth.

Henry walked into his new home and jumped slightly when he saw her lying there, “Emma! You’re back,” he forced a smile onto his face as he walked over to her. As he grew closer his smile faded and became a frown as he took in her pale, puffy, tear streaked face, “why are you crying?”

Emma wiped at the tears she hadn’t even known had been falling. She thought she’d cried them all out, “Nothing kid,”

Henry continued to look at her skeptically but he decided to let it go for now. He sat on the coffee table across from her and looked around as if searching for something. Or rather someone. Maybe even two someones, “Where’s the baby?”

Emma’s throat bobbed as she fought for control. She knew she needed to get herself together. She swallowed down the thick lump in her throat and sadly told him the truth, “She’s with your Mom.”

Henry narrowed his eyes as he looked at her closely, “where’s that?”

Emma ran her hands up and down her face and let out a deep breath. She hated having to confess this but she knew she’d get no respite from Henry unless she came clean, “I don’t know kid.”

Henry’s frown came back. He was completely confused, “But you were with them for almost 3 weeks! How come you don’t know?”

Emma’s response was a careless shrug before she scooched down lower and reclined against the back of the sofa again. There was a lot they had to talk about. But now was not the time. She just wasn’t up to the task and couldn’t even force herself to pretend.

Henry had no idea what to make of this situation. For months now he’d been waiting to see or hear from his Mom. Though Emma had called and texted multiple times a day in the past few weeks she’d been with them, she always seemed to have some excuse of why he couldn’t speak directly to her himself.

He’d suspected that Emma might not be giving her his messages. But she was Emma. The Savior. There’s no way the Savior would do something like that. Which led him to only one other possible conclusion. His mother didn’t want to talk to him.
This had really thrown him. It was something that he couldn’t understand. He had always been his Mom’s little prince. But now that she had her own baby it was like he didn’t even matter to her anymore.

His confusion over the situation led to frustration and eventually anger. Now he finally had Emma back. But she was staring at her phone with tears slowly running down her face ignoring him. She hadn’t even given him a hug or said that she’d missed him. She hadn’t even asked him how he’d been without her.

He wanted to get Emma’s attention back to him so he asked, “who was that woman that took you to see them?”

Emma was lost in her own head trying to figure out how she was going to go on with a broken heart. It took her a minute to realize what he was referring to, “Oh. That’s your mom’s sister. Her name’s Zelena.”

Henry’s eyes bulged. He wasn’t expecting that answer, “sister!!??” He shook his head emphatically, “she doesn’t have any sisters. She’s an only child like me.”

Emma reached behind her head and grabbed some tissues from the box that was kept on the end table. She wiped her face and nose. While she’d been gone, she’d been concentrated solely on her baby. She’d already missed so much with her that she didn’t want to miss a second more. She hadn’t bothered to fill her family in on the whole situation.

She’d decided while she was away to keep quiet about Cora being alive and Kathryn now living with Regina until she could tell them in person. But she knew that Henry deserved the truth, “yeah well. Apparently they just found one another.”

Henry was floored. His Mother had never once mentioned having any relatives at all. He’d only recently heard about her Mother not long after she’d showed up to town out of nowhere, “But she’s not in the storybook,” he insisted.

Emma stared at him as she took stock of him. Henry was still completely caught up in the curse and his storybook. Despite the fact everyone else had moved on to embracing their new lives. Henry still loved being revered as part of the famous Charmings’ whose daughter was the Savior who’d broken the curse.

One thing she’d realized early on after the two of them met was that Henry didn’t like being wrong. It was the catalyst that had pushed him to go and find her. He took his reality being challenged very seriously and he fought hard to make others accept his truth.

That had been fine while the curse was still enacted. But now the curse was over. She knew she needed to make him understand that it was time for them all to move on. If – god forbid – anything ever happened and Henry had to interact with the outside world he needed to know how to do it in a way that wouldn’t get him locked up in a psych ward. It was also a lesson that her parents and the rest of the townspeople needed to learn. “The storybook isn’t a crystal ball Henry. There’s plenty that’s been left out of it that you don’t understand.

Henry didn’t like the sound of that at all. It sounded like she was trying to tell him that he was wrong, “The book was right! The curse was real!”

Emma pursed her lips and heaved a big breath out through her nose. She sat up and turned toward Henry, “That book can’t tell you anything about the actual people or what actually happened. It just gives you some of their backstories in a way that a kid like you can understand. But that doesn’t
mean that everything in the book is right or true.”

Henry sat gaping at Emma in complete disbelief of what he was hearing. The book had been completely right. And it had given him back his Mom and Dad and even his grandparents. Now Emma was sounding like she had when she’d first gotten there and he just didn’t understand. Not after all that she’d seen and done since the curse broke. “But it was!” he yelled insistently.

Snow and David burst into the apartment. They had just said goodbye to Neal and his fiancé when they’d heard shouting. They did a double take after walking in, “Emma!! We had no idea you were home.”

Emma rolled her eyes at their intruding. She was trying to have a conversation with her son. Then again, what she had to say to him pertained to them as well. She pulled her hair back and used a hair twist on her wrist to secure it in a messy bun.

Snow and David walked over to where Henry and Emma sat on the sofa. Snow’s head swiveled around as she searched around her, “where’s my grandbaby?”

Emma’s head had stopped pounding but she was still dehydrated. Her tears had stopped for the moment but she knew it would be a while before she got over this loss. Before answering she took a long swig of her water, “she’s with Regina.”

Snow and David’s faces registered their shock. “What do you mean she’s with Regina? You were supposed to bring her back here.”

Emma’s lips twitched as she tried to hold back the snarky retort that was sure to follow. She averted her gaze as she collected her thoughts.

She knew she needed to force them to see reality. They’d lived in their fairy tale land for far too long as far as she was concerned. She knew the pain of what it had just cost her would last a lifetime. Still she was conflicted on exactly how she was supposed to get them to see and understand reality when they weren’t actually real themselves. She pinned her Mother with her eyes. “I couldn’t bring her back here because -thanks to your help with the judge - I had to make Sophie’s Choice.”

At the blank looks on their faces she explained in a voice that appeared eerily calm despite the fact that inside her emotions were churning, “It was either let Regina keep her without a fight or lose her and Henry. That would be in addition to me, you, the judge, and probably most of this town ending up in a federal prison.”

Henry sat up straight at the mention of his name. His brow crinkled in confusion that was mirrored by his grandparents. Emma had always thought he looked more like Regina’s and Neal’s child than hers. It was in that moment that she could see the resemblance in him and her Mother.

“We don’t understand,” David breathed through his shock.

She jerked her thumb at herself as she rose up and squared off against her parents, “your judge friend isn’t a real judge. In fact none of you really even exist in this world. Everything here is nothing but make believe bullshit. If I had’ve tried to fight for my baby then Regina would’ve had the right to fight back. And she would’ve won. So once again – to save all your asses – I had to give my baby up.”

Snow pursed her lips and shook her head at her daughter. She put her hand on her hip and gave her a condescending look, “Emma we’ve been down this road before. And we won because that’s what happens. The good guys will always win against evil. You should’ve brought our baby home.
Now we’re going to have to go and get her.”

Emma stared dumbfounded at her Mother. She couldn’t believe this was her birth line. No wonder Regina called them idiots. She shook her head, “I’m not doing this.” She turned and walked toward her room but stopped just short of the door, “tomorrow I’m calling a town meeting. Make sure that all your friends are there because I’m only going to be having this conversation once. And for the first time you’re all going to listen.”

Snow’s face lit up as she moved toward Emma, “Oh Emma. We’ve been waiting for you to step up. It’ll be the perfect time for you to remind everyone that you’re the Savior – and we’re your family – just before the election.”

Emma didn’t even bother to try to process a response to that. She went into her room and slammed the door shut behind her.
“Daniel?”

Regina stood beside the lake where she’d first encountered Blue and Daniel the last time she was in the Nether. It hadn’t changed at all. The only differences were this time she knew where she was and what was going on around her. That and there was no baby Blue or Daniel in sight.

She’d been waiting and calling her love for a while and still she’d received no response. After a few more minutes of waiting she began to walk forward hoping she’d eventually come to her house once again.

She’d been dreaming of this throughout her pregnancy. She’d been grateful for Emma’s help through the labor but even then she’d been desperately wishing that it was Daniel who held her hands and softly encouraged her. Trying to get back that feeling she’d had when it was she, Blue and Daniel had been what drove her forward.

The fog she’d remembered from her last time in the Nether had somehow managed to become even denser. She had to squint hard to be able to see any distance ahead of her. Thankfully after stumbling around a bit she finally managed to make her way back to her mansion.

She burst into the house calling for her love, “Daniel!” When she received nothing but her own voice echoing throughout the house followed by silence, she stood in the doorway feeling despondent. She’d come all this way and still nothing.

She slowly made her way upstairs stopping to check in all of the rooms along the way. She looked into Blue’s room in confusion as she saw what had become of it. It no longer held any of the dolls, toys, or furnishings fit for a princess that it once had. Instead it was littered with boxes and looked to be a storage room.

Not wanting to panic over what this could possibly mean she reminded herself that Blue was safely at home with her Mother and sister. She was safe and surrounded by love. If a problem arose, they would alert her immediately.

She moved on quickly poking her head into each room and calling out for Daniel as she went. After she made the rounds upstairs she went back downstairs continuing her search. When she came up empty after going all through the house, she ended up in her living room next to the fireplace. She took a seat on the plush sofa in front of it and conjured up a fireball. She threw it into the fireplace. Normally fire had a tendency to soothe her. Unfortunately this time it wasn’t working.

She had promised her Mother and sister that she’d only be a short while. But here in the Nether she had no idea how much time had passed. She decided to give it a few more minutes before having to call it quits. She curled her legs underneath her as she settled more comfortably onto the sofa and stared miserably into the flickering flames.

“Daniel, where are you?”

Zelena glanced uneasily at her Mother as she bounce walked Blue up and down the length of the bedroom. The second Regina entered the spirit world, Blue had let out a piercing wail. Tears were
streaming down her reddened face and she was inconsolable. Watching her arms and legs flail around and hearing her piercing cries broke her Aunt’s heart, “She knows.”

Cora merely nodded as she cooed softly to her granddaughter, “we come from a long line of strong, powerful women.” She pressed her lips to the wailing baby, “this little one will be no exception.”

She moved closer to the bed where her daughter lay, “she’s not gone little one. She’s still here,” she said softly as she laid the baby across her Mother’s chest.

Blue began to calm but she was still clearly upset. Her tears had slowed but continued running down her cheeks as she burrowed her face into her Mum. She sniffled as she lay across her Mum’s chest sucking on her tiny fist.

Cora sat beside them and rubbed soothing circles across Blue’s tiny back as Mother and daughter locked eyes with one another. Their pale faces and rounded wide eyes mirrored the apprehension they saw on the other. Neither one of them were happy about this situation.

Though they were all getting better at the family thing they were still far from being healed. Wounds of the past run the deepest and last the longest for everyone. That coupled with the stubborn nature that all 3 women possessed and there was still a ways to go on the road ahead of them on their way to happy.

They had both tried to talk Regina out of going. But she had insisted that she needed to see Daniel. And she was Cora’s babygirl and Zelena’s little sister. It made saying no to her very difficult for both women.

They tried not to dwell on how they had initially come together as a family. But still – Regina’s suicide attempt wasn’t far from either of their minds. Not wanting to upset her, they kept their fears and worries to themselves as Zelena helped her and Cora learn spirit walking. When their skill level was high enough they knew there was no way they could hold her back. So instead Zelena and Cora helped support her in whatever way she could as she prepared to go back to the Nether.

Zelena took a seat on the other side of her sister’s body and toyed with Blue’s hand. She smiled as her tiny fingers instinctively wrapped around her pinkie, “she’s perfect.”

Cora grinned and nodded enthusiastically, “she is a Mills dear. It’s in the genes.”

Both women kept their gazes trained on Blue and not the corpse-like body of Regina lying there looking like death itself. She was still sniffling but at least she had stopped crying. Now she lay on top of her Mother blinking slowly as it became clear her falling asleep was imminent.

Cora bit her lip as she looked at her eldest, “just a few more minutes. Then I’ll bring her back home.”

Zelena nodded her consent. The two went back to keeping counsel beside Regina and baby Blue.

CF

Emma stared up at the ceiling commiserating over her life. A year and a half ago she’d had things all worked out. She’d been reunited with her son. She’d met the mother of her child and had fallen deeply in love. It was supposed to be her happily ever after.

Then the horror began. Out of the blue it seemed, Regina began to push her away and refused to allow her to see her son. Emma had been hurt, angry and confused since things between them had been going so well. All of her defensive walls that she’d been erecting since childhood had lowered
after she and Regina became a ‘we’ had returned even higher than ever before. She felt a change come over her that she hadn’t liked. She became moody, impatient and intolerant. But she still carried the hope that once Regina understood that their family was meant to be, things would return back to normal and they could just continue on with their happily ever after.

Then Henry had fallen prey to a sleeping curse that had been meant for her. That’s when Emma had to accept that all of Henry’s rants and raves weren’t just moody preteen fueled rages from an overimaginative child who should probably spend a lot less time with comic books and fairy tale stuff and more time with humans. She had to face a fact she had been slowly coming around to but hoped wasn’t true; the curse was real.

That had begun an avalanche of toxic waste she’d become buried under and still couldn’t seem to rise out of. Finding out that her parents were alive was one thing. Finding out that her Mother was her roommate and younger than her was another.

Regina had reluctantly teamed up with her in order to save Henry. She’d explained to Emma that she would have to fight to recover a bottle of true love that would cure him. But it wasn’t until she had descended the hidden dungeon underneath the library that she’d realized she’d had to slay a dragon for it.

Rumple had then cheated her out of her chance to save her son by tricking the potion from her. And when Henry had flatlined she’d poured every ounce of hope and love that she had left in her into that one last kiss. Henry had been cured by her true love’s kiss and the curse was broken. But – truth be told - so was she.

When the curse broke, it wasn’t only Henry who woke up. The entire town was now awake. And with it came all of their expectations of her, her life, time, and choices.

Her parents wanted her to take her rightful place as their daughter as they reascended to their throne. Her son and the town wanted her to be their Savior. Emma had done the only thing she knew to do. Run.

She and Regina had spent one last dizzying night wrapped in one another’s arms before they had to face the ugly truth. There was no happily ever after for them. She was a Charming and Regina was the Evil Queen. There was no way they could be together.

Emma realized she’d spent the past few months going through the motions of trying to make things appear fine. But they weren’t. Losing Blue was merely one more blow to an already damaged soul.

She sat up and threw her legs over the edge of the bed before making her way to the bathroom. She took care of her morning business then over to the sink to was her hands. She scowled as she stared at herself in the vanity mirror. Her eyes were reddened and her whole face was still puffy from crying.

She had no idea how she was going to fix her life. Blue and Regina were gone and she had no idea if or when they’d ever be back. The only thing she knew was that there was still Henry to worry about.

She felt bad as she threw cold water on face. He deserved better than he’d gotten lately. His Father was a loser, he had one Mother who’d abandoned him physically, and the other who’d been abandoning him emotionally lately. She felt shame flood through her but she quickly pushed it away. This was about making things better for her son and selfishly focusing on herself wasn’t going to get that done.
She skipped brushing her teeth and instead opted for swishing mouthwash around her mouth. She hurriedly ran a brush through her hair as she heard Henry beginning to stir around the kitchen. After a last look in the mirror to ensure she looked presentable she made her way into the kitchen.

Henry was at the toaster with an opened box of strawberry poptarts in of him. He was already dressed for school in a pair of jeans and a button down shirt with a sweater on top of it. Just looking at his preppy clothes was enough to let Emma know that he sure wasn’t only her son.

Emma rounded him just as the toaster dinged. She grabbed the pop tarts before he could and tossed them into the sink.

“Hey! That’s my breakfast!” Henry stared at his ruined sweets in horror.

“That stuffs not good for you. Sit down. I’ll make us something,” Emma opened the refrigerator and perused the interior. Thankfully butter and cheese keep well. She made a mental note to go shopping later as she turned towards the counter and checked the bread box. The bread was stale but not moldy. She began to put together a couple of cheese toasts. She grinned toward her son and wagged her eyebrows at him, “Looks like we’re having cheese toasts.”

Henry still wasn’t too happy about the loss of his breakfast. They were the last poptarts in the house. His Mom never let him have any. She considered giving kids processed food the same as abuse. It was only after moving in with Emma and his grandparents that he was allowed things like precooked meals and frozen or processed foods. He sometimes missed his Mother’s homecooking and coming home to a warm house filled with delicious aromas. But some of it wasn’t so bad.

“They’re called grilled cheese sandwiches,” he shook his head and rolled his eyes at Emma.

“Not where I come from. In foster care, they don’t really tell you much about food other than you’re lucky if you get it daily. So we just called them cheese toasts. Go have a seat,” she absently pointed to what was considered the dining room tables behind them. “They’ll be ready in a minute.”

Henry sat at the table sulking while he waited for any type of acknowledgement from Emma. He was completely confused about everything that had been going on lately.

After she’d made her declaration last night of having a town meeting today, she’d then disappeared into her room. His grandparents thankfully disappeared back to their apartment. None of them seemed concerned with where he was or what he was doing. It wasn’t like at home where his Mom made sure to check up on him at least every 30 minutes that he was out of her sight. Not wanting to be burdened with keeping up a fake front with them he’d instead opted for staying in his own place.

Even though it was early he’d decided to just get ready for bed. He’d taken his shower and put on his pajamas just for something to do. Afterward he’d sat staring at the tv trying to piece together everything that had happened the past couple of weeks.

His Mom and Emma now had a baby. And he had a baby sister. It still didn’t feel real to him.

After finding out that the baby was coming he’d pushed it to the back of his mind. He’d seen the pictures and videos that Regina had sent Emma but it was like looking through someone else’s family albums.

He’d had nothing but a sense of total disconnect. Well – maybe slight twinges of what he didn’t want to admit was jealousy when he saw his Mom smile in a way he hadn’t seen ever. Even when she did smile at him in that way that made her whole face light up there was still always that sadness deep inside her eyes. He remembered that she sometimes had nightmares and knew that something bad had happened to her once. It’s just – he’d forgotten all those Mom things about her for a while.
there. Now – as his memories of her were fading more - he wanted desperately to remember every little thing about her.

Then Emma had disappeared for almost 3 weeks. He’d thought that she would be bringing the baby back with her and had prepared himself for what a crummy situation that was going to be. A baby would’ve taken everyone’s attention from him. Even his grandparents were more excited about the baby than he’d ever seen them about anything other than themselves. Now that she was back he had to admit he felt a little happy that he didn’t have to share his home and his last remaining parent with a baby. But even that hadn’t lasted long.

Nothing here was as it should be. Before the curse – everything made complete sense to him. Now it felt like everything he’d worked so hard for was slipping through his fingers.

Emma had gone from being his best friend to a roommate who did nothing but cry over her baby. His Dad spent most of his time talking about his life away back at his ‘home’ in New York with side references to Henry being welcome to join him and his fiancé from time to time. His Grandparents were completely wrapped up in themselves. He had no idea where that left him.

Emma divided the last bit of crangrape juice between two glasses while she waited for the sandwiches to fry up. She placed one in front of Henry and sipped at hers as she flipped both sandwiches. Once they were done, she took the finished sandwiches off the skillet and put them on two plates. She sliced them both crosswise and sat Henry’s on the table in front of him before taking hers over to her seat across from him.

For a moment, Henry stared down at his sandwich. Emma had cut it into 2 large triangles. But his Mother would’ve cut it into 4 or maybe even 8 small ones for him. His stomach growled prompting him to dig into his sandwich. As he took his first bite he stared curiously at Emma as she sat quietly with her head bowed. He chewed thoughtfully as he waited for her to say whatever it was that was bothering her.

Emma spread her hands out on either side of her plate as she carefully planned her next words. She swallowed thickly and blinked repeatedly to hold her tears at bay. She tried to school her face but she didn’t have Regina’s skills. She tried for an upbeat tone but even she cringed a little as she heard herself speak, “Your Mom has promised that no matter what we’ll still be able to see your sister,” she pushed out of her tight throat quickly. Her fingers curled into fists as her chest became constricted but she pushed ahead anyway. “She says she’ll make sure that we have some kind of visitation. She just can’t promise on a schedule or anything right now.”

Henry frowned before tossing what was left of his breakfast onto his plate. It was weird hearing Emma call that baby his sister. He’d of course looked at the videos and pictures that Emma had sent while she’d been away and still nothing. Even though he knew technically it was true. He still felt little to no connection with her.

“So I’m going to have visitation with Mom while you visit with your baby?”

Emma’s face registered surprise before she managed to school her features again. Regina had made no mention of wanting anything to do with Henry. Quite the opposite in fact. She never asked about him. Not even how he was doing or if he was adjusting in any way. She didn’t even seem to care to hear any news about him. Emma had tried repeatedly to bring him up in conversations and each time she’d been shut down. When she’d explained what Zelena had done to him before they’d poofed there, Regina had shown no care or interest in the situation. Emma had been the one who’d had to tell her that if she ever used magic on her son she’d have to answer to her for it. “Is that what you want?”
He shrugged and avoided eye contact. “I guess it’s fair,” he said softly as he toyed with his sandwich crusts. “Since you’ll be with your baby and all.”

She cleared her throat nervously and began gathering up their dishes before heading over to the sink. ‘We’ll see I guess,” she muttered. She could tell that he was hoping for more but there was only so much pain she was willing to heap onto his shoulders.

Henry stared at the stiff way that Emma held her shoulders as he watched her scrub at the dishes. Before he could continue the conversation however his grandmother entered the apartment.

Emma scowled as Snow let herself in once again without preamble. She walked over to the kitchen bar that was a semi-division between the kitchen and living room area. She propped her elbows on it and leaned her head on her fists. Without even a ‘hello’, ‘good morning’, or ‘how are you?’ to either of them she launched into her diatribe, “Your Dad and I have been thinking. It’s clear that Regina’s had some effects on you and your behavior. I don’t really think you’re in the right frame of mind to lead a town meeting.”

Emma scoffed at her as she finished up the dishes. “I wasn’t asking for either of your permissions. And I’m still calling for a town meeting tonight,” she told her as she dried her hands on a kitchen towel.

Snow frowned and crossed her arms, “and what exactly is the reasoning behind this?”

Ignoring her, Emma turned to Henry, ‘go and get your stuff for school so you’re not late.”

Henry didn’t want to leave. He started to protest but when Emma fixed him with a piercing glare, he knew she wasn’t kidding. He leaped up and headed to his room for his things.

Turning her attention back to Snow, she walked around the kitchen bar and squared off against her. “I can tell you what it’s not about. It sure as hell isn’t about you. Or about your stupid campaign. I’m doing what I have to do as Sheriff of this town for everyone.”

Snow looked her daughter up and down, reading – and not liking – her defensive body language or tone of voice. She puckered her lips, “I don’t think you’re understanding the gravity of your actions Emma. I mean – first this whole baby thing. Which I understand wasn’t your fault since you had no idea you could have a baby. But with the Evil Queen?!??! And then on top of that – you just abandon her here there instead of bringing her back home to her family where she belongs.” She threw up her arms in exasperation, “I mean – I just don’t even know what to do with you anymore.”

Emma had stood quietly fuming as she listened to her Mother’s rant. She silently kept trying to remind herself that this was her family now. And this was her life and there was nothing more she could do except figure out a way for it to work. “This baby thing? Blue is my daughter!! She’s not a ‘thing’ to be managed! You expect me to just get over what’s happened just because you’re capable of abandoning an infant?!??!”

Snow’s mouth dropped in disbelief of what she was seeing and hearing. She had never seen nor heard Emma so belligerent before. She knew she had a temper. And that she was having a hard time adjusting to life post curse. But this was becoming too much! “We did what we had to do to save our family!”

Before anymore words could be said, Henry returned with his backpack slung over his shoulder, “I’m ready.”

Emma went over to him and bent down to his level. “I really hope you have a good day ok?”
Henry nodded in surprise. It had been a long time since he’d connected with Emma. He was starting to think that maybe she had forgotten him. He gave her a small smile as she wrapped her arms around him.

“Love you kid,” she ran her hands through his hair before ruffling it.

Snow huffed and blew out a breath. “Come along Henry before we’re late. This conversation isn’t over Emma,” Snow called over her shoulder as she led him out the door.

Emma rolled her eyes before turning toward her room to get ready for the day. One thing was for damned sure. These people weren’t going to change easily. She had to get through to them that they needed to figure out how to exist in this reality as opposed to their happy happy joy joy fairy tales.

Regina grinned down at her baby before plucking her from her bath. She wrapped the towel around herself and folded it around her daughter as she lightly patted her down. She pressed her lips to her temple as she dried her down, “My little moppet. I love you so much.”

She was taking even more extra special care than she normally did with her since her Mother and sister had told her about how upset Blue had gotten when she thought her Mum was gone. Even during her pregnancy she had felt as if she and Blue had an even more special relationship than most pregnant Mothers.

Blue seemed to respond to her moods and communicate with her more. When she was upset, Blue would squirm around and run her hand or foot up and down her belly as if trying to give her a supportive caress. When she wanted nothing to do with Emma and tried her best to ignore any feelings involving her away, Blue would keep up a pattern of almost nonstop kicks and punches. Regina was certain she’d bruised all of her internal organs.

Yes, the little one had definitely inherited the Evil Queen’s temperament. She had no one but herself to blame for that one.

But there was more to it than that. She’d noticed that Blue responded to Emma almost as much as she responded to her. She was a baby who loved attention either way she got it. But she seemed calmer when she or Emma held her than when she was held by the rest of the family. She would gurgle up at her sisters or her Mom when they held her. But when she or Emma did it, she would practically burrow herself into them.

After drying her off she climbed onto her bed and got into a comfortable position. She always made sure that the room temperature was comfortable enough so that Blue could spend some time out of her diaper and airing out some after her baths. “I’m really sorry I upset you princess. That wasn’t my intention. Mummy just really needed to see our old friend,” she leaned back against the pillows she’d stacked behind her back. She pulled out her breast and began to nurse her baby.

Blue sniffled and pursed her lips together. Regina chuckled at how adorable her li’l mini me looked doing an Evil Queen impression. She offered her a nipple and almost begrudgingly Blue accepted.

After the first suckle at her teat, the Emma Swan genes in her kicked in and Blue began to enjoy her meal in earnest. Her eyes closed and she gave a small moan as her belly began to fill.

“Like Mother like daughter huh?” again Regina chuckled.
Emma kept her eyes peeled as she mentally went over everyone’s fairy tale identity in her head. Her Mother was supposed to be the Secretary. But she and her Father had been whispering among themselves and alternating between glaring and waiting for Emma to acknowledge their glaring.

Emma heaved a deep sigh and continued to ignore them. For her, it had already been a long day. She just wanted this part over with as soon as possible.

After getting dressed in a pair of jeans, a sweater, and her knee high boots, she’d gone into the office for a few hours. She’d brushed past her dad and went into her office and closed then locked the door. She’d done a bit of paperwork but didn’t bother to overdo it. Though her parents had taken over as co-Mayors of the town, they weren’t as strict as Regina was with deadlines.

Her stomach grumbling a few hours later reminded her that it was time to eat. She printed up the flyers she had made about the town hall meeting, grabbed some tape, and headed over to Granny’s.

“Em!” Ruby greeted her with a hug. Granny just peered at her over the rim of her spectacles. “I didn’t know you were back.”

“Well - ,” she hugged her friend back for a moment before pulling away embarrassed. She really had missed her. Ruby was the closest thing to a best friend she’d had in a long time. “That’s the power of poofing.”

“Where’s Blue?” When she saw Emma’s face fall so did hers. “It’s okay Emma. Tell me all about it,” she said as she steered her best friend over to the last booth where they could both have some privacy. It had previously been Regina’s booth. For some reason, the patrons were still leaving it empty as if they were terrified of what she’d do if she mysteriously came back and found them there.

Emma slid into one side of the booth while Ruby slid into the other. “Okay. Well see - .”

After her lunch and an assurance from Ruby and Granny that they’d spread the word about the town hall later, Emma had walked around the town taping her flyers on various posts and outside a few of the downtown businesses. The good thing about a small town was that everyone - at some point in the day – passed through downtown so there was no way they could say they’d had no idea about tonight’s meeting.

Now she sat nervously bouncing her leg waiting for everyone to settle in so that she could call the meeting to order. When she saw who walked in the door though she was immediately off her chair and stalking down the aisle of the town hall.

“What are you doing here?” she was glaring at Neal but she cut her eyes toward Tamara making it clear that she was directing this at both of them.

“I told him about it. He is my Dad,” Henry answered.

Emma held her hand up to silence him, “this is between the adults Henry. Go and take a seat.”

Henry frowned at her but when she frowned back at him, he swallowed whatever it was he was about to say. He stomped down the aisle to the front row and threw himself in a chair. He sat sideways as he kept his eyes trained on them.

“Henry told us there was a town hall meeting,” Neal answered a little confused by this new Emma. She was a far cry from the shy, scared teenager that he’d met 10 years ago.
“Exactly,” she put her hand on her hip and glared at him. “As in residents of the town. Not visitors.”

Neal scrunched up his face confused, “I don’t see what that has to do with anything.”

“Why doesn’t that surprise me?” Emma asked sarcastically.

Before Neal could argue over it anymore, Tamara put her hand on his forearm and gave him a reassuring smile, “that’s fine. Why don’t you stay here to support Henry? I have some paperwork to do back in our room anyway.”

“Are you sure?” Neal looked like he still wanted to argue though even he was confused over why he was fighting at all.

“Of course,” she pecked him on the lips. “Go be with your son,” she encouraged.

Neal nodded and smiled at her. Then he walked over to the empty seat beside Henry.

As Tamara made her way out of the building, she heard Emma call out. “Okay everyone. We’ll give it a few more minutes for the stragglers then we’ll begin.”

After leaving the building she looked around her before pulling out her phone. She searched her contacts for the home office then tapped out a text. **They’re all having a town meeting. I’ll be over at the inn in 5 minutes.**

She looked around her to make sure no one was watching. Seemed in this bupkis town, they took town hall meetings seriously. The sidewalks were clear. Even the businesses had closed up early so that they didn’t miss a minute. She quickly made her way back to the inn. She knocked on the door of the room that was down the hall from the one she shared with Neal.

When the door opened, she grinned up at the man staring down at her, “Hi Owen.”

RQ

Regina hadn’t meant to. It was completely an accident. Well – maybe subconsciously she’d wanted it.

She’d put Blue to bed before climbing into her own. Though it was early, she’d already learned that it was best to nap whenever Blue did.

Because she was on breastmilk instead of formula, Blue required feedings more often. Which meant Regina would be sleeping a lot less.

After putting her down, she’d laid herself down and tried to get some rest. But her mind wouldn’t leave the Nether. Before she knew it she was back there. She never even heard her baby start to cry.

MF

Cora blinked confused as to why she was awake. Then she heard it. Blue’s wails.

She jumped out of bed and quickly made her way down to her daughter’s room. There was a room that adjoined Regina’s that she had eventual plans to turn into a nursery. But her room was so large that she had been able to fit a crib, rocker, and diaper station in the corner of it. She’d said she wasn’t yet ready to be apart from her baby even if it was only in the next room.
When she ran into the room she took one look at Regina’s corpselike figure on the bed and knew immediately what had happened. She went to the intercom they’d had installed throughout the house and called for Zelena. Then she went to grab a very upset Blue out of her crib.

Green smoke appeared before Zelena did. Once she’d appeared, her face took on a hue not far from her signature green. She wrapped an arm around her middle as she bent over slightly, “remind me not to do that again while pregnant.”

Cora was busy trying to calm Blue so she didn’t bother to answer her. Instead she tossed her head toward the bed, “Look.”

Zelena looked over and saw her sister’s body lying still. Too still. As she realize what had happened she huffed, “Oh for the love of - ,” she started to say.

But before she could finish there was a pop then a plume of pink and silvery smoke.

Her Mother stared in horror at her empty hands, “Oh my God!”

“Did that just - ,” Zelena’s eyes were wide as she took in what had just happened. “Oh my God!”

“I’ve got to wake her,” Cora went over to the empty side of the bed and lay down. After a few deep breaths, she entered the Nether.

CF

As soon as Emma unlocked the door to their apartment, Henry raced to his room. He ran inside and slammed the door shut. He just couldn’t believe what had just happened.

Emma, for her part, followed at a more relaxed pace. She ignored Henry’s tantrum and instead laid her body out across the sofa. She swore she was just going to rest for a minute.

The next thing she knew, she heard a pop and then pink and silver smoke appeared. She blinked sleepily at it as she wondered what next? The next thing she knew, her baby girl was scrunched up on her chest.

“Holy shit!” she exclaimed as she sat up carefully. “Holy, holy shit!”
“Daniel??!”

Regina just couldn’t understand it. Where could he possibly be?

From their earlier conversations he had mentioned that he lived another life outside of the Nether. But he’d also let drop that he kept a special watchful out just for her.

She’d been here 3 times now and there was no sign of him anywhere. Even though she knew it was crazy, she couldn’t help feeling a little rejected. As if he was purposefully avoiding her.

This thought sent her postpartum hormonal body into total chaos. She felt the tears that had been running down her cheeks drip onto her bare arms that she had wrapped around herself for warmth before she even realized she was crying.

She left the lake and walked quickly through the thick, dense fog back to her home. When she got there, she again found the place the same as the last time she’d been there. Empty.

She emitted a small strangled cry as she sank down onto the corner chair that she had shared with Daniel and Blue. She pulled her knees up to her chest as her tears started to stream down her face faster. She buried her head between them and cried harder than she could remember doing so for a long time.

She was crying so hard she missed the pop and the flash of light. It wasn’t until her Mother was crouched down in front of her shaking her before it even got through to her that she was no longer alone.

“Regina! Regina! We have to go!” Cora cried urgently.

“Wha - ?!???” she stared at her Mother dumbfounded.

“Blue’s gone! We have to go!” Cora clamped her hand around her daughter’s wrist. There was another flash of light then crimson colored smoke. Then they were back from the Nether.

Zelena was staring anxiously down at their still bodies. When they began to move she uttered, “Oh thank god!” She jumped on the bed and began to hug her sister tightly to her.

Regina used what little strength that hadn’t been zapped by her trip to the Nether to push her away having no time for this. There was only one thing on her mind, “Blue?!”

“I know where she’s gone,” Zelena looked disgusted as she shook her head.

Regina stared at her a long minute and when she still offered up nothing she practically screamed, “Where!??!”

Zelena looked taken aback before she squared off against her sister, “she has two mothers. And one of them decided to leave her while she went chasing after a dead guy.”

Regina glared at her sister for her slight. Then when everything she said had set in she clenched her eyes shut before throwing her head back and groaning, “Oh no.”
Blue was with Emma? She looked back and forth between her Mother’s and sister’s disapproving faces. God she’d never live this one down. She shook her head and started to call upon her magic but was stopped by her sister.

“I’m going with you!” Zelena told her before wrapping her arm around her waist.

Regina gave her a stiff nod then called upon her magic. With a pop and smoky purple magic, the two were gone.

SMF

They rematerialized in Emma’s living room where Emma was cooing softly to her baby. Regina gave a deep sigh of relief that they had been right. Emma gaped at the two of them for a second before backing away with Blue, “No, no, no Regina. She wanted me,” she shook her head vehemently as she tried to put as much space between Blue and herself and the two intruders.

Regina didn’t hesitate for a second. She strode over to where Emma was trying her best to get away, “Give me my baby.”

Zelena had been bent forward with her hands on her knees trying to push down the rising nausea. Poofing and pregnancy did not mix at all. When it became clear that there was no way around it, she wrapped an arm around her midsection and laid her hand across her mouth but not before a loud belch made its way through.

Regina stopped pursing Emma and looked over at her sister when she belched. Only then did she notice she was the same color as her namesake. Concerned, she took a step in her direction, “are you okay?”

“Bathroom,” Zelena groaned before flying towards the open door. Thankfully she remembered to slam the door shut before the sounds of sickness hit all of their ears.

Regina wrinkled her nose at her sister’s situation. She remembered the nausea all too well and was plenty thankful that part of her life was over. She turned back to Emma and held out her arms, “my baby.”

CF

Henry couldn’t believe it. He was so angry he could barely contain himself. He picked up a tennis ball and began to bounce it against the wall as hard as he could.

This was something he’d never be able to get away with doing at home. But nothing in this place was anything like his home.

Emma had stood before everyone in town and spoken against everything that he’d fought for and held sacred for the past year and a half. She’d told everyone that the Evil Queen had lost, the curse was broken, and the past was the past. It was time for everyone to move on.

She’d said that if they wanted to revert to their fairy tale characters then – whatever. But they were no longer in a fairy tale world. This was a new world and there were new rules. And laws that governed those rules. And anyone not following those rules or laws of society would be dealt with accordingly.

Then she’d handed out pamphlets that outlined some of the basic bullet points of the laws of this land. Things like no lynch mobs, no seeking revenge for believed slights, no stealing, murdering, or vigilante justice would be tolerated.
She’d also given them all basic traffic law guidebooks. She told them she expected every citizen of driving age to come in and pass the requisite driving tests before being out on the road. In the meantime, their cars would be booted.

She’d said she understood that Regina was the one who’d given everyone there their jobs and ID’s. People had begun to shift around uncomfortably wondering if she was coming after them next. Even the Judge who he knew was one of his grandparents supporters started to look ill. She’d explained that she would be keeping an eye out for things that didn’t look right. But if there were any problems with how they were behaving at their jobs then they would be dealt with. And that everyone who was of age to have an ID needed to make sure that theirs matched up with whatever identity they’d decided to go forward with in their lives.

She’d paced around as she’d angrily told them about having a baby with Regina. Everyone had shifted around uncomfortably and a few people gave him weird side glances after that one. His face had turned red and he’d pretended to be oblivious but he’d still heard some of the kids from school sniggering and making jokes about it. He was sure he’d have hell to pay when he went back to school the next day. And even his grandparents had gotten upset about this revelation.

Seemed Snow White was capable of keeping a secret when it was in her personal best interest. She had planned to take her daughter having a baby with her sworn enemy to the grave with her. Her parents had risen up and tried to say something but Emma wasn’t allowing anyone else to have the floor. Under the strength of her glare, they both slowly sat back down and remained quiet throughout the remainder of the meeting.

She’d gotten emotional as she’d explained having to walk away from her baby. Not because she had wanted to. But because she’d had to protect all of them.

Then she’d made it clear that that was something she’d never do again. As far as she was concerned the Savior’s job was done. From here on out they could address her as Sheriff or Emma. Because that’s who she was.

When his grandparents had again tried to stand up and speak with her, she’d instead turned and jumped down from the elevated stage. She clamped her hand onto his shoulder. “Come on Henry. We’re out of here,” as she pushed him ahead of her to the apartment without another word or look back to anyone.

For the past few months, he’d done nothing but listen to her cry over her baby and Regina. Then this morning he’d thought they’d reached a new understanding when he began to see flickers of the Mom that he wanted her to be. And now this.

He was ready to scream and do something even more drastic than bouncing a tennis ball against the walls when he heard Emma cry out. He’d ignored it because he wanted her to know that he was ignoring her.

Then he heard something he hadn’t heard in a long time. It made his chest tighten up and tears started to well up in his eyes. His breathing became ragged as he stood stock-still torn between hoping that it was true despite the fact that he knew he shouldn’t be happy about it. Then he heard it again. He crept to the door and quietly opened it.

He gasped when it became clear that he hadn’t been wrong. He slipped out through the crack in the door then rounded the corner. For the first time in months she was here. His Mom.
“Give me my baby!” Regina had to shout yet again.

Again Emma dodged her attempts to get at Blue, “she came here to me Regina. She wants me.”

Regina shook her head in dismissal, “that’s because she thought that I was gone.”

Emma narrowed her eyes at her then looked curiously at Blue and back to Regina again, “why would a 3 week old baby think that her Mom was gone Regina?”

Her jaw clenched and she had to stop herself from grinding her teeth together, “what I do in my private life is none of your business!”

“It is if my baby thinks that you’ve deserted her Regina! I’m her Mom too. I have every right to know that my baby is being taken care of. And according to a 3 week old, you’re not!” Emma shot right back at her.

Regina shook her head and walked around her. She looked up at Blue as she frowned over Emma’s shoulder. She raised her thumb to wipe away the errant tears on her face, “I’m really sorry baby. Mummy just had to see our friend. But I wasn’t gone. I would never leave you.”

Emma snorted and brought Blue down to cradle her in the crook of her arm. She held her close to her chest while she bounced her, “it’s okay baby. Mommy’s here.”

“Ugh!” Zelena came from the bathroom with her hand across her middle, “there’s something wrong with the toothpaste here.” She walked across the room and pulled out a stool at the kitchen counter to sit on, “The brat’s snooping. As per his usual.”

Henry had been standing in the doorway gaping at his Mother. It had been so long since he’d seen her. But hearing this woman – who he now knew was supposed to be his Aunt – refer to him as the brat who snoops caught him off guard. His cheeks turned bright red as he began to shuffle from foot to foot. He straightened out his clothes nervously as he waited for his Mother to acknowledge him.

Regina’s body stiffened but Emma turned to glare at Zelena, “don’t you dare talk to my son that way!”

Zelena scoffed and flicked her wrist at her.

Regina used the distraction to lean in and swoop her baby away from Emma before she could put up a protest. She cradled Blue to her chest as she dropped kisses on her temple, “Mummy’s so sorry my love. I won’t ever do that again. I promise.”

Emma frowned at her now empty arms before she reluctantly dropped them. She was still confused as to how and why a baby poofed herself to another country. I mean – she knew she had magic herself and all. But it was still just this weird tingle that ran underneath her skin. For the most part she ignored it.

But to know that her magic had mixed with Regina’s and created this beautiful little being. Who in turn had her own magic was still overwhelming for her.

She turned to Henry and smiled, “come and meet your baby sister.” Regina fixed her with a glare that she ignored. She held her arm out and beckoned Henry closer as Regina took the opportunity to settle down onto the sofa with Blue.

Henry licked his lips nervously before slowly making his way over to his Mother. His gaze alternated between her and at the baby lying nestled in her arms that she was whispering softly to in
Spanish. He wasn’t sure what else to do so he stared down at the little squirming body as he continued to wait for his Mother’s attention to shift from her to him.

Emma stood just over his shoulder gazing down lovingly at her baby. It had only been a couple of days but she had still missed her baby more than words could ever say. She moved around him to sit beside Regina on the sofa, “she’s beautiful isn’t she?” she asked as she ran a finger lovingly across Blue’s unruly head of thick blonde tufted hair.

Regina pulled down the strap of the silk pajama set that she had gone to bed in and pulled out her breast. She began to nurse her baby while continuing to apologize and coo softly down at her in Spanish.

Henry’s cheeks reddened as he fidgeted nervously. He had of course seen his Mom naked before. And she’d explained that the human body is beautiful and not meant to be ashamed of. Still – it was his Mom. Seeing her breastfeed would never not be weird.

As Blue latched on – which she took as a sign of her forgiveness – the adrenaline that had been thrumming through her body after hearing that her daughter had disappeared began to wear off. She was now left with a weariness that seeped right down to her bones.

Before entering the Nether, she had already had a long day. Blue’s every 3 hour feedings were definitely wearing on her. She spent what time she could in between Blue’s naps and feedings to do some work from home. She had forgotten how hard it had been being a single Mom to an infant all those years ago. Now that the immediate worry over her daughter was gone, holding her almost 3.5 kg daughter in her arms was all she could manage as her head fell with a small thump to the back of the sofa and her eyes fell shut as she tried to conserve what energy she had left for her trip back home. Between caring for Blue, work, and the magic she’d used to get to the Nether and then to Storybrooke she was nearly wiped out.

“We need to go,” she announced tiredly before switching Blue to the other side.

“No!” Emma cried out. She had already gone 3 days without her babygirl. Though she knew it was inevitable - right now was way too soon. “I haven’t seen her for days Regina,” she accused. “And Henry’s only just met her.”

Regina cracked an eye open and swiveled her neck to stare at her but didn’t bother trying to lift her head, “Emma I’m exhausted. And I’m sure my sister is too.”

Emma began to open her mouth to protest but then she took in the state of the woman before her. Though always beautiful no matter what the circumstance, Regina really did look like she was about to pass out. Her eyes were bloodshot. Her voice was scratchy and thick from impending sleep. Still - it was too soon. They’d only just got there.

She jumped up quickly and made her way to her room, “The two of you can sleep in my bed. That way I can go and get the princess some things while you take a nap.” She entered her room and began to pick up as best she could before she turned to the bed and started to make it up.

As a foster, making the bed had been of utmost importance. What family wanted a messy kid? But as an adult she’d gotten in the habit of just blowing it off. She was going to do nothing but jump back into it at some point anyway.

Henry frowned as he listened to the conversation. It had been so long since he’d seen his Mother. And she still hadn’t even said hello to him, “I thought we were going to have visitation now.”
Startled, Regina’s eyes flew open, “What?!?” From across the room she heard Zelena snort.

“Visitation,” Henry repeated as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. “Emma has visitation with the baby. And you and I can have visitation together.”

“So - ,” Emma strode out of the room slightly breathless from running around and picking it up. “I can take the little princess with me and you can get some much needed rest,” she grinned and gave herself a mental pat on the back as she congratulated her genius completely unaware of the conversation she had just interrupted.

Regina’s sleep muddled mind was moving into zombie territory. She understood what Emma and Henry were saying to her but for the life of her she couldn’t fit all the pieces together properly.

“What?”

As Blue detached, Emma swooped in and grabbed her quickly from Regina. She ignored Regina’s glowering as she grabbed some kleenex to clean her nipple and readjusted her sleep top.

She went into the kitchen and grabbed a kitchen towel and began to burp her baby, “I said – you and your sister can have my bed while I take Blue with me shopping. I think it’s a good idea for her to have her own things here anyway.”

“I’m not letting you take my baby anywhere,” Regina started to try and sit up but her body refused to cooperate with her. Instead the weak plea and no follow through fell on deaf ears.

Emma chuckled at the sound of her baby’s belch as she wiped at her milk mustache. It never stopped surprising her that a noise so big could come from something so tiny. She again walked into her room only to return a moment later with her blanket. She fanned out the blanket on the empty space beside Regina then began to swaddle her little princess just as she’d learned to do in the hospital.

Regina dug deep and managed to force herself upright, “I am NOT allowing you to take my baby anywhere! I wouldn’t trust you any farther than I could throw you with her.”

Emma startled at the tone of her voice then bristled at her words. She opened her mouth as she looked up from Blue into fierce brown eyes and a fire lit in her belly before her eyes registered Blue’s arms waving around seemingly erratically. She slipped her index finger into Blue’s palm to try and calm her. As her Swan princess’ hand closed tightly around her finger, the comeback she had been about to fling at Regina died on her tongue.

She stared down at her baby entranced as a calm flooded her system. Her breath caught in her throat as her confusion over the situation grew. She knew she should be angry but instead all she felt was an overwhelming tranquility.

Regina watched a slew of emotions flitter across Emma’s face before one of her weird yet endearing lopsided grins took over.

“I just need to spend time with her,” she pleaded softly. “It’s been three days already. You don’t understand how it kills me not to have her,” her words broke near the end as the words got stuck in her choked up throat but she still managed to get them out. She looked up at Regina with eyes filled with pure anguish over the situation they were in. “Please. I’m her Mom too. And she needs me.”

Regina’s eyes dropped down and locked onto the matching set of her daughter’s. She reached out and grabbed ahold of Blue’s free hand. She didn’t want to stay in this place for a minute longer than absolutely necessary. But Emma did have a point. After Emma took Henry from her, a minute
without him had felt like an eternity in hell. She held no ill feelings against Emma and honestly wasn’t trying to hold Blue over her head. But on this night, her body really had no more to give. She was no superwoman. And she really did need rest.

But the longer she stared into her daughter’s eyes that were so much like her own, the more she felt something inside her began to melt, “I get that. But it’s late. My sister and I have already had a full day,” she tried to reason with her.

Zelena stared in horror at the scene before her. To say she was disgruntled would be saying the least. She had her own reasons for disliking the un-Charming clan. The least of which involved having to nurse her Mother back from the brink of death when Snow White used her own daughter to kill her. She felt uneasy watching the obvious tension displayed between the two, “If it’ll stop your whining I can keep an eye on her while you rest.”

Two heads swiveled her way in complete shock. Emma was caught off guard yet grateful at the offer since the woman had done nothing since they’d met but go out of her way to make sure she knew she wasn’t liked or wanted. Though she took umbrage at the assertion that she wasn’t allowed to be with her baby unsupervised; seeing that Regina was mulling over the idea made it palatable to her.

“Are you sure?” Regina didn’t want to put her sister out of the way anymore than she already had. It seemed she was always asking something from her and that was a position that she had never been comfortable with. But the promise of even a couple of hours of rest to recharge before trying to get back home sounded like heaven to her.

Zelena rolled her eyes, “I wouldn’t have interrupted your little love fest if I wasn’t. I don’t fancy the thought of becoming mincemeat because you didn’t have enough naptime when I have a baby on the way. Since I’m not tired and this,” she patted her small belly bump, “little one obviously isn’t either I think a walk would be just the thing to settle us both before we go to bed.” She rose and looked down at herself pointedly. She was still wearing nothing except the nightgown she’d gone to bed in, “Obviously I’ll need clothes. And your phone.”

Emma lifted her hip and retrieved her phone from her back pocket happily. She picked up her baby and held out a hand to help Regina to her feet. Reluctantly Regina accepted before following Emma back into her bedroom.

Henry looked over at the redhead who was still sitting on one of the stools that lined the kitchen bar not knowing what to do. He watched as she dialed a number then held the phone up to her ear as she waited for the call to connect.

She stared back at him with annoyance written across her face, “do you ever do anything except snoop?”

Henry took a small step back still confused as to why the woman was so hostile to him. As far as he knew – he’d never done anything to her. He’d only just ‘met’ her – if it could be called that – the night she forced him into his grandparent’s apartment. He turned on his socked heels and followed his Moms into Emma’s bedroom. He stood in the doorway watching the scene unfold before him.

Emma was in her closet moving around. Regina was on the bed with her knees raised and Blue balanced on her thighs, “I love you so much mi princesa. And I’m so sorry I worried you. I’m sorry if you were scared but I would never let anything hurt you. And even if I’m not around – I will still never leave you,” she bent down and nuzzled her baby’s nose before planting butterfly kisses on her cheeks and a full one on her lips.
Henry’s eyes began to sting with unshed tears and his chest constricted as he watched the love that his Mom had once heaped on him be given to another. He started wringing his hands as he blinked rapidly to hold back his grief.

“Okay,” Emma said as she carried some clothes thrown over one arm and a pair of boots in her hand. “We’re going to head out now.” She stopped next to the bed and waited for Regina to give Blue one last goodbye kiss and hug before settling her back into Emma’s arms.

As Emma turned off the main light in the room, leaving the bedside table lamp lit, she noticed him in the doorway. “Oh, hey kid. You want to go out with us and get your little sister some things?” she held up her harm that cradled her daughter slightly with a grin as she stared down at her.

Henry dropped his head before shaking it, “No. I’m going to stay with Mom.”

Emma looked behind her at the now practically hidden lump beneath the covers. From what she could tell – Regina had pretty much gone out as soon as her head hit the pillow. She really had looked pale and exhausted and obviously needed a few hours of uninterrupted sleep. She frowned at her son, “I think she’s out of it kid. Go get your shoes on and let’s go. We’ll stop by Granny’s and pick something up for dinner too,” she said as she remembered neither of them had eaten yet.

‘I’m not hungry,” Henry insisted. “I’m just going to stay here,” he looked past her to where his Mom was bundled underneath the blankets.

Emma didn’t want to argue with him and she knew trying to force him to do anything was always a losing battle. Henry had managed to somehow inherit Regina’s stubbornness. “Fine kid,” she walked past him into the living room. “I’ll bring us something back for dinner. Make sure you don’t wake her up. She really does need to rest.”

Henry nodded before entering the room and sitting down on the edge of the bed. He folded his hands between his knees and sat staring at the way the part of the blanket that was half covering his Moms face rose and fell with her deep and even breaths.

Emma wasn’t happy about leaving him there. This could be disastrous since Regina had made it clear that Henry was no longer a priority of hers. And in that regard leaving her to find Henry when she woke up could backfire in their faces. But if anyone could break down walls she’d built up to keep them out – Henry was definitely the right guy for the job. “Don’t forget to call or text me if something comes up. Bye kid,” she called softly before shutting the door behind her.

She strode over to the redhead and held out the clothes she’d brought with her, “I went with stretch pants instead of jeans since I like mine tight.” She gave her a cheeky grin, “Helps show off my best assets.”

Zelena rolled her eyes as she exchanged Emma’s phone for her clothes. She pulled off her nightgown and began to get dressed. “Let’s go,” she said once the deed was done.

MF

Henry couldn’t take his eyes off his Mom’s sleeping form. She was actually here.

He was saddened and confused. She’d barely acknowledged his presence. He’d waited so long to see her and yet she didn’t seem too thrilled about seeing him.

His heart had been breaking a thousand times over since the night he left the hospital with Emma and gone to his Grandparents loft knowing that he was leaving the only home he’d ever known forever. He’d only wanted to bring back happy endings. And thought that if he followed the storybook
exactly that everyone would end up happy. But that wasn’t how life had unfolded. Not for him and from the looks of it – not for Emma either.

He wasn’t happy. All he wanted was for things to go back to the way they were before his storybook ruined everything. In that moment, he wasn’t even sure if he wanted Emma in his life or not. But if it meant he and his Mom could be happy again – that’s a price he’d be willing to pay.

Tears began to run down his eyes as he processed through the changes in his life. No Mom. No home. Emma was miserable. His grandparents were only concerned with themselves. And his Dad spent almost every minute they were together counting down the minutes until he could go back to his precious life in New York.

His small frame shook as his tears continued to run down his face, “Mom,” he croaked as he stared at the woman he’d lost. Her hair was longer. Longer than he’d ever seen it before. And she seemed lighter – happier than he could ever remember seeing her before. That just made him want to curl up and die. She was fine without him. Happy even. And it was all his fault.

He knew he shouldn’t but he just couldn’t help himself. He began to scoot his way up to the top of the bed. He carefully pressed his body as close to his Mother’s as he could desperately seeking that familiar comfort that had always just been a part of who she was.

He breathed in deep that familiar scent that was all hers. It hadn’t changed at all. It brought with it the memories of home, holidays, laughs, comfort, and love. It was just Mom. His Mom. The same as it had always been. Until his storybook that is.

He bit his lip to choke back his sobs as he continued to cry. Somewhere in the midst of crying he thankfully managed to fall asleep.
CHAPTER 27

Zelena zipped up the ends of the borrowed jacket she wore and shivered, “why the hell is it always cold here?”

Emma shrugged as she tuck ed the ends of Blue’s blanket tighter around her. Blue stretched then yawned as her eyes blinked heavily. Emma dropped a kiss upon her head as she grinned down at her, “it’s New England.” She pursed her lips before turning to the redhead, “you’re from old England. How is it that you don’t like cold?”

“This cold is different,” she muttered as the two fell into lockstep. Their heels click clacked against the pavement as they hurried along toward the diner.

Zelena hated this town. And everyone and everything in it. It had been a miserable place during her stay here. The only good to come out of this hellhole was her family.

She loved England. The sights, the sounds, the culture, the history. No matter what time of day or night there was always something to do. And it was so easy to get anywhere else in the world from there. They were connected to so many different countries and it made one proud to say they were European.

It was funny because when she’d first come to this world she’d originally settled in America. She’d been drawn to England after being asked if that’s where she was from because of her accent. After having to make up excuses that no one ever seemed to really buy about her being an American due to her accent slipping, she’d finally packed up and moved there.

She’d only ever ventured this far away from home for her family. And as far as she was concerned she could die happily that way.

“That brat knows not to wake up my sister doesn’t he? She looked like she was dead on her feet. She needs some uninterrupted rest.”

Emma glowered at the woman, “don’t talk about him that way! He’s Regina’s son too you know. Which makes him your nephew. You might want to think about that before you call him names again.”

Zelena scoffed then snorted out a laugh, “she wants him even less than the rest of us do. He’s a horrible ungrateful child. His messed up genes definitely came from you,” she flicked her wrist at her.

Emma’s cheeks burned red as she held her baby closer, “Your sister was the evil queen! He’s just a little boy. What makes her better than him?”

Zelena stopped walking and squared off against her, “She was his Mum who took damned good care of him! She gave him everything and he spit in her face for it. There are plenty of children who would’ve given anything in the world to have a Mum half as good as he did. I would’ve given anything in the world to have a Mum who loved me like that. Instead he actually did everything in his power to bring her pain. There is something seriously messed up in that boy. But you will not blame my sister for it. The evil inside him is all Charming. If I cared, I’d say get him some damned therapy.”
Emma didn’t really have a comeback for that one. She turned away from her and resumed walking. “You don’t know as much as you think you do,” she muttered.

They crossed the street and headed for Granny’s front door, “Oh but my dear. I do,” Zelena said as she held the door open for Emma.

Emma shook her head as she pulled her baby closer to her. She walked briskly past her and into the fragrant warm air that blasted her in the face at Granny’s.

The entire diner quieted as she stepped inside. But for the first time since coming to this town, instead of hiding from all the stares and whispers Emma grinned proudly in the face of it all. Blue was hidden inside her blanket. But all eyes in the diner were firmly trained there as everyone waited with bated breath to see what was clearly the newest Little Charming.

“Emma!” Ruby gasped as she rounded the counter and walked toward the trio. She was closely followed by Granny. “Is this - ?” she let the question hang as she gestured toward the squirming blanket.

Emma’s toothy grin became impossibly wide as she nodded and pulled back the blanket to reveal her lil princess inside. A collective breath was heard to be inhaled as the baby was revealed. Blue looked around her with wide blinking eyes before giving another big yawn that this time drew a chorus of aaah’s.

Granny stepped forward and began to lift her from Emma’s arms, “Well there’s no denying that hair. Or those big beautiful brown eyes,” she planted a kiss on Blue’s cheek before settling her back into the crook of her arm.

“Look at this hair,” Ruby chuckled as she ran her fingers along Blue’s wayward tufts.

“Regina’s tried using oils, creams, and everything on it. Doesn’t help at all,” Emma joined in the laughter as she bent over to give her daughter another kiss. She had already known that being a royal wasn’t for her. She wasn’t meant for this spectacle that her parents seemed to bask in. But the pride she felt showing her daughter off to the world (or the diner full of patrons of the tiny magical town no one knew anything about in the real world) nearly had her bursting at the seams.

“And who’s this?” Granny peered at Zelena over the rim of her glasses with large piercing eyes.

Emma scowled as she flicked her wrist through the air, “that’s Regina’s sister.”

Though Zelena had spent many months in the town just before reuniting with her family, she had managed to keep to herself. She’d stayed in an abandoned farmhouse on the outskirts of town. She had become acquainted with the town’s inhabitants over that time. They had all been so consumed with themselves that she had been able to slip in and out of their daily lives without leaving a trace. “You may call me Zelena,” instead of holding out her hand to shake she merely nodded her head in Ruby and Granny’s general direction.

Ruby turned back to Emma after giving her a polite smile. She lowered her voice conspiratorially, “does that mean Regina’s here?”

Emma heaved a sigh, “yeah. She’s back at the apartment taking a nap with Henry. She won’t even let me take my baby out alone,” she shook her head as her lips curled down at the edges. “I just came here for - …. Oh – just the person I was looking for,” she nodded her head toward a table in the middle. “I’ll be right back,” she headed over to the table and starting to chat up a blonde woman.

Ruby tilted her head as she studied Regina, “I don’t see the resemblance. But I can definitely smell
her on you. She’s a part of your pack,” she grinned at the redhead as if she’d said something moderately intelligent.

Zelena huffed and rolled her eyes at the wolf. She knew Ruby was the town gossip. Not that she cared – but she was glad that this pit stop in this town would soon be over.

Thankfully Emma rejoined the group. She held her arms out for her baby. With only a little more fuss over her, Granny handed her back to her Mama, “Ashley’s agreed to allow us into the shop to grab some things for this little one. But we do have to hurry.”

Ashley and her family met the group at the door. She held up the key to the baby and children’s shop that was aptly named Oh Baby! “Sean’s going to take Alex home and put her to bed. So if you’re ready - ?”

Emma waved as they walked out the door, “we’ll be back in just a few minutes.”

“I really appreciate this Ash,” Emma told her as they walked past the closed shops on Main Street. In this town, things rolled up early as a rule. The people here were more ‘early to rise early to bed’ types. They still seemed to be on Enchanted Forest times despite having been here for decades already.

“No problem Emma. I literally owe you my happiness,” she tossed over her shoulder as she began to unlock the door.

Emma blushed and ducked her head as they walked into the store. When Ashley switched the lights on, her face lit up as if she was a kid staring at a pile of presents waiting for her under the Christmas tree on Christmas morning.

“I’m not going to open the cash register. I’ll just record what you buy and we can settle up later. Sound good?” Ashley offered as she grabbed the iPad that sat beside the cash register and began to boot it up.

Emma nodded numbly but kept her eyes trained on the sight before her. It was like paradise for babies and kids in there.

After giving up Henry, she’d vowed that the next time she had a baby it would be the right way. With a ring on her finger and a partner by her side. When she and Regina had begun to get serious she had occasionally talked to her about more kids but she had thought they’d have to use a sperm donor or adoption to build their family. Never did she think she’d have another baby under these circumstances.

It wounded her to the core that she couldn’t be a constant part of her baby’s life. Blue wasn’t even a month old yet and still there was already so much she had missed. And if things continued on there would be a lot more. But this – this she could do for her.

Her eyes lighted on a lavender colored pram and she instantly grabbed it. She grabbed a premade basket that from what she could see was at least a baby starter kit that would get them on the way. She grabbed a pack of preemie sized diapers, socks, blankets, onesies, teething rings and anything else she could think that a baby would want or need off the top of her head.

Ashley followed behind silently keeping an itemized receipt of her purchases. Zelena stood huffing impatiently near the door and waited for this hell to be over.

Emma had managed to fill up the pram and scrambled around looking for a way to juggle all of her items. Ashley led her over to the baby carrier aisle and helped her to pick out a strap on and a few
Moby wraps. After Blue was fitted snugly across her chest, she grabbed a stroller and continued her shopping extravaganza.

She pushed the stroller with one hand while pulling the pram with the other and was filling yet another basket that she carried in the crook of her elbow before Zelena finally cracked.

“This was just to pick up the essentials. You can come back tomorrow for the rest of this crap,” she had her arms crossed across her chest while tapping her foot impatiently.

Emma reddened and looked sheepishly at Ashley, “sorry. I guess I got carried away.”

“No problem Emma. I owe you my life. Literally,” she waved her apology away.

The two chatted about Motherhood as Ashley closed up the shop. She invited Emma to the Mommy and Me club that she had recently put together for the new Moms in town. Unsure of how the future was going to work out with Regina insisting on leaving the custody issue hanging in the wind between them, Emma bit her lip nervously as she came up with a random excuse to try and blow off the invite. She didn’t want to commit to something that would only make this process harder on her than it already was.

Emma bounced Blue in her carrier as she tried to figure out how she was going to maneuver between the baby, the pram and the stroller. Zelena reluctantly grabbed the pram and began to push it back up the street as the two blondes said their goodnights to one another.

Emma was flying high as she pushed her daughter in her new stroller. Tonight had been a good night for her. She had felt as if she was doing right by her Swan Princess. Nothing could kill the buzz she had going on right now.

Then – just to prove that the universe was out to get her - it happened.

They were almost back to the diner before they were stopped.

“What’s going on here?” Snow looked down at the stroller and the pram that was filled to the brim with baby things then pointedly at Emma’s chest where she had draped a blanket over Blue to help keep her warm. David stood next to her looking perplexed. His hair was standing on end and he was completely disheveled which she assumed was from her Mother dragging him out of their apartment before he’d even had a chance to get himself together.

“Bloody hell,” Zelena muttered. She turned to glare at Emma who was standing there like a slack jawed fool, “this is all your fault.”
“Mary Marg - ,” she started. At the rise of Snow’s eyebrow and pointed look she amended, “Snow. What are you two doing here?”

Snow scoffed, “Ruby called me.” The disappointment that Emma herself hadn’t thought to inform her of what was going on was clearly evident in the lift of Snow’s chin as she gave her daughter a slight glare.

Emma closed her eyes momentarily and shook her head as a small groan escaped her lips. She should’ve known. She tossed her head back and stared up at the sky as she first inhaled then loudly exhaled a huge breath.

Snow ignored her theatrics and instead focused on her granddaughter, “well?”

Emma decided to play dumb as she wrapped a protective arm around her daughter, “Well?”

“I want to see my granddaughter!” Snow shrieked.

Emma shook her head before resuming walking. “I need to get her inside. It’s cold out here. And I’m not having an argument with you in the middle of the street,” she continued on to Granny’s with her parents following closely on her heels.

When they entered Granny’s this time, Emma’s eyes narrowed at the size of the crowd. From her naked eye it seemed as if the crowd had actually grown. She knew that the town tended to reconvene there after Town Hall meetings anyway. But the meeting had been over for hours now and there had been way less people here just half an hour ago. Now all eyes were on the small family as they made their way over to empty seats.

“Excuse me,” she pushed through the crowd to the back booth. It was the one that Regina had always sat in and for some reason the townsfolk still tended to leave it empty. Zelena slid into the seat across from her making a big point to sit on the very end so that no one else could sit beside her.

Snow looked curiously between the two women before sliding in beside her daughter, “let me see her.” David pulled a chair from the next table over and sat at the end of the booth.

Emma sighed but knew it was best to just rip off the band aid rather than let the misery linger on. She drew the blanket back from off of the top of Blue’s head revealing the little bundle that was sleeping peacefully across her chest.

“Oh, Emma!” Snow gasped. With trembling hands, she reached out and ran a finger across the top of Blue’s head. Emma couldn’t stop the grin that spread across her face everytime she looked at her babygirl. “She’s beautiful,” Snow gushed.

David nodded in agreement, “she is.”

“I made this for sleeping beauty there,” Granny came over with a teeny knit cap. It was white with a ribbon that ran around the rim. She’d obviously used the leftover scraps from Blue’s baby blanket. It was a perfect match.

“Thank you,” Emma gushed as she took in the detail. It amazed her that the woman had thrown this
together in such a short amount of time just for her. “Blue thanks you too,” she said as she lightly tugged the cap over her daughter’s wayward hair careful not to wake her.

Granny flicked her wrist at her, “it’s nothing. She’s so tiny it barely took me 15 minutes to put together. I’m just glad that it fits,” she beamed with pride at the baby. She took in the stack of packages between the pram and the stroller, “and that you got the little princess squared away.”

A blush crept up Emma’s neck, “yeah. I may have gotten a little carried away there. But she’s worth it,” she whispered as she stared down at her daughter.

Emma frowned but didn’t want to put up a fight as Snow reached over and began to work the baby out of her carrier. Blue frowned then gave a small cry in her sleep. She sat back fuming as Snow managed to get her out of her carrier and pulled her into her chest, “she was comfortable Snow,” she complained.

“She’s my granddaughter,” Snow fired back at her. “And thanks to that witch this is the first time we’ve seen her. Now that she’s here this is exactly where she’s staying.”

Emma watched green magic crackle at the tips of Zelena’s fingertips. The woman was clenching her jaw and at this moment, if looks could kill, Snow would be 6 feet under. She drew in a breath hoping that she could control the situation before something major happened. She snapped her head over to Granny, “can we order so that we can get out of here?”

Granny waved Ruby over who quickly finished with her customer. “What can I get for you all?”

“I’ll have 2 cheeseburgers with 2 large fries and 2 strawberry lemonades. And Regina usually has a salad. Is that okay with you?” she turned the question toward Zelena who was still having a visibly hard time with the situation.

“Make that 2 turkey sandwiches with cheese and extra mustard. And 2 strawberry lemonades sounds fine,” Ruby nodded but before she could move on Zelena added, “and 2 order of fries and onion rings.”

Ruby smiled and made a quick glance down to the barely visible baby bump but kept her professional demeanor intact. She turned to Snow and David, “and you two?”

“We’ve had dinner already,” Snow informed her as she bounced her new grandbaby on her knee.

“A few pieces of your strawberry cheesecake would be nice though,” David threw in as he slipped his finger into his granddaughter’s palm. The baby scrunches her body up while smacking her lips but thankfully continued to sleep.

“To go please. And if you could put a rush on it I’d be forever grateful,” Emma yelled after Granny and Ruby who had departed to take care of the order.

“And who is this?” Snow asked while pointedly looking over Blue’s head at Zelena. She was certain she knew everyone in the town by now but for the life of her she couldn’t place this one’s face.

“Zelena. She’s Regina’s sister,” Emma answered while fidgeting around uncomfortably.

Since coming back home, Emma hadn’t really had the chance to get into the whole Cora is alive and Kathryn skipped town to be with Regina’s family thing. She had mostly been concentrating on getting herself straightened out so that she could focus on her kids. Now she was just silently praying that they could make it out of the diner without her taking out everyone inside.
“Since when does Regina have a sister?” Snow was confused as to what all was going on. But she knew there was nothing about this situation that she liked right now. She and Emma really needed to have a long talk about everything.

Zelena put her elbows on the table and propped her head up on her hands while giving Snow the kind of look a predator gives to its prey minutes before closing in, “since I’m the oldest I guess that would mean her entire life.”

“She was my stepmother before she decided to turn into a homicidal maniac. Why is this the first time I’ve ever heard of this?”

Green flashed in the depths of Zelena’s eyes and the tips of her fingers before she curled them into claws. She gave a sneer before leaning across the table, “Maybe if you weren’t so busy conniving to send my sister to murder our Mother while pretending to be the victim in the situation you would’ve taken notice of someone and something other than yourself. And if that sputtering oaf you call a daughter hadn’t been busy kidnapping her child then she would be able to get her head out of her arse and focus on something and someone other than her own pure selfish greed.”

Emma looked horror stricken as her head swung back and forth, “I never - !”

“Don’t even think of lying,” Zelena hissed through her teeth. She pointed to where Archie sat just a few feet away from them at a table he shared with Marco. “The insect might be disgusting. But he doesn’t lie.”

The diner gasped as their eyes followed her finger. Archie’s face flamed the same shade of red as his hair as he became clearly flustered. “I – it was – um - ,” he sputtered as he reached up with one finger to push his glasses further up his nose.

“Bombastic simpleton,” the redhead scoffed as she shook her head at the buffoon.

“Henry wanted to be with me,” Emma tried to justify as everyone’s eyes in the diner turned to settle back on their table. “And Regina poisoned him. He almost died.”

Zelena turned her heated gaze back toward Emma before spitting out between clenched teeth, “That was merely a sleeping curse. And she broke her own curse in order to help get bring that miserable weasel back. And you knew damned well that was about you and not him. Still she allowed you to dictate to her what happened to a child you have no business with. Which is a lot better than you deserved from any Mother whose child you’ve decided you had some right to even when you know you’re wrong. The only regret is that it failed.”

Now she folded her arms on the tabletop and leaned over them toward Emma. She narrowed her eyes at her with suspicion written clear across her face, “and how exactly did that happen anyway? It was specifically set up for you. So how did that horrid child come across it?”

Now it was Emma’s turn for her face to become beet red as she stumbled around for something to say. She really had no answer to that. Henry had told her it was poisoned. But instead of just tossing it in the bin or even stepping on it he took a huge chunk out of it. Watching her son fall had spurred her into action which eventually led to the breaking of the curse. But she herself didn’t understand why he would go to such lengths just to prove himself right.

Then again he did hate being contradicted more than anything. He became almost hostile when someone or something didn’t make sense to him. It was one aspect of his personality she honestly didn’t care for. Not that she’d ever admit that to anyone.
She sat for a moment breathless as if the air had been knocked out of her because she hated to think of there being something wrong with Henry at his age. Yes she’d been stubborn and should probably have listened to him more. But did he really have to go to those lengths to pit her against his Mom? The waves of hostility coming off of the redhead were practically tangible. She knew without asking that she'd have nothing but more ammunition to use against him if she ever acknowledged such a thing.

She glanced nervously around the crowded diner where all eyes seemed to be centered on them. Her eyes bulged as she took in the curious faces around her and realized that this could only end badly, “Umm – why don’t we just get our food and take this up back at home? I don’t think this diner is the right place for this private conversation. And – oh thank God. Ruby you’re a lifesaver!” she rushed out as she began to shove her way past her Mother.

Snow scoffed but thankfully got out of the way allowing her to jump out of the booth and grab the take out bags from Ruby. She handed them and the drinks to her Father before grabbing the pram and making her way to the counter to pay for their order.

Snow and Zelena exchanged loaded glares before following her. Emma quickly paid and left a generous tip for Ruby before turning back toward Snow and wrangling her daughter out of her arms. She put her back into her carrier and made sure that Blue was wrapped tightly in her blanket before making her way out the diner. Zelena strolled behind her leaving David to grab the stroller and follow them and his wife out the door.

She quickly led the small group back out. She practically sprinted back to the apartment making it in record time. She exchanged the food and drinks that David carried with the pram and left it up to him figure out how to get them upstairs.

After making her way upstairs and unlocking the door she made straight for the dining room table. She placed their meal down on the table and took a moment to relax. Her heart was beating in her chest triple time as she heaved a deep breath glad that she was finally back home and away from prying eyes.

There had been a lot of accusations thrown around tonight. Having her family business publicly aired was never something that she was okay with.

Despite Zelena’s allegations otherwise she knew had done the right thing by taking Henry to live with her. Henry had been over the moon about being able to be a part of the good guys. He’d even started calling her Mom.

So she had been right. It was best for Henry to be with her. Everyone said so. No one tried stopping her. And Regina really didn’t put up much of a fight either. Henry wanted her and she wanted him. It was as simple as that. Then why did she feel so heavy?

“Where is Henry?” Snow asked as she strolled in behind Zelena as David hefted the stroller into the place. He turned and walked back out after leaving it in the middle of the living room presumably to go back for the pram.

Instead of answering, Emma turned to her bedroom door. She quietly cracked it open and peeked her head inside. Her breath caught in her throat at what she saw. Henry had Regina in a pretty tight vice grip around her neck and a leg thrown over body. She remembered Regina to be a light sleeper and knew she must’ve been really exhausted if she hadn’t woken up from that.

Then a tendril of green magic snuck out. Instead of being cuddled against his Mom, Henry was thrown back to the opposite side of the bed. He ground his teeth but as a heavy sleeper he barely
noticed the disturbance. Emma however turned to glare at the woman behind her.

Zelena just gave her a haughty smirk before sticking her nose in the air and making her way to the food containers. Emma threw one more saddened glance back into the room as she protectively placed a hand around Blue’s head and began to bounce walk her over to the table.

Zelena washed her hands then began to pull out and sort the food while David brought up the pram and used his foot to kick the door shut. Snow sat frowning as Emma outright ignored her Mother in lieu of a seat at the table. She was one who could always eat – and right now she was starving.

“I’ll take her,” Snow reached across and again without asking started to wrestle Blue from her carrier. Blue began to squawk a protest making it clear she wasn’t okay with the arrangement.

“You could’ve just waited for me to let her out Snow,” Emma grumbled as she watched Snow trying to console her daughter. Blue eventually quieted down and instead stared up at her parents as if they were aliens from another planet.

As they ate each of them retreated into their own thoughts. Snow and David sat cooing over their grandbaby. Zelena glared her hatred at them as she ignored her sandwich and instead plowed through both of the fries and one of the crates of onion rings. Emma was lost in her own thoughts as she too ignored her sandwich and went straight for the ketchup drenched fries.

She was miserable. And she had been for some time. Though living through misery had been a constant theme in her younger years, she’d finally reached adulthood. And sworn that would never be the case again.

After getting out of prison, she’d sworn to live life by her own terms. And she had. She had her own little slice of life and it had suited her just fine. But she had been lonely. And still so unhappy. That was … until Henry.

She had thought she’d found her forever with him and Regina. When they were together everything was perfect. But then they’d have to crawl out of their love cocoon and go back to the real world.

That’s when Henry would remember. He hated his Mother. And he and Emma were really heroes that belonged with the good guys. He’d start pressuring Emma to be who he had decided she was meant to be. And she had been torn in between wanting to keep her son close to her and loving a woman who had difficulty showing and proving that their love was on equal ground.

Emma had hated being caught in the middle of the two of them. She loved Regina but she also loved her son. She tried her best to straddle both relationships. Trying to make Regina understand she wasn’t trying to take Henry away from her while trying to make Henry see that there was more to his Mom and his life than stories inside of a big pretty picture book.

Then the crack. Because something always has to give. Henry fell to Regina’s sleeping curse. And then his heart had stopped. She woke Henry up with true love’s kiss. And she’d gained parents she never even knew existed before. But she lost everything else she loved in her life. Because the universe was out to get her.

She was forced to embrace her new reality. The one that included them living in a magical town full of fairy tale folk, her parents being younger than her, a son who only saw her and his grandparents as perfect and his Mother as pure evil, and the woman she’d fallen in love with leaving her behind forever.

But in all honesty now, she knew she hated this town. And the way that everyone here already had
her and her life defined for her. She was their Savior. Her parents were their rightful king and Queen. And the townsfolk were their loyal subjects. Just the thought of it all was sickening.

She knew what she wanted. And that was for her kids to be happy. But Henry was just as sullen, defiant, and angry as he’d been since she’d met him. Except now it was directed at her since Regina wasn’t there to deal with it. And Blue was living halfway around the world from her. This – just wasn’t working for her at all.

She knew what she needed to do. Now she just needed to find the courage inside of her to get it done.

She turned toward Zelena, “do you mind if we have some time alone?”

Green magic zapped out and the next thing everyone knew Blue went from Snow’s arms to lying nestled in her Aunt’s. Blue gave a small smile as she stretched her body out fully before sighing in contentment and relaxing again. She blinked up drowsily at her Aunt who grinned down at her baby niece before lightly kissing her cheek, “Not at all. You may leave now.”

Emma saw the protest written across her Mother’s face before she even opened her mouth and she hurried to divert her attention. “I think we should talk in your place,” she fumbled with the keychain she’d pulled from her pocket until she found the key to her parent’s apartment. Without bothering to wait for them she left her place and unlocked their door before strolling into their living room and waiting on the two of them to catch up.

“Emma!” Snow’s voice had taken on a sharpness that let Emma know she was close to losing it. “We cannot let them just take our baby. She belongs with us. We’re her real family.”

Emma didn’t even bother putting any of her energy toward that crap at all. Instead she momentarily closed her eyes and inhaled a deep breath. “We’re leaving,” she announced quietly.

Snow and David’s eyes widened almost comically, “WHAT?!?” they screamed together. David stepped beside his wife and dropped his hands onto her shoulders as the two of them leaned into one another.

Emma walked around the sofa forcing her parents to move around with her. She swung back around until she was the one nearest the door and squared off against them. “Henry and I are leaving. I’m not going to have my daughter half the world away from me. I need to be able to see her and know that she’s alright. I need her with me. And that’s not going to happen here. Regina’s made it absolutely clear she has no intentions of staying here. That leaves only one solution. Henry and I are going to move to France.”

Of course Snow was the first to recover. She regarded her daughter suspiciously, “so that’s what this is all about then,” she nodded her head knowingly.

Emma forehead scrunched in confusion, “huh?”

Snow planted a fist on her hip, “Emma, look at you. Can you even hear yourself? That woman destroyed our entire lives. Now you want to live with her again? After she tried to kill your son!”

She huffed an exasperated breath. “I just don’t get you Emma. First you have this – this breakdown at a town meeting. And now this!”

Unshed tears stung the backs of Emma’s eyes as she faced the truth that they were and maybe would always be on opposite ends of the spectrum from one another. She pursed her lips and took a deep breath before answering, “I don’t expect you to understand.” She looked away from them as a lone
tEAR made its way down her cheek. She sniffled, “You gave me away to have your happy ending.” She ignored their gasps as she continued, “but I never agreed to that with my baby. I need her. She’s the only thing that makes me feel real right now. And I can’t – and won’t – be away from her for another minute.”

David strode forward. His face was a mask of incredulity, “Emma – we had no choice. We sacrificed our happiness so that one day we could all have a happy ending together.”

Snow stepped up beside him. The two of them clasped hands as they looked at their daughter in horror. Her chin jutted upward as she sniffled and stared her daughter down, “what we had was hope. Hope that despite everything we’d have to endure in the meantime, we’d one day all be together again. It’s hope that brought us through the darkness. And now here we all are!” she spread her arms out to encompass the room. “Together at last.”

Emma angrily swiped at the track the tear had left down her cheek while trying her best to keep the rest of them at bay. “No. You wanted your happy ending. And you didn’t think for a second about what that meant for me.”

She took a step back while looking around the apartment that was meant to be her first home with her parents, “I’m not happy here. I don’t think I ever have been,” she shook her head sadly. “The only time I feel any peace at all is when I’m holding my daughter.”

The tears she’d been holding back began to run free down her face as she allowed them to go unchecked, “I – I know everyone wants us to have this big happy family now. And maybe one day we can. But that day isn’t going to be today.” She backed up to the door and opened it. She looked back at them before walking out, “You wanted a Savior more than you wanted a daughter.” She held up a hand to stifle their protests. This wasn’t about them. This was something she needed to do for her. “And I want nothing more than to watch my daughter grow into the beautiful woman I know she’s going to become more than I want to pretend to be happy here when I’m not.”

“I’m sorry. But I can’t be what you want me to be.” Before anymore words were said, she turned and fled out the door.

RQ

Regina startled as she woke. There was an unfamiliar weight pressed against her and deep, heavy breathing in her ear that ended in a soft snore. The fog of sleep was instantly lifted as her heart began to speed.

She had been woken up like this various times back in the Enchanted Forest. Most nights she was able to enjoy the peace of her own bed. But there were some nights when Leopold was feeling extra needy. Instead of leaving after he was finished with her, he’d instead choose to spend the night in her bed. She’d spend the remainder of the night cramped under the weight of his body as she prayed for daylight to come and the soreness that ran through her to ease.

She lay for a moment confused as she tried to get her bearings. The weight pressed against her now was definitely lighter than Leopold’s bulk. She kept her eyes closed as she turned her head slowly so as not to startle the intruder. She slowly opened her eyes as she began to feel the tingle of her magic burning just beneath her fingertips instantly at the ready. It took her a couple of seconds more before her eyes were able to adjust to the low light in the room. But eventually she was able to make out the outline of her son’s features from the moonlight that streamed through the curtains.

It still took her another minute to process what was going on. Eventually she remembered where she was and why.
It had been a while since she’d seen her son face to face. She’d viewed the videos that he’d sent her once but had stopped it a few seconds in. She hadn’t wanted to be reminded of the past then – or now.

The last time she’d actually spoken to Henry at length was just before the Netherland incident. The curse had been broken for a few weeks and there were still people baying for her blood. But her magic had been returned to her and they knew it was in their best interests to keep their distance.

She had spotted Henry with Snow leaving the store and had run over to them. She’d bent over to hug her son only to have him forcibly push her back. Though she should’ve been used to it by now since he’d spent the past year being nothing but purely venomous to her, the pain it stirred inside her struck her to her very core.

She’d tried to talk to him but he’d only glared and shouted how much he hated her and how much he wanted her out of his life. She’d almost broken down as she watched Snow smirk at her before throwing her arm around his shoulders and leading her son away. She had known that in that moment she had lost him forever. And there was no turning back.

He was her son. That bond had been established not long after she’d brought him home from the adoption agency. She remembered being at her wits end with his nonstop crying. She had no idea why. His diaper was clean, he wasn’t hungry and he’d been burped. Still the crying persisted. She was positive he was telling her that she was the worst mother in the world and she was moments away from throwing in the towel and agreeing with him. In a moment of desperation she screamed at him to please stop crying. Their eyes locked onto one another’s and just like that – he did.

Time stopped as she stared into her son’s hazel eyes. She knew in that moment that they were going to be okay. A love that she had no idea ever existed blossomed inside of her. And over the years it just continued to grow.

Love never dies. It only grows. Though she knew she still and always would love her son that love was now displaced. It was locked away in the same place that held her love for her Father and until recently Daniel.

He was no longer the boy who’d grin at her cheekily with a face full of chocolate after burying his face in the baking bowl as he lapped up the last bits of chocolate that had eluded his spoon and finger. He wasn’t the toddler who’d jabber Mama Mama happily as he made his way over to her on wobbly legs as he gave her a proud toothy grin. That Henry was gone.

He’d been replaced with a sullen and secretive boy who didn’t hesitate to spit bullets at her every chance he got. Her beautiful boy was gone. And this one – was definitely a Charming.

Her son had been a small thing. But as she took some time to study him, she could see all the changes that were evident. His cheeks were no longer covered in baby fat. Instead they were becoming more defined.

His limbs were gangly as they splayed out around him. His wrists stuck out of his shirt sleeves making it clear that it was time for him to go up another size. Or two. But that was no longer her place to deal with. Because this wasn’t her son. He was Emma’s.

She knew he would be fine with Emma. And the two of them would have to figure out a way to move forward together. But she would not be a part of that. Though that was a pain she knew after losing her Father and Daniel that would never go away. It was one she was prepared to live with.

She would bear the burden of holding it in because she wasn’t blameless in this situation. Though
the extremes that were taken that got them to this place were not completely her fault, she was no innocent either.

Losing a child was a price that no mother should ever have to pay. But she knew now – with her entire family by her side – she would be okay. With their help – and with Blue and Daniel’s – life had once again been breathed into her. And she knew despite any evil past deeds, it was possible for her to still be happy. She was still worthy of and capable of having and giving love. And that was what was most important.

Voices and movement from outside the door drug her out of the headspace she was currently in. With one last loving look at her son, she shook off her musings and left the bed. She walked into Emma’s bathroom and threw some cold water on her face to help wake her up. The nap had helped but she really did need a few more hours of uninterrupted sleep. She used the restroom and washed her hands then left the room to find her sister and her baby so that they could get back home.

When she walked into the living room, her sister’s gaze tore away from the baby bouncing in her arms to meet her smile with one of her own. Blue was now fully awake. As if she sensed her presence, her head turned and her eyes and face lit up as she began to wave her arms and kick her feet around excitedly.

With just as much exuberance blooming inside her, she strode quickly across the room and reached for her baby. Zelena released her to her Mother with a smile across her face. Seeing them happy always made her happy. Though the joys of being and having a family were still new to all of them. This was definitely something they would never get tired of.

Regina raised Blue above her head and peppered her face with kisses as the baby squirmed happily. She brought her back down with an exaggerated swoop that made Blue’s face split with a grin from ear to ear.

“My love,” she held her daughter close. “Mummy missed you.” She laughed as Blue gurgled in response.

She turned her grin toward her sister, “where’s Emma? You didn’t turn her into anything did you?”

“Not yet,” the redhead deadpanned. “Her parents on the other hand – blech!” her face twisted in revulsion.

Before they could say anything else, the apartment door opened and Emma walked back in. One look at her tear streaked face made it clear that something big had just gone down. When their eyes met, the part of Regina that still and always would hold love for Emma rose up inside of her. She broke eye contact with her as she attempted to regain her composure.

Emma stood for a moment staring at the woman she had once pledged undying love for. Her throat worked furiously as she cleared it in hopes that she could get through the third hardest conversation she’d had to have with someone she cared about in less than 24 hours. Once she was sure she’d be able to speak without embarrassing herself she managed to croak out, “can we talk?”

Regina squelched the sigh that threatened to erupt at the question. She wanted to just say no so bad. But she’d known since finding out that she was pregnant with Emma’s child that being put in awkward positions would just be part of something she’d unfortunately had to live with until Blue came of age to deal with Emma on her own. That didn’t mean she was happy about having to accept it though. She hung her head while taking a deep breath, “sure.”

Emma led her the few steps away that it took to separate the dining room from the living room. They
stood in front of the sofa but neither made a move to sit down. She licked her lips nervously as she searched for the right words. When nothing came to mind she did what she did best- blurted out the first thing that popped into her head. “I’ve decided that Henry and I are moving to France.”

Regina’s eyes blinked rapidly in surprise. “O-kay,” she said slowly. That was completely unexpected. She didn't bother to point out that she didn't live in France. It was Emma's life. There was nothing for her to say about the situation.

At seeing none of the resistance she thought she would get, she nodded before moving forward, “I want to be near my baby. I can’t just stand by and watch her leave and never know when I’m going to see her again.” At the continued silence she began to fidget. Regina was wearing her Mayor mask. The one that made it nearly impossible for her to figure out what was going on inside her head.

She put her hands in her back pockets and began to rock on the balls of her feet, “we could get a place near where you live. That way I could maybe take her for a few hours so that you can sleep. It would be a win-win,” she smiled shyly and shrugged hoping to use whatever charming gene she had to make Regina feel less threatened and hopeful that this could work.

Regina huffed out an incredulous laugh. When she saw the seriousness on Emma’s face she shook her head vigorously.

“No.”
Nothing Left to Do

CHAPTER 29

Emma’s brow creased in a frown, “No?”

“No Miss Swan,” she shook her head harder. “Absolutely not.”

Emma frowned as she glanced down at her baby lying comfortably nestled in Regina’s arms. She compressed her lips into a thin line, “She’s my baby too! You don’t get to make all the rules Regina. I’m not asking for anything special. I just want to be near my baby.”

Regina remained quiet as she walked over to her sister and handed Blue over to her. She didn’t want the baby picking up the tension that was rapidly growing. She made her way back over to where Emma stood glaring daggers at her, “I do and will make the rules for my baby. Because she is exactly that — a baby!” she yelled. She glanced over at where Blue had begun to fidget in her Aunt’s arms before lowering her voice and turning back to Emma, “And until she’s old enough to make decisions for herself — as her Mother — that will be my job.”

Emma’s jaw tensed and her nostrils flared as she breathed heavily through them, “I’m her Mom too Regina. And you promised - .”

“I promised that I wouldn’t keep her from you,” she cut her off. “And I haven’t and won’t.” She matched Emma’s glare and shook her head at her, “but I am not allowing you to run roughshod into my life. You stole my son. But you will NOT take my baby.”

Emma’s jaw dropped, “I did not! You’re the one who tried to poison me. And that’s why Henry would rather have me than you!” Her face registered surprise at her own words. She hadn’t meant to say that. But Regina was being completely unreasonable.

Regina cocked her head to the side and raised an eyebrow at her, “really now?” She looked pointedly behind her towards the bedroom where she’d practically had to climb from underneath Henry.

Emma’s cheeks stained red and the lowering of her eyes made it clear that they both already knew the answer to that question. She knew she was on the losing end here. But she wasn’t going to give up her baby. She raised her head and stared directly into an identical pair of dark brown eyes wondering how they could be so alike and yet one was filled with love and the other was filled with — well - who the hell knew when it came to Regina.

She’d never been able to read her. At least not as much as she’d convinced herself that she could. She had no idea what was going on inside her head. And she couldn’t allow herself to become distracted by trying to figure it out. So instead she took a deep breath. Then turned toward her baby when she spoke next, “I know that Archie told you I was trying to take Henry from you. And I admit that I did say that. But it was taken entirely out of context.”

Tears stung her eyes as she turned back toward Regina, “I never meant it that way. I only - ,” she stopped and growled. She ran a frustrated hand through her hair as she squeezed her eyes tight willing the tears to stay away, “I never meant it Regina. I only wanted to be close to him. And to you. And you threw me away like what we didn’t matter to you at all.”

She wrung her hands out as Regina turned away from her. Her tears refused to stay at bay and
instead slipped silently down her cheeks. “I’ve lost so much with her already Regina. We talked about this,” she pleaded with the stoic woman before her. Her voice cracked as she continued, “You knew I wanted to be there the next time I had a baby. I wanted to be a part of everything. And instead I feel like I’ve missed everything already. I can’t just stay here and watch her leave me over and over again. Please,” she begged. “I don’t think I’m asking for much.”

Regina scoffed and shook her head as she crossed her arms over her chest. Emma had no idea what she was asking from her.

She had worked hard the past few months on rebuilding herself. She’d worked at becoming a woman that she could love when she looked in the mirror instead of the broken mess that she had been before. A woman that her daughter would be proud to call her Mum.

Henry and Emma had already taken so much out of her heart and soul. Before finding out about Blue, she wasn’t even sure she’d be able to survive having anymore pain dumped onto her.

But it was never her intention to cause anymore pain to anyone. Least of all Emma.

Though she didn’t trust her. And they would never be what they once were to one another, she did still care about her. And seeing her hurting wasn’t something she could bear.

She sniffled and blinked away her own tears. She was not going to turn into a quivering pile of mush. Especially not in the face of a Charming.

Zelena stared at her with her eyes narrowed. She had made her views on Emma, Henry, and the Charmings loud and clear repeatedly. She’d watched them for months before Snow sent Regina to Cora with a poisoned heart in her hand. She’d already admitted that it had taken everything she had in her not put them out of their misery back then.

But it was Blue who held her gaze. She stared deeply into her Mum’s eyes. Though the eyes were her own, the expression in them were all Emma. Her chin trembled as the corners of her mouth pulled down into a frown while her eyes became liquid.

She chewed on her bottom lip thoughtfully as she ran over the many ways having Emma and Henry in close proximity to her would ruin everything she’d rebuilt. Could she really risk allowing Emma back into her life again? And if not what would be the consequences of that situation? Would Blue grow one day and think that it was her fault that she’d kept her away from Emma?

The churning in the pit of her stomach told her that this was the worst idea in the world. But the concern for how Blue would feel knowing she could’ve been closer to her Mother but hadn’t been allowed managed to force her push away all the anxiety such an idea caused her.

“Fine,” she gritted through her teeth as she continued to look upon her baby. She squeezed her eyes shut and took a heaving breath as she wondered what the hell she’d just done.

Emma broke out into a grin at the same time a shout was heard from across the apartment.

“No way!” Zelena cried as she shot upright. She marched over to her little sister shaking her head, “there is no way I’m going to be around her or that horrible thing.”

Regina took a deep breath and gestured to Blue. “She loves her already. I’m not happy about it either. But as long as they’re in their own space I guess I can live with it,” she begrudgingly admitted.

Emma pulled Blue away from the redhead, “you hear that babygirl? Mama’s going to be able to see
you everyday!

Regina held up her hand, “I didn’t say that.”

Emma threw her a sharp glance, “what’s that supposed to mean?”

The brunette rounded on her and placed her fists on her hips, “it means I still don’t trust you to be with my daughter unsupervised. It means that there are still going to be guidelines that you’re going to need to follow.”

Emma didn’t like the sound of that. But figured they’d have plenty of time to cross that bridge later. Instead she turned her glare from Regina to a gaze of utter adoration back to her daughter, “we’re going to be together my Swan Princess. You, Mama, and your big brother Henry.” She lifted Blue above her head and nuzzled her neck before bringing her back down to her chest. She buried her face in her neck inhaling her sweet baby scent as Blue waved her hands and feet excitedly. “My Swan princess,” she whispered as she kissed her repeatedly on her neck and against the side of her face.

Regina watched the spectacle for a moment trying her best to steady her racing heart. She was so through with everything and everyone in this town. But there was still the last thing she needed to do to cut all ties, “We’re leaving now.” Emma’s head turned sharply toward her and her mouth began to open to lodge a protest but she held up her hand to stop it before it started. “There’s something I need to do before we leave. You can say your goodbyes while I’m gone.” And without another word, she poofs away.

Zelena turns to her and hisses, “You can fool my sister. But don’t for a moment think you’re going to fool me. I’m going to keep a very close eye on you,” she announced before flinging herself down onto the sofa. She crossed her legs and the knee and swung her it around rapidly.

Emma cooed to her daughter, “this is goodbye for a little while. But Mama will see you soon. It’s only for a little while,” she kissed her daughter’s head and held her close. “Just a little while my love.”

RQ

Regina stared up at the place she’d called home for decades. She had raised her son here. Taught him to walk, talk, and ride his bicycle here. They’d had plenty of good times here. Before the darkness set in.

She made her way up the path to the house allowing random memories to flow through her. She entered her old home and waited for that familiar feeling of relief that flooded through her whenever she stepped into the house. She knew Henry would be bounding downstairs at any moment and she no longer needed to be the Mayor or anything else. She could just be a woman enjoying being home with her family.

But there was nothing. As she stood in the doorway and looked around all she saw were empty rooms. Her plan in coming here had been to have a last look around. But now she felt it wasn’t even worth the bother.

She had let her son go. And just as he was no longer hers, this place was no longer her home. A fireball lit in the palm of her hand. She turned and tossed it behind her. Then she poofed away.

She came out in front of her old vault. She entered the small gate and walked inside. She made her way through the secret opening and down the stairs.
This place had once been her refuge. It was the one place she knew that she could let down all her guards. At home with Henry, she had to be his Mom. But here she could rage, cry, or let loose any number of hurts and frustrations without feeling as though she would be judged or punished for them.

But now the rooms were empty. It was funny – she’d always thought that this place was huge. But now that there was nothing connected to life to fill it, it just seemed small and cold. She frowned as she made her way up the stairs then out the gate. This time, instead of conjuring a fireball, she focused all of her magic to force the vault to constrict.

The vault slowly began to collapse. She kept minimizing it until it became no larger than a Christmas ornament. She picked it up and slipped it into her pocket. Then she poofed away.

The first thing she heard when she got back to the apartment was a tongue click. “It’s about time!” Zelena stood and frowned at her sister. She crossed her arms over her chest and tapped her foot as she waited expectantly.

Emma sighed but knew that there was no way around it. She gave her baby one last hug and kiss before handing her over. Her eyes watered over but she wiped the moisture away with an impatient hand.

Regina took her baby and held her close as she held the back of her head and pressed kisses into her forehead.

Emma frowned as her phone began to ring. Who in the hell would be calling at this time of night.

“That would be work calling,” Regina said as stared pointedly where Emma’s phone lay on the kitchen table. She took her sister’s hand and began to poof away.

“I’ll see you soon baby girl,” Emma screamed out before they completely disappeared. Once the smoke cleared she sniffled loudly then turned to her phone. “Sheriff Swan speaking.”

RQ

Regina ignored her sister as they rematerialized in her bedroom. She knew she wasn’t happy about this situation. Truth be told, neither was she. But it was something they’d just have to live with.

Cora and Lola both jumped up and ran over to greet them. Lenny stood from where he’d been resting and stared with narrowed eyes before turning in a circle and plopping himself down. He turned his back on them as he made himself comfortable and went back to sleep.

Cora eased Blue from her Mum’s arms as she held her grandbaby close, “My baby. You had us all worried.”

Zelena scoffed. “Wait until you hear what your darling daughter’s done now,” she said as she stalked herself across the room. She opened the door and stared back at where they stood, “I hope u know what you’ve done.” She slammed the door shut on her way out.

“What was that about?” Cora asked as she stared after her eldest daughter confused. Though Zelena had called and texted while they’d been gone, she’d still been worried the entire time.

Regina sighed heavily before dropping down onto her bed. She rubbed the back of her neck while absently stroking Lola’s soft furry head. She stared at her Mother with bleary eyes, “can we please have this conversation later? Like after I’ve had a few more hours sleep. I do still have to work in the morning.”
She began to stack pillows behind her back and got into a comfortable position. Then she motioned for her Mother to hand Blue over to her. She was sure a feeding was all it would take to get the li’l dumpling back to sleep.

Cora handed her over. As Blue latched onto her Mum’s nipple she sat beside her daughter. “Now or later won’t change what you have to say. You might as well spit it out.”

Regina let her head fall heavily against the headboard. She closed her eyes and stretched her back before saying tiredly, “I told Emma that it would be okay for her to move here.”

Cora frowned, “are you sure that’s wise?”

A mix of emotions floated across her daughter’s face. She could see the worry, confusion as she thought over her words, but also the unknown fear.

“No,” she answered honestly. She shrugged her shoulders, “but now it’s done. There’s no choice left but to live with it.”
“Seriously?” Abby squealed excitedly as she bounced on her bed.

Regina winced at the high pitch of her voice but continued diapering her daughter without missing a beat. “Unfortunately.”

“And where is she going to stay?”

“That’s Regina’s problem,” Zelena glowered at her sister. She still wasn’t okay with this situation. “But I know that it won’t be here.”

Regina sighed and continued to ignore her sister, Abby, and her Mother. She looked down at her baby’s cherub face and smiled as she kicked her tiny feet around. She bent down and blew raspberries on her belly as Blue squiggled around.

Not for the first time she wondered why the hell they always seemed to come together in her bedroom. The place was a sprawling mansion that had different wings attached and yet here they all were. Again.

She had always been a private person. But since coming here, her bedroom had become ground central for girl talk. She was going to have to put a stop to that real soon.

She quickly began to dress Blue, “I have no idea.” She sat in the rocking chair beside Blue’s changing table and used a water bottle to spritz her hair before trying her best to tame it. Though she had her other Mother’s hair color her little girl definitely had her temperamental hair. By the time Blue woke from her next nap it would be sticking up all over head again. But at least she could say she’d tried to do something with it.

Zelena sniffled, “you still didn’t have to tell her that she could move here.”

Regina huffed and glared at her sister, “what else would you have me do? She was blubbering away and Blue wasn’t far behind her.” She shook her head as she slipped an elastic headband down over Blue’s head. “I don’t want to deal with her anymore than you do. But she is Blue’s Mother. And she’s already attached to her since you haven’t noticed,” she threw a sharp eyed look over at her sister.

Before Zelena could add anything more Cora held up her hand, “what’s done is done. There’s no use in getting ourselves worked up for no reason.”

Regina gave her Mother a grateful smile. She turned Blue on her lap to face her. She bounced her on her knee as she planted eskimo kisses on her cheeks and eyelids before bringing her in close for a hug, “Mmmm,” she inhaled a large lungful of her sweet baby scent. “Mummy has to go to work now my love. But I promise you it’s just for a little while.”

Blue gurgled and then gave a small pout. Regina chuckled at her babygirl’s antics before rising. She crossed the room and handed her off to her Mother.

She turned to Lola and scratched her behind both ears as she pressed kisses to the top of her warm head. Next she grabbed Lenny who tried in vain to dodge her kisses and made sure to give him extra sloppy ones. Then she turned back to where her babygirl rested in her Mother’s arms.
“I’ll see you all later,” she said after she gestured to Abby to that she was ready to get on with their workday. She bent and kissed her daughter repeatedly. She always hated leaving her. But she also loved her work. And she’d fallen pretty far behind lately.

“Bye,” Abby tossed over her shoulder as they took their leave.

Zelena looked over at her Mother, “this is not going to end well.”

Cora shook her head and sighed. She didn’t want to say that she agreed with her. Her daughters were adults and honestly she’d never been that great a Mother to either one of them. They had gotten to a point where they could say they were truly family and loved one another as they were. But she wasn’t sure she’d ever reach a point in her life where she could say that she’d earned their forgiveness.

She was just happy that she was able to be there for them now. And even though this had obvious signs of becoming a disaster, she was determined to remain calm for all their sakes.

CF

Emma lounged happily against the arm of the sofa. She had her laptop open across a lap desk, pen and paper at her side and was perusing the net as she searched for all the things they needed in order to get ready for this big move as she was calling it.

Moving was no big deal to her. And she was no more attached to this place than she had been any other in her life. At one point she had believed that getting to know her parents and planting roots here were the most important things in the world. But she hadn’t been happy here in a long time. Though there were small moments of gratitude there was also a lot of heartache attached to this place. And she was more than happy to leave it behind.

It was still early morning. And thanks to Regina’s little late night arson she’d been up all night long. Since she was still on an adrenaline high she’d taken the time to study up on what all they’d need for a permanent move overseas. It was while she was taking notes on the passport process that she heard her bedroom door pull open.

She twisted her head around to smile over at her son as he ran from the bedroom before noting the look of horror on his face. “Henry what’s wrong?” she asked slightly alarmed. She propped her arm along the back of the sofa and twisted the top half of her body to face him fully.

Henry’s head followed his eyes as he looked frantically around the room. He still had those moments before fully waking when he’d need a moment to remember he didn’t live at home anymore. Once the fog of confusion lifted this morning he’d remembered his Mom had come to visit. He’d stretched out his arm alongside him only to find the bed was empty. When he realized this he’d jumped up and ran from the room in search of her.

His eyes scanned the living room frantically searching for her. But all he saw was Emma staring back at him with widened eyes.

He stepped forward into the room, “where’s my Mom?”

Emma shook her head while facing forward again, “she went back home.” She put the laptop on sleep before closing the lid and leaning over to set it down on the coffee table before her. Then she folded up the lap desk and rose as she began to work the kinks out of her body.

Henry drew in a sharp intake of breath. His chest began to feel tight as his breathing became rapid. He blinked repeatedly, “she’s gone?” he repeated confused. He hated how scratchy his voice came
out. But he couldn’t help it as his throat began to tighten up.

He made his way over to an unoccupied part of the sofa. His body more fell into the vacant spot as opposed to sitting properly. Gone. His Mother had come and gone. Without a word to him. His head dropped and his body slumped as he felt himself on the verge of tears.

Something in Henry’s voice caused Emma to cease her stretching and fully look at her son. “Henry,” she sat beside him and put her hand on his arm. She waited expectantly for him to lift his head and look at her. Once he did she took in the tears glistening in his eyes, “What’s this about?”

Henry’s bottom lip quivers as he looks at Emma with waterlogged eyes, “she didn’t even say goodbye.”

Emma pulled her son close to her side and chuckled. She kissed the top of his head as he looked at her bewildered. “Yeah, she’s gone. But I’ve got some really good news.”

Henry stared at her in confusion certain that she’d lost her mind. There was nothing good about this situation, “What?!!?”

Emma scooched to the edge of the sofa and twisted her body around to stare down at her son. “Guess!!?” she said excitedly.

Henry frowned not really liking this turn of events. His Mom had spent the night before barely even acknowledging his presence. He thought she’d at least be there when he awakened … but no. Now Emma was sitting and grinning her head off after telling him that she had just left him. Again. Without even a goodbye. He sniffled and wiped at his nose, “I don’t have any guesses.”

Emma rolled her eyes at his antics. Henry had sure gotten his flair for dramatics from the Queen herself. “She’s gone but it’s okay. Because she’s agreed for us to move with her.”

Henry’s head popped up as his thoughts began to swim. Move? He’d already done that twice now. He was getting a little sick of pretending that it was still fun. It was too early for him to flitter through all of these emotions so quickly. He shook his head to help clear it hoping he’d misheard, “huh?”

“Yes,” Emma nodded again. She bounced beside him on the sofa. “We’re moving to a place close by. That way we can see your sister whenever we want.” She picked up the pen and paper she had discarded earlier and held it under his nose, “see? Once we get our passports and tickets we’ll be ready to go.”

“But - ,” Henry scrambled to get off the sofa. He stood up as he shouted down at her, “we just moved here!”

Emma scowled at him confused. She thought he’d be thrilled with being closer to his Mom and sister. She pinned him with a straight look, “and we’re going to move again. As soon as we get our passports we’re going to be out of here.”

“But - ,” he started.

Emma held up her hand to stop one of his tirades. She could tell just by the look on his face that he was about to rile himself up into tantrum territory. She had no idea why he would be upset about this move but she really wasn’t in the mood for him to start either. “Look, it’s late for me and early for you. While you’ve been cashing in on your beauty sleep I’ve been dealing with other things around here. Now I’m going to throw us together some breakfast while you get showered and ready for school. Your Grandma will be here to pick you up in about 30 minutes.”
Henry opened his mouth to continue his protests but again he was instantly shut down.

Emma flicked her wrist at him and turned her head away before standing and making her way to the kitchen. “I’m serious Henry. We’re not going to do this. Now go and get ready like I said.”

Henry stood momentarily watching in stunned silence as Emma began to move around the kitchen. His jaw tightened as he turned on his heel and made his way to the bathroom.

He had no idea what was going on. He refused to acknowledge that the tightening in his gut everytime Emma mentioned her baby might have something to do with jealousy. He only knew that this was a situation he didn’t like.

He threw a glare over his shoulder as he stepped inside the bathroom but Emma was too busy humming and bouncing around the kitchen to be bothered to notice. Just as she had ever since that baby had first come into their lives and interrupted the family that they were trying to build.

Whatever was going on. He knew that as far as he was concerned, this conversation wasn’t over by a long shot.

MF

Regina pressed her lips together tightly as she held in a laugh. Watching Abby trying to crawl her way out of the car around her distended belly was hilarious.

Their lives had changed so drastically in the past few months. She had brought Abby over to help her stay on task since she knew having the baby was going to a stumbling block in the process of what she wanted to accomplish in this job. Abby had come to her rescue then. Now here they were in the opposite end of that predicament. And soon they’d have to address the fact that her backup was going to need backup.

Unable to hold back any longer she asked, “You need me to ask someone to help roll you around?”

“Ha ha ha,” Abby finally made her escape from the low gravity seat and began to fix her clothing. She turned on her friend, “What kind of a friend are you?”

“The best,” she instantly responded. “We’re not friends. We’re family.”

“Sisters,” Abby agreed as she threaded her arm through her best friend’s.

They entered the children’s home and grimaced as they looked around. It was exactly as they’d expected. From the outside, the building wasn’t much to look at and the inside wasn’t much better. This was exactly what they hoped to change once their shelter was up and running.

The place was as cold and impartial as they’d expected. There were barely any signs of children even though the place boasted that they took in hundreds each year. This place seemed to signify precisely what they were hoping to never become.

They walked up to the front desk and met the bored, uninterested stare of a young woman, “May I help you?”

Her nasally voice grated on Regina’s nerves already. But she shoved it aside and plastered one of her Mayoral smiles onto her face, “we have an appointment with the Child Care Supervisor.”

“You can have a seat over there,” the woman pointed to a group of sofas whose better days were long past.
“We’re going to make this right,” Abby said quietly as they took their seats.

They had only been waiting a short while when a surprisingly young woman with wild red hair made her way over to them. “Mrs. Mills?” she inquired with an Irish brogue.

“Please call me Regina,” she stood and held a hand out to Abby to help her up. “And this is my Assistant, Abigail.”

“Abby,” she held out her hand to the woman and offered her up a large smile.

After shaking both their hands she gestured just behind them, “And please call me Merida. How about we take this to my office?”

The trio spent the next few hours discussing the various issues and some possible solutions in helping fix the problems that were part of the systematic failures and pitfalls of the Child Care system. Though they all agreed that there was plenty that needed to change they were in different places as far as how to proceed was concerned. But in the end, they managed to conclude their meeting with no hard feelings on either side.

As they sipped their afternoon tea, things took a turn for the better. They put the work aside and were able to relax and chat freely. Regina had to admit that her opinion and respect for the woman greatly increased as they spent more time together.

“If you don’t mind me asking,” she placed her teacup back onto the coffee table in front of her, “how exactly did someone so young gain your position?”

Merida chuckled before dunking her biscuit in her tea and taking a bite, “It might not look like much to yew all but me and me three brothers were raised here. We were wee bit mites when our parents passed. And with no family to take us in this is where we landed. Once I finished my degree I came back to what was familiar. Over the years, I was able to rise to my current position.”

Abby was impressed. “Sounds like a lot of hard work went into getting here.”

“No more so than what you’re doing,” she quipped. “It’s sad to say that the work you’re doing is necessary. And our needs only rise each year,” she sighed heavily.

“Well, now that you’ve helped us to gain a better understanding then I’d say we’re in good shape to tackle what’s ahead,” Regina flashed the woman one of her rare beaming smiles.

Something akin to interest lit the woman’s large blue eyes as she took in the dark haired beauty. “Would you like to see the place?”

The trio rose and their host pointed out various places that she thought would be of interest to them. Regina was saddened to see the stacks of bunkbeds all pushed into a room. One of the things high on their list for their school was ensuring that each child had a space to call their own.

They had just entered one of the playrooms when Merida was called away by her assistant. She excused herself and told the women they were free to look around while she handled some urgent business.

Abby found a chair in a corner and began tapping away on her iPad. Regina continued to walk around the room watching the children go about their play.

One boy sitting alone in a corner drew her eye. While all the other kids played around him, he sat quietly at a small table staring out towards the windows. He had beautiful dark curls and the second
saddest pair of dark eyes she’d ever seen. She knew that look well. She’d seen it for years when she looked into the mirror. And it in no way belonged on the face of any child.

“Hi,” she said softly as she pointed to the empty chair across from him. “Mind if I sit with you for a bit?”

After receiving no response from the child she took it upon herself to pull out the chair and sit. “Looks like you have a lot of friends to play with. Why are you over here by yourself?”

As she waited for a response that never came, she took the time to study the child. She didn’t know why but there just seemed to be something about him that was pulling her closer to him. She couldn’t resist leaning closer to him, “I always did like the strong, silent type,” she waggled her eyebrows at him.

In response, he gave her a small, shy smile complete with a full display of dimples before quickly looking away from her.

Still intent on coaxing more from him, she continued, “What’s that you’re holding?” she pointed to something that sat coveted in the boy’s hands. She instantly realized she’d overstepped and wanted to kick herself as his smile instantly deflated and the boy went back to staring listlessly straight ahead.

“Sorry about that,” Merida re-entered the playroom and stopped just short of where Regina sat with the boy. Abby stopped tapping on her iPad and closed the cover before putting it away. She walked back over to where they were and waited.

“I see you’ve met Raphael,” Merida pointed to the small child.

“We were just getting acquainted,” Regina began to gather herself. “Seems he prefers being a little man of mystery,” she smiled at the child. “Thanks for keeping me company Raphael,” she gave the boy a small wave and started to walk away.

As she turned a small hand clamped itself around her wrist. She looked down and the child was smiling up at her. He pressed something into her hand before turning and walking back over to his chair.

She looked down in confusion at the feather the boy had placed in her hand. “Thank you,” she gave him another smile and a wave as she followed her host out into the corridor.

Merida’s eyes bulged as she turned back toward her. “I can’t believe he did that,” she breathed. “What did ye say to him?”

Regina shrugged and shook her head. Though she was touched, she wasn’t quite sure what the big deal was,” we just had a friendly little chat.”

“He hasn’t spoken or communicated with anyone since being here. His Mum passed away when he was a wee babe. He lived with his Dad until a neighbor phoned 999 about a stench coming from their apartment. He was found sitting next to his body. He was ice cold when officers arrived. They’re guessing he’d been gone for at least a week before they were called.”

“Oh how sad!” Abby exclaimed.

Regina’s heart broke as she heard the boy’s sad tale. She looked through the glass of the closed door and grew even sadder as she watched him continue to stare out the window. Her eyes dropped back down to the feather in her hand and she caressed it softly.
“Well,” Merida began to smooth out the wrinkles in her dress. “I guess this concludes our tour.” She began to walk them back towards the front lobby.

“It was nice to meet both of ye,” the redhead said as she again reached out to shake their hands. “If there’s ever anything else you need then please feel free to let me know.”

“We will,” Abby grinned at her. “And thank you for taking the time out to meet with us. This will go a long way in helping us move forward.”

As Merida turned to her, Regina felt a sharp tug inside. She knew instantly what it was. It was the same thing she felt whenever she had to be away from Blue. She raised her eyes to the supervisor, “Actually there is. What exactly is the adoption process?”

*** I couldn’t resist! I love me some Dimples Queen. I could stare at pics of the two of them together all day. And I hate the name Roland. I just couldn’t do that to a child. Even an imaginary one that isn’t really mine. Hope you enjoyed! :D ***
“Seriously?”

Regina winced at the screeching voice. She looked down at her baby who lay across her upturned knees and nuzzled her nose. Blue squiggled and waved her arms and feet in response.

Again - for some unknown reason - everyone had converged on her bedroom for girl time after dinner. Who knew where and what the men of the house were about. Her Mother sat beside her playing with Blue’s hands. Lola spread across the middle snoring. Zelena and Abby were both splayed across the end of the plush King sized bed. Earlier they had compared matching baby bumps as they discussed the next stages in their respective pregnancies. Then Abby broke the news about Regina applying to adopt Raphael.

“He’s really adorable. Just wait until you meet him,” Abby showed her Mother and sister the couple of pics they’d managed to snap of Raphael.

“Oh!” Cora gushed. “He’s very handsome,” she grinned at the deep set dimples and the little face that beamed up at her.

Zelena tried to keep the frown glued to her face but failed miserably as she took in the tumble of dark curly hair and the large brown eyes. A reluctant smile curled up her lips as she stared at the picture of the small boy, “Well – at least he seems better than the last one,” she muttered.

Regina rolled her eyes but otherwise completely ignored the comment. Zelena had spoken of the weeks she had spent in Storybrooke trying to get to know and understand the situation between her and their Mother before she approached them. She had observed Henry during the time when his hate speeches had been as frequent as breathing to him. This left a deep feeling of antipathy within her towards Henry for the callous, ungrateful way he had treated her.

As a child she had grown up knowing she was adopted. Though her adoptive mother had done the best she could with and for her, her adoptive Father had made it clear that she was unwanted. Henry, for her, seemed to tap into those old feelings of being lonely and unwanted. She couldn’t understand how a child could not be grateful for being cared for in a home filled with warmth and love.

“When do we get to meet him?” her Mother asked.

“Soon actually,” Regina turned up her nose. “Because he’s not talking, he’s considered a special needs adoption. They fast track those,” she shook her head. She turned to her nightstand where she’d placed the dark blue feather he’d handed her earlier. She smiled lovingly as she gazed at it, “How in the hell he’s supposed to just be happy go lucky when he spent an entire week beside the corpse of the only person he had left in the world is beyond me.” She still couldn’t believe the shamefulness. She was confused and a little disgusted that someone as beautiful as that little boy was labeled as special needs due to him not speaking after such a traumatic event.

It had been easier with Henry. She’d had some paperwork to do. But since it was a private adoption situation handled by a private lawyer it had all happened quickly.
She’d already lucked out since due to her building a shelter here specifically for kids who were homeless and needed care, she had already completed most of the requirements for adoption. She’d taken the prerequisite skills courses just so that she had an understanding of what prospective parents for her school would face. Her medical records, references and background information were already completed and compiled. All she had left to do was to wait for the home study to be completed. Merida had been extremely helpful as they’d gone over the next steps and had already assured her that it was one of her top priorities.

“The home study appointment is set for next week. Merida’s looking into getting me clearance to take him out for day visits so that we can get acquainted. I’m going to need everyone here on that day. They’ll need to interview all of you.” After everyone shrugged and nodded their consents she continued, “And you’ll make sure Hades knows to behave himself right?” she pinned her sister with a sharp gaze.

Zelena rolled her eyes and huffed, “he’s not like that anymore you know! Of course he knows how to behave himself.”

Regina pursed her lips but just let it go. Hades was used to ruling over people. He had not been in this world long enough to make all of the necessary social adjustments of going from a ruler to a commoner amongst men. But there was no denying he loved her sister to death. And he put her happiness above even his own.

She still steered clear of him as much as possible. And Blue was never left alone with him. But he was cordial enough as long as you didn’t let him get into your head or rile him up in any way.

“Where are you planning on putting him dear?” Cora asked as she looked around the room. It was a large room. She understood Regina’s reluctance to move Blue to her nursery even though it was already set up next door. Though the mansion had many wings, with 4 different families, things were starting to get a little cramped.

Regina chewed on her bottom lip as she thought over her answer. She had always been an organizer. And had already planned for this as soon as she realized she couldn’t leave Raphael behind. She took a deep breath and made the second big announcement of the night. “While we’re here I was going to convert the room next door to his bedroom.”

Zelena’s eyebrows rose as she thought through the selective wording. “While you’re here?”

Now came the big part. “We can’t keep doing this. The two of you are pregnant and soon there’ll be two more babies to contend with. And a small boy. I know you have a place in the city but it’s a small place. We’re going to need more room than that.”

Cora curled her legs underneath her, “what exactly are you proposing dear?”

Regina shifted Blue onto her belly and began to massage her from head to toe as she gathered her thoughts. It was something she did to help her relax as a part of their nightly routine. Blue seemed to love it and it helped with her muscle development and digestion. By the time she got down to her toes, her baby girl would be like putty in her hands. She gently placed her hand around the crown of Blue’s head being ever mindful of her soft spot and began to rub small soothing circles into her scalp.

“The driving here and back to the city daily is already murder. I love my car but I don’t like spending 2 ½ hours a day in it just to get back and forth to work. Nor do I see the kids being any happy about it than I am. This is a nice weekend home. But it’s impractical during the actual work week.”
“Which is precisely why I keep the condo in the city,” the redhead pursed her lips as she pointed out. The duh was automatically implied.

Regina moved her hand down to Blue’s back as her baby let out a soft cooing sound. She stretched out her toes and relaxed against her Mum’s hand as Regina continued as if she’d never been interrupted, “There’s a house on the school property that used to be the faculty housing. It’s also set far enough away from the school that it wouldn’t be as if we were living there. It has its own garden and driveways. The school is still quite a hike away. I think it can be easily converted into a nice family home,” she smiled hoping that this would help set everyone at ease for the next decision she had made.

Everyone looked around to one another silently searching for their agreement. After everyone had given a careless shrug and a nod to her proposal, she moved on.

“There’s a maintenance shack on the land. It’s on the opposite side of the property but it also has its own privacy. I was thinking - ,” her tongue slipped out and moistened her lips. Her hands began to work Blue’s dangling legs as she inhaled a deep breath and said the rest in practically one breath, “I was thinking that Emma and Henry could have that side.”

Cora sat with her mouth hanging open while Zelena gave her little sister slow exaggerated blinks. “What?”

The younger brunette huffed as she turned Blue back over onto her thighs and began to work her from head to toe in small circles again, “I don’t want her here anymore than any of the rest of you. But the house is all of the way across the pond from ours.”

Zelena snorted, “And you think she won’t figure that out?”

“Trust me when I say, she’s not that bright,” Regina gives a half smirk and flicks her wrist at her. “She’s aware that there will be ground rules in having her here. I’m not giving her any legal custodial rights to my baby. But it might not be so bad having her around.”

“This is such a bad idea,” Zelena crossed her arms over her chest. “Just know that while she’s here she’ll be your problem. Her and that boy,” she practically spat.

“Anyway, I’ve scheduled to have the architect meet us here right after our appointment for the home study. That way there’ll be a bit of all of us in the new house,” she smiled at her family.

Lenny jumped onto the bed and looked at Blue lying across her lap. He glared at her before turning his back and finding himself a comfy spot on the far corner. He turned around then and curled himself up before settling down again for another marathon of napping.

“I think someone’s got sibling rivalry,” Abby said with barely contained laughter.

“Well it’s only about to get worse,” Regina rolled her eyes before nuzzling her baby. “Isn’t it Princess? Because you have your big brother coming home soon.” She held up the phone that showed a picture of Raphael, “See? This is your new brother,” she waved the phone in front of her face.

Blue lay blinking slowly up at her through sleepy eyes. When she pointed out the picture on the phone her baby actually gave a small, somewhat dopey smile.

Regina gasped, “Oh my God! Did you see that? Did you just smile?” she waved the phone around some more and pointed, “Brother? See? That’s your big brother.”
Blue’s eyes focused on her fully for a second before her small dopey smile turned into a gummy grin.

“Oh my God!” she gushed. “I have to send this picture to Emma,” she pulled up the camera on the phone and zoomed in on her baby girl. Click. And then just for good measure. Click. Click.

Abby, Zelena, and Cora each exchanged loaded glances as Regina pulled up her email and sent the picture to Emma.

“She’s not going to be a problem eh?” Zelena’s compressed her lips into a thin line. She could see it coming already. The Charmings were nothing but trouble. And yet again her sister hadn’t learned her lesson from them.

This was NOT going to end well.

CF

Emma yawned and stretched as she exited her bedroom. She’d crashed just as soon as Henry had left for school that morning. She thought about making coffee but after a glance at the clock told her Henry should be home soon she decided against it. They’d just stop into Granny’s for a snack instead.

As she was debating how big of a snack she was planning on having, she plopped down at the table and awakened her laptop. She had a few more minutes to kill and she hated daytime tv.

She had been going through her emails when a pop-up notification for a new email came through. She opened it without hesitation when she saw that it was from Regina.

Emma fumed silently for a moment as she processed. Instead of making her happy – what she saw had her hands tightening into fists.

Her baby had just smiled for the first time ever. And she’d missed it. Another milestone gone that she would never be a part of.

‘I should’ve been there for that,’ she thought. ‘She’s my baby too!’

Without missing a beat she immediately typed out a reply.

She smiled?!?! My baby smiled and I missed it?!?!! What did I do to you to make you think that it’s okay to just cut me out of her life?!?!! This is exactly why Henry and I deserve to be there. I’ve already missed everything! I’m not going to be just pushed aside! I’m her Mom too!!!

I’m done with getting pictures and videos that I’m not a part of. As soon as the passports come through Henry and I will be there. This is the last time I’m missing something important in my baby’s life.

She hit send quickly. Then she sat back and shook her head as she glared at the laptop as if it had done something to offend her.

‘Never Again!’ she yelled as she slammed the lid shut and walked away.

CF

Henry stared at the diaper goo on his tray that was school lunch. Even the dessert tasted like crap. His Mom always used to make his lunch for him. Now he was relegated to wondering if he’d ever
Emma tried. This morning she’d made scrambled eggs. But they’d been hard and rubbery. Not fluffy and creamy like the ones he was used to eating at home. If it wasn’t for Granny’s he’d forget that food wasn’t supposed to make you feel bad.

“Hey Hen,” Hansel called tauntingly before slamming his tray down across from him. “Lay anymore rotten eggs lately?” Some of Hansel’s friends sat on either side of Henry. They snickered as they put their trays down.

Henry tightened his jaw but otherwise ignored him. At first, after the curse broke, he had been a hero to everyone. Now he was back to being the town weirdo. Not that he cared or anything though.

“We heard your Mom was in town. The Evil Queen herself. It’s a good thing she’s hot,” Hansel popped his brownie into his mouth and licked his fingers afterward. “I hear, she even brought her cursed baby along with her.”

Henry began to blink rapidly as he tightened his hand around the fork that was picking its way through the brown colored goo on his tray. But he refused to lift his head. Instead he stared at the unappetizing mess that sat before him.

“Hey Freddy,” Hansel turned to his friend who sat to Henry’s left. “What’s it called when the Evil Queen and the Savior make a baby together?” he paused for effect before turning his gaze back to Henry. “Mistake number two,” he pointed to Henry as the boys around him began to guffaw loudly causing more of the kids’ heads to turn their way. “You’re mistake number one!” he yelled out before throwing his head back and laughing loudly.

Henry cheeks colored but he said nothing. He started to swing his feet around hard as he forced himself not to cry or show any emotion that could later be used against him.

“I heard she got fire happy again. The entire neighborhood came out to watch the fire last night,” the boy named Freddy said as he shoveled a spoonful of the dark colored goo into his mouth.

Hansel nodded as he reached across and took Henry’s brownie off his tray before taking a big bite out of it. “I went past there this morning. The entire house looked like someone took a blowtorch to it.”

Henry’s head lifted as he processed what the boys were saying. “What house?” he asked even as the answer became obvious to even him.

Hansel looked surprised that he’d even spoken. Then he shook it off and the usual devilish smirk he wore when he was around Henry made a reappearance. “What house do you think?” He jerked his thumb toward Henry before turning to his pals again, “and he’s supposed to be smart.”

Before he even realized what he was doing, his chair scraped backward and he was running for the door. He made it out of the cafeteria and barreled through the front doors of the school before he heard someone call from somewhere behind him, “Henry!”

Henry ignored them and just kept running. It wasn’t until he felt his cheeks turn cold that he even realized he was crying. He swiped angrily at his face as he continued to pound his way down the streets as fast as his legs could carry him.

He’d barely registered getting up and running let alone where he was running to. But as he dropped to his knees after clearing the shrubs he wasn’t surprised. Or at least that’s what he told himself as
his eyes adjusted to the sight in front of him.

The crater that had been left after his Mom had taken her apple tree was still there. But the rest of the house hadn’t fared so well.

The roof was charred and had fallen somewhere inside the rooms. The walls had long since crumbled and in their place stood thick beams of wood, blackened and charred from where the flames had licked at them.

Nothing had escaped the fire, glass littered the floor where the windows had broken and the metal base of the grand chandelier lay blackened and twisted on the ground.

A strangled cry broke from his throat as he stared unseeingly at the mess. Gone. It was just gone. The house he’d spent his entire life was just gone.

There was nothing left except a burned out skeletal shell of the house that had stood there before. It was gone. The place that he’d spent his entire life was gone.

He knelt there in front of his burned out house trying hard to keep himself together. He batted at his eyes hating the fact that he was crying yet unable to stop himself. He had lost everything.

He knew realistically that wasn’t true. He still had his Mom and grandparents. And even his Dad now. But this – this was the center of his life. The only world that he knew. And his Mom had burned it down and left it in broken burned out pieces. Just like his heart.

He’d tried – he really had – to do the right thing. But this – this was just too much!

He had no idea how long he sat there kneeling down in the cold. But he knew he couldn’t stay any longer. He rose and brushed the dirt from his slacks and hands. His tears fell down his cheeks blindingly as he ambled forward.

He was done with plans. He was done with missions. He was done with being the one who saw what no one else could see. It had gotten him nowhere.

There was no time nor thought for anything. Except for this to finally end. One way or another.

Chapter End Notes

****OK people real talk. As a proud Boricua what’s going on in Puerto Rico is very near and dear to me. I have family and friends there so I am personally invested. I’ve been told my house is pretty much gone which I care not about. My focus is my people. If you can please help in any way you see fit. Whether it’s donating clothes, money, time, medicines, baby products (diapers, formula, even toys that kind of thing) any and all help is appreciated. We are all Americans and should stand together. Any little bit counts. Thank you.****
Greetings and Happy Holidays fellow fanfic-ers! I hope you all had as great a time as I am loving and celebrating. I know it's been a while since I've updated but I do bring gifts.

First, the next couple of chapters of this are already written and will be up shortly. I might even get the next posted before the week is over ;). Just as a gift and a thank you for sticking with this fic.

Also if you're reading my other fics then you know that I've been slacking on them all. And I promise there's good reason for it. The unfortunate development of carpal tunnel for one. Thankfully I've gotten that problem somewhat under control.

But -even more excitingly- I am in the process of finishing and publishing my own original work! Though it will continue to be slim pickins, I still promise that I will finish all of my fics except for Trop Sensible. I will get around to taking that one down whenever my lazy ass can be compelled to do so. That one I'm turning into a book also. As I said before, this one is the easiest to write so I will probably concentrate on finishing this before moving on. Then again don't quote me on that. It really depends on what inspiration I have at the time.

Anyhew - I bid you all tidings and hope next year finds you even better than the last! Enjoy! :)**

CHAPTER 32

Regina swatted Lenny away lightly as he mewed directly in her face. "I'm up! I'm up!" she cried as she wrapped her arms around him in hopes of getting him to calm down. She pulled him down onto her chest and began to smother him with kisses as Lola jumped into the middle and added wet, slobbery kisses of her own.

She had always been an early riser. It was a habit left over from her Enchanted Forest days. Everyone went to bed shortly after sundown and rose with the sun every morning. Her inner clock had never reset even after all the time that she'd spent in this land.

She pushed Lola away from her as she stretched and yawned. Lenny continued mewing to keep her on task with filling his breakfast dish. She glanced over at Blue who lay snoozing peacefully in her bassinet. She had gone down after her 4 am feeding barely an hour ago and wasn't due to be back up for another 2. Much like her blonde Mother, she had a tendency to smack her gums and chatter to herself in her sleep. Although in her case it sounded more like cats chortling amongst themselves.

She locked Lenny and Lola out of the bathroom while they whined outside the door as she went about her morning routine. After brushing and washing, she grabbed the video monitor for Blue's bassinet before going downstairs to fill Lenny's and Lola's bowls.

Life with an infant who needed to be fed every 3 hours and no caffeine was interesting. Her Mother
helped out as much as she could but she still hadn't completely adjusted to what was her new reality. Trying to get through the day with little to no sleep.

She chewed on some almonds as she threw the ingredients for her energy boosting smoothie that she had come to rely on into the blender. She'd found drinking the shakes along with yoga helped rejuvenate her to a point. Their therapist had suggested it and she'd never felt stronger. It was definitely a lifestyle change she could see doing for years to come.

She sipped at her smoothie as she grabbed her tablet and began to go through her emails. Most of the things in her inbox were work related. Along with a reminder from Merida about their upcoming appointment. As if she could forget.

She was looking forward to this. Though the entire process was being expedited it still felt like everything was moving at a snail's pace to her. It had been hell leaving Raphael there when she knew that he was meant to be with the family. She just wanted her son safe at home with her and his sister where he belonged.

She had finished replying to her emails and was just about to go upstairs to begin her yoga session so that she could shower and be ready when Blue woke for her breakfast when she remembered the private email system to Emma. She logged on expecting to find a message saying how much she'd enjoyed seeing Blue smile. Or something along those lines. As usual, nothing could be that easy when it came to the not so Charmings.

As she scrolled though Emma's message, she found herself becoming angry. How dare she?! She had bent over backwards and had had her life taken over by you Charmings for far too long. If this continues to be a problem for you then I think that it's best for you and Henry to stay where you are. If it upsets you so much to hear news about Blue's milestones then I have no problem with keeping them to myself. This pettiness is the reason I wished that you weren't a part of her. We all would've been better off that way.

Good day Miss Swan

She quickly pressed the send button. She ran her hand through her hair and stuck her chest out as she took a deep breath to try and control her anger. She shook her head in disgust at the laptop as she turned and made her way upstairs to start her day.

She began stretching on her way upstairs as she made her way out to her balcony. As she drew in her first breath while going into her Sun salutation pose she poured all her negative energy into her breath out as she began her new morning routine.

CF

Neal's head swung around as he searched desperately for the source of the wails that rang in his ears. The cries were filled with such anguish, pain, heartbreak and despair that he knew he needed to get to whoever was emitting them quickly. Just hearing them struck something deep inside of him.
He broke from his light jog to an all-out run as the cries grew louder letting him know that he was close. From a distance, he spotted a figure squatting near a twisted and gnarled log. He recognized him instantly.

"Henry?" he questioned anxiously as he came closer. He quickly did a scan of him from head to toe and could see nothing was outwardly physically wrong with him. His head swung around the beach and he noted that it was completely deserted as he tried to reconcile what was going on. "What are you doing here?"

Henry jumped as he heard his name called. He hadn't realized he was no longer alone. He sniffled and wiped at his eyes before briefly glancing at his Dad and then away quickly. "N – no - thing," he managed to push out through his tightened throat. Except from the way his voice broke it was clearly far from the truth. He continued to wipe desperately at his face with his bare hands as he heard his Mother's voice in his head saying a gentleman always carries a handkerchief with him. You never know when it's going to come in handy. She'd even bought him huge stacks of them that had his initials monogramed in the corners. He groaned knowing that yet again she was right. And he was wrong.

At hearing the groan, Neal hurried over to the boy, "are you okay?" Neal asked as he inspected him and the situation further. Still seeing no outward signs of injury he took a breath to calm himself. "Are you hurt? Should I call Emma?" He pulled his phone out of the pocket of his jogging pants but before he could check his contacts list and ring her up, he was stopped.

"No!" Henry shouted as he pushed his Dad's phone away. "I just want to be alone."

Neal took in the tears that were still streaming down the boy's face though he was trying desperately in vain to brush them away. Making a quick decision he nodded, "Okay then. We can just sit here alone together," he lowered himself fully onto the ground next to the plank that Henry was crouched on. He stretched his legs out in front of him and stared out at the sea as he chewed on his bottom lip and waited.

"It's all gone," Henry cried out as he lowered his head onto his arms and began to sob.

Neal was a bit startled. Learning about Henry was just one of many curveballs life had thrown at him lately. Though Henry called and embraced him as his dad this entire situation was still new to him. He was still only just getting around to processing the fact that he even had a son. But he did understand pain. He'd spent his entire life trying to figure out how to navigate through his own and he still hadn't exactly mastered anything.

He stretched out his arm and wrapped it around the boy's shaking shoulders, "it's okay. Whatever it is – it's okay. But I can't help you if I don't know what's wrong. Just tell me what happened."

"My house," Henry squeaked. He grimaced as he continued to try and compose himself. His throat worked furiously as he tried to swallow down the tears that wouldn't stop. When he felt he could go on without embarrassing himself further he continued, "It's gone. She burned it all down. And she didn't even say anything to me at all."

"What? When?" he'd seen Emma earlier at the diner before he'd gone out for his run. She'd said nothing to him about her house burning. Then again, Emma really hadn't said much to him about anything except rules she expected him to respect regarding Henry.

Henry's tears had finally quieted down to the occasional hiccup. He stared unseeingly out at the still waters. Being out here and watching the water had always helped him to gather his thoughts. But this time it wasn't working. Winter was coming. And though it hadn't frozen over yet, there were
patches of ice starting to form across its surface. He knew that underneath the surface those waters would be churning in winter's icy grip. Just like he was.

He shook his head sadly, "It doesn't matter. She's just the Evil Queen anyway. Emma's my real Mom now."

Neal frowned as he processed what he was hearing. He was still only just becoming acquainted with Henry. With everything in this town really. He still had a lot of catching up to do.

He'd known that a curse had been cast to bring everyone there from the Enchanted Forest. He didn't have to ask his Papa much about this. He understood that there were things about Rumplestiltskin that even he didn't want to know.

And he knew that Emma herself had only recently become reacquainted with Henry. According to Henry, he'd been adopted by the Evil Queen. But Emma – as the Savior - had saved everyone and broken the curse to bring back happy endings. Then they'd gone to New York after Rumplestiltskin had forced Emma to uphold her promise of a favor and they'd found him.

Now they were supposed to be in the midst of getting their happy ending. It seemed so long ago but truthfully it had only been a few months since he'd agreed to return to town with them to spend some time with Henry and his Papa. And to figure out where he belonged in this picture.

Henry and Emma's Mother Snow had made it perfectly clear that they believed that Neal and Emma would be the perfect new beginning to their forever. But Neal knew that was impossible.

It had been a shock to him to learn that Emma and Henry's adoptive Mother had been in a relationship. And that the two of them had conceived a child. He'd heard of such a thing happening back in their world. But he'd been floored about learning it had happened here.

The Emma he'd known had been innocent in the ways of the world. She'd been streetwise because life had dealt her a heavy hand by thrusting her into the uncaring hands of the foster care system. But there had been so many things she'd still been naïve about back then.

Now she was a Mother twice over. And he'd known as soon as he'd learned of the baby she'd shared with another woman that there was no going back for the two of them. Not that knowing any of this had stopped Henry and Snow White from trying to set him and Emma up repeatedly. One of the reasons he'd asked his fiancée to come and visit him there was to make it clear that they were barking up the wrong tree.

He'd noticed lately that Henry had been quieter than he'd ever seen him. Since he'd never had problems before with making himself and his needs known he'd sat back and waited for a sign from him as to what it was he needed from him. But as he took in the sorrow that had surrounded the boy he cursed himself for the fact that he was so inadequately prepared for the situation.

He knew almost nothing about the woman that had raised Henry. Asking around town didn't help. Most people referred to her as the Evil Queen and said that they were glad that she was gone. But Emma had clearly fallen head over heels for the woman. Though they'd been out of touch for a long time, he still felt he knew her well enough to know she would do no such thing in vain. And having Rumplestiltskin for a Father taught him never to take other people's opinions as gospel. There was obviously more to the answer of who this woman was that had been such a huge part of 3 important people in his life.

And though Henry had his issues, from what he could tell, he was still basically a good kid. The woman couldn't have been all evil to have raised a child like him.
He knew he needed to tread lightly up this situation since he really didn't have much knowledge to gain any insight into it. "But you have a new home now. Like you said, Emma's your Mom now. Why would you care about your old house burning down?"

"Because it's my house!" Henry screamed as his tears began anew. "Emma only has an apartment. It's not a real home," he cried.

Neal shrugged still confused about what it was exactly that Henry was upset about, "well home is where the heart is. Now that you live with Emma that's where your new home is," he offered up to him with a smile.

Henry threw him a wilting glare before staring back out at the water. It was hard for him to put into words what the problem was. He knew his Dad was right. That it wasn't his home anymore. But for some reason that didn't stop him from hurting.

He'd spent his life there. Then he'd moved to be with his real family. But his Mom and his old home were still there. Until the day he came home from school to find Emma waiting there for him with all of his things. Then a feeling he couldn't name had begun to take hold as she told him that his Mom had left. And without one word to him about it. She was just gone. Vanished forever.

The letter she'd left him had been like a punch in the stomach. He had stared at that paper so many times that he had the handful of words memorized. Henry, I hope you find your happiness. What a joke.

He'd felt as if he'd been gutted. Though he knew he should be happy about being with his real family, everything around him felt so fake. His grandparents were completely consumed with themselves and with ruling the town. And though Emma kept a smile plastered on her face, he knew that it wasn't real. When you looked deeply into her eyes, she had the same almost haunted quality to her that his Mom had always had. And it made him miss her even more.

Finding out that Emma and his mom had been in a relationship was one thing. Finding out about the baby had been something else.

He'd tried to hold onto faith that this was the way things were meant to be. Their happy ending was still just right around the corner. But seeing his Mom again had really thrown him. He'd wanted to throw himself at her. But she wouldn't even look at him. So he'd been still.

As he'd watched her, he'd noted how different she was now than she had been while living there. And it wasn't just about growing out her hair. She seemed softer. And watching her with her baby had almost killed him.

She was completely different now. It was hard for him to hold onto the images of her as the Evil Queen that his storybook dictated when she'd looked so much happier than he'd ever seen her before. There had been something about how different she was now that just amplified how different everything was. Including him.

He knew her should hate her. But when he saw her the other day she'd just looked like his Mom. The woman that let him lick the bowl and spoon when she baked. And who made up silly little rhymes that didn't actually mean anything or even really rhyme to help him ace his tests at school. She asked him about his day all the time. And even when he blew her off she still asked.

Now with his house gone the last tie he had to anything that was real had been taken away from him. Again.
"It doesn't matter," he sniffled as he swiped his arm across his eyes to soak up the last remaining tears. "She was evil anyway."

"I don't really know much of anything that happened before meeting you," Neal responded honestly. "Emma and I – we're not perfect. And we're just trying to figure out this whole parenting thing."

Henry glanced curiously at his Father. He knew he was right. He didn't know him or anything about his life. And right now he wasn't sure what that meant to him. All he knew was that his old life was gone. And he'd never felt so alone in his life.

"But I do know something about parents," Neal continued. He coughed a little and moistened his lips. "When I was only a little older than you, I made a wish to change things for me and my Papa. The fairies granted me passage through a portal for the both of us. I was sure that if we just left all of the magic behind us, we could start a new and better life."

The edges of his lips turned down as he remembered begging his father to come with him. And the heartbreak he'd felt as he stared into his Papa's eyes and knew that wouldn't happen.

He'd spent some time on the cold and lonely streets of England trying to figure out how he was going to live before meeting the Darlings. They'd taken him in for a while before Pan had come along and whisked him away to Neverland. That had also turned out to be a cold and lonely existence until he'd managed to make his way back into this world.

Meeting Emma had been a reprieve from the cold and loneliness that he'd felt on the streets as he did whatever he could to get by. But even that had ended with him once again alone and trying to figure out how to go about his life.

Like Henry, he'd once thought that he had all the answers that would solve all the problems as he saw it in his life and everyone else's around him. If only everyone would listen to him then they'd all be so much happier.

It had taken him a long time to realize that what other people did were out of his control. He could only control himself. Once he'd accepted his responsibility in how his life was turning out instead of using pointing fingers as a scapegoat, his life had actually taken a turn for the better.

"My Papa is the Dark One. I know what he does. I always have. And though that doesn't sit well with me – I had to just let go of trying to control what that meant. The things he does doesn't change the fact that he's still my Papa," he broke off as he looked out thoughtfully across the water before turning to the boy who'd finally fallen silent beside him. "And I still love him."

Henry's eyes widened in shock as he processed through what he was being told. He still loved his Dad even after knowing all his dark secrets? He wrapped his arms around himself as the wind he hadn't felt before began to nip into him. He hadn't even thought of that as an alternative for himself.

His Mom was the Evil Queen. That was it. If he didn't want to be evil then he had to be against her. Right?

Or so he'd believed. And even been encouraged to believe by his Grandparents and everyone else in the town. But if his Dad still loved his Papa even after all he knew then maybe - . His heart leapt as he felt something akin to hope began to spring inside of him. Maybe - that meant he didn't have to feel guilty about wanting his own Mother back.

For the first time in a long time, he felt a warmth build inside him as he realized that maybe he and his Dad weren't so different after all. "We're moving," Henry told his Dad. Though he was looking
back out at the water he kept watch from the corner of his eyes. "We're going to move to be near Emma's baby."

Neal bobbed his head as he processed this information. "Good for her," he said as he began to understand that Emma had obviously made a choice for herself.

Since they'd become reacquainted she'd been angry, guarded and standoffish with him. But he still recognized a lost soul when he saw one. He knew wanting to find her parents had been something that plagued her in her younger years. And if she was willing to give that up to follow the mother of her baby across the world then so be it.

He knew that she and he would never be what they were before. They had been too young, dumb, and inexperienced despite all that they'd gone through in their lives. 10 years brought with it alot of hurt but also learning and growing. He would miss her and Henry. But he would never begrudge her happiness. It was the thing that he wished for her the most.

At the hurt and confusion he saw on his son's face he shook his head and grinned. "I meant for Emma. Not for us."

He clapped his hand on his shoulder, "You don't have to worry. There's planes, trains and automobiles in this land. There is no such thing as too far away anymore. I promise you - no matter where you go - I will always be no farther than a phone call away."

He watched his son give a small smile for the first time in a long time before noticing that the boy was starting to shiver. He pulled off the jacket that he wore over his jogging gear and placed it around the boy. "Come on," he stood and straightened out his clothing. He brushed sand from his clothes before turning to the young boy, "Let's get you back home." He held out his hand to his son and waited for him to grab ahold.
"I can't believe it's almost over."

Emma glanced over at Ruby as she finished her last swig of Evil Princess with a twist. She shrugged, "that's what I like about it."

Ruby sighed loudly before turning around in the middle of the apartment and gesturing all around her, "but it seems like you just got here. And now you're leaving again?"

Emma tossed her head back and groaned. This was supposed to be a girls' night. Even if it was only the two of them. It was supposed to be time for her to have some peace and relaxation and just chill out with – well - pretty much the only friend she's ever had.

The past few days had been nothing but chaos. Her parents called themselves throwing an "intervention". They'd secretly invited half the town over when she and Henry showed up for their weekly family dinner that Snow had cornered her into going to.

She'd had to face down the masses (again) and let them know that she wasn't going to allow this town to come in between her and her family. She was moving to be near her baby and they'd have to find some other deity to bow down to. But since they now lived in a democracy they might want to rethink bowing down to anyone.

Snow had ended the sickening night in tears while accusing her of breaking her heart. David had glared at her as he yelled at her for upsetting her Mother. The nosey townfolk had basically watched the whole embarrassing display while stuffing their faces and taking note of the juicy gossip to spread around. And she'd had to hurry out of there with Henry before things got even more insane than they already had.

When Neal – who for some reason her Mother kept including as 'family' - had caught up to her outside and offered to take Henry for the night, she'd jumped on the chance. Thankfully, Ruby had stood by her side and the two were drinking the mess of the night away. Now this.

"Ruby," she said a bit more sharply than intended. When Ruby jumped she ran a trembling hand through her hair before continuing, "You know the deal. I need to be near my daughter. And honestly, I'm looking forward to it. This place has just become a large prison filled with cartoon characters. I feel like I'm in Roger Rabbit. It just doesn't feel like home," she shook her head sadly.

"You mean since Regina left," Ruby threw her friend a smiled filled with knowing.

Emma snorted into her drink, "Regina's made her general loathing of me clear. Or have you forgotten the poison was actually meant for me?" She frowned down into her drink as her mind played over the latest dig from Regina's email. She still wasn't sure what she meant by not wanting her to be a part of Blue but it still stung nonetheless.

Once she'd calmed down she'd typed out an apology for being an ass earlier. She knew she had overreacted but knowing she'd missed something else in her daughter's life had struck a raw nerve with her abandonment issues and fears of being unwanted.

Ruby plopped back down onto the sofa beside her. Emma's eyes were drawn to her best friend's long legs. In another life – she could see her and Ruby being together. But in this one – Regina ruined
Ruby leaned toward her as she spoke which drew Emma’s eyes downward to the expansive amount of cleavage she normally showed. It was then she realized she'd made the drinks way too strong and immediately put hers down.

"You forget we've got our memories back," the brunette tapped the side of her head. "I remember everything. Especially having almost daily therapy sessions with you while you wailed on about the secret girlfriend."

Emma scrunched up her face, "well that cat's out of the bag now."

"Doesn't mean it's over," Ruby singsonged. "Anyway, aren't curses like foreplay to you two?"

Emma decided for the sake of their friendship that it was time to shut this entire thing down. "I'm cutting you off," she grabbed Ruby’s drink out of her hand and collected the pitcher along with her own glass before making her way into the kitchen. She quickly rinsed everything out and put it all into the dishwasher before turning to the littered bar.

"For the record," she took all the juices and placed their caps back on before adding them to the paltry stock in the fridge. "I'm doing this mostly for my baby. I'm her Mom and she needs me. But also for Henry. He's as miserable here as I am. Hopefully once he's around his sister more they'll be able to bond."

"This town is toxic to everyone here. You can see for yourself the way everyone seems almost happy to try and return this place back to the Enchanted Forest. Seriously how happy could you all have been bowing down to a King and Queen?"

Ruby sucked in her cheek before grimacing, "well …"

"But if you want to really be honest this is for me as much as for my kids. I hate this place," Emma emphasized her words by grabbing the sponge and scrubbing the counters furiously. "I've missed almost everything with my baby. I get pictures and emails about her while she grows up without me."

Tears began to well in her eyes as the hurt she’d tried to keep squashed inside her began to spill out. "I missed everything a Mom should have. Like fighting over baby names, talking about all the things that were going on with your partner or the baby, or even just feeling her kick for the first time. I only ever got to feel that right before she came sliding out. I even missed her first smile," she said sadly as she shredded the sponge in her hand while her tears made their way down her cheeks. "I refuse to miss anything else."

"Oh Em," Ruby glided over with her arms out. She pulled her friend into her embrace, "I know. And I'm sorry."

The blonde took a deep breath but returned the hug as she was glad for the comfort it provided her. She buried her head in the crook of her friend's neck as she let the tears just go, "I don't care if it's selfish. I want to be with my kids. Not stuck in a town that treats me as if I'm a performing animal. There to amuse when they want entertainment, hero worship when they want to feel the glory of the 'Savior' and always on pins and needles so their feelings don't get hurt in anyway. I'm not even a real person to them."

She pulled away from the embrace and tossed the sponge onto the counter behind her before making her way back out into the living room and slumping down onto the sofa. "With Henry, I wasn't able
to feel anything," she sniffled and grabbed some tissues from the box beside her. Ruby came over and it did and didn't surprise Emma that she was able to do so graciously.

"I had to pretend he wasn't even there growing right inside me. Because I knew he could never really be mine. There was no way I could give him a happy life," she wiped at her eyes before tossing the tissue and grabbing more.

"But now I have a chance to be with my daughter. And I'm not going to waste it away just because the people in this town want me to be their one woman minstrel show."

Ruby put her arm around her friend and pulled her into her side. Emma's head dropped onto her shoulder and she placed a kiss on top of it. She heaved a sigh, "I get that. And I'm sorry if you thought I was trying to get on your case again." Emma fluttered her lashes and gave her puppy dog eyes to let her know that she was forgiven for upsetting her. She batted her lashes at her, "It's just – I'm really going to miss you. We all are."

Emma tried and failed to hide her grin as she wrapped her arm around her bestie's waist. "I'm going to miss you too." They sat in silence for a while lost in their own thoughts before she held up a finger in warning, "But you're the only one I'm allowing to come and visit us after we're settled."

MF

Regina slumped against the closed door with relief. She opened her closed eyes and grinned as she caught sight of her family hovering in the foyer before her. "Thank you all," she held her arms out as she walked over to her Mother and sisters. Lola jumped up and down excitedly not wanting to be left out.

Abby rubbed her back and squeezed her extra hard as she squealed out, "it was our pleasure."

"I have to admit," Cora nodded her head as she pulled back from the group hug. "We all did really well," she said with a pointed look over at Hades who had thankfully managed not to make too much of an ass of himself.

Merida had come and spent almost 4 hours interviewing each family member and going through the house with them. She'd brought Raphael – who'd been dubbed Fae by Hades due to his slightly fairy tale impish appearance and huge dimpled smile – along with her for the homestudy. Her family had fallen in love with the boy the same as she had and she knew that she'd made the right choice. Fae (seemed it was going to stick and she had to admit it fit him well) himself had seemed happy to be doted on by so many people. His eyes had been as wide as saucers as Regina showed him the room that would be his and explained that they were going to fix it up however he wanted it.

Even Blue seemed excited to have the boy around. Regina had even managed to snap a pic of him holding her on the sofa. He'd been placing a kiss on her head and she was gazing up at him dazzled by the young boy already.

Regina's grin practically split her face. "She said as soon as she processes the paperwork he should be cleared to move in as little as a few weeks."

"Well," Hades intoned, "It's a good thing you people are getting the hell out of here soon. Who knew a mansion could ever be full?"

Zelena smacked him across the chest, "No one's going anywhere. We're a family. And this will always be home."

Right at that moment the doorbell dinged. Regina held a finger in the air, "Right on time. That must
be the architect."

"You mean your little crush," Abby said under her breath.

Regina threw her a withering glare and caught a hold of Lola's collar before pulling the door open. "Good afternoon," she said maybe a tad too loudly. She was still grinning from ear to ear. She hadn't been this happy or fulfilled since – well she didn't know when.

Her architect, Mieke Boehrs, beamed at her with her own face-splitting grin as she stared at her hostess with a twinkle in her large blue eyes. "Good morning to you too," she said with a thick German accent as she stepped into the house and gave her a hug. When she pulled away she noticed that they were not alone. "To all of you," she dipped her head in greeting.

Regina laughed nervously, "Sorry. We just finished up the homestudy with the adoption agency and we were having a happy moment. You pulled up in the middle of the celebration."

"Ah," she nodded in understanding as Lola pushed her head into her hand making sure that she wasn't ignored. Mieke had come highly recommended to her when she'd first started her job and everyone had been impressed with her speed and efficiency while getting the job done. During the late nights over planning and overseeing the construction work they'd gone from talking about work to developing a genuine friendship. The two had racked up hours of time chatting and getting to know one another better.

Though she enjoyed her company there was nothing romantic going on between the two of them. Unfortunately that didn't stop people from making comments about the two of them which drove Regina nuts. She'd just given birth to another woman's child for goodness sake.

An awkward silence began to grow before Regina held out her arm to sweep her family to the side. She blushed with embarrassment at the weirdness of them all crowded into the foyer of the house. "Please come in and make yourself comfortable. We have a lot to go over."

Mieke grinned and gaped openly while her blue eyes followed the swing of the brunette's hips as she led everyone through the house and out onto the back terrace. She'd planned ahead and thought lunch outside would be nice since it was a rare sunny day in England. The weather had cooperated nicely with their appointment and it was neither too cold nor too warm. She'd prepared the meal beforehand so everything was already to be spread out and devoured.

She filled Lola's bowl up first so she wouldn't be a nuisance and beg as they tried to enjoy their meal before washing her hands and taking her seat. The talk around the table was mostly about Fae and his homecoming. Everyone was happy about the boy's upcoming adoption and placement and eager for him to join their family.

Hades even leaned back in his chair and beamed proudly with himself as he announced, "I can feel the shift of testosterone in the air already."

Once the meal was finished, Cora and Zelena handled the light clean up as Regina made her way upstairs to get Blue up from her latest nap. Mieke brought out her swatches, notes, and her laptop as she gathered everyone's input on the new house and showed them the latest mockups.

Regina grabbed her nursing blanket and headed back out to enjoy the day as she and the rest of the family finalized their contributions to the new home that they would spend their weekdays in. By the time Blue had been burped and was on her way to her next marathon of napping, Mieke was on her way to wrapping up for the day.
By this time, Zelena and Abby had already gone down for much needed naps while her Mother had gone out to do a bit of shopping. Fred and Hades had gotten bored and taken off an hour ago to do whatever it was that men do.

"Are you sure that you won't stay for dinner?" Regina asked. With all the work they'd done recently together it wasn't an unusual request. Outside of the work aspect they were good friends. "You know you're always welcome."

Mieke paused putting away her things to think it over. She scrunched up her nose thoughtfully in a way that Regina had come to find adorable. She shook her head before going back to packing up. "Since someone refuses to abscond away with me for the weekend, I really should get going. My little brother has a recital coming up so I'm spending the weekend back home," she referred to her native Germany. From London, the train ride alone was a little over 4 hours. "If I leave now I can make it home by dinner."

Regina chuckled and waved away the offer. Mieke had made her interest in her obvious practically since their first meeting. But she had made it clear from the start that her mind was still with another. The blonde accepted the excuse but still flirted with her shamelessly.

Regina walked her to the door as Lola trailed along behind them. After opening the door, Mieke bent down and gave Lola some brisk petting which the pup closed her eyes to soak in.

"Well stay safe. And I hope you have a good time back home," Regina gave the blonde a large smile.

Before there was time to react in any way, Mieke stood up quickly. Before she realized what was going on, Regina felt an arm wrapped around her waist pulling her in close and her lips were captured by another's.

At first she gasped and her eyes widened as she took in the playful twinkle in blue eyes. Mieke was obviously an experienced kisser and it had been a long time since she'd been in someone's arms. After a second she relaxed and closed her eyes as she just let it happen.

"Don't look so scared," the blonde told her with a cheeky grin as she pulled away. "Sometimes a kiss is just a kiss." She waved as she turned back forward and made her way out to her car.

Regina ran her tongue over her lips thoughtfully as she watched her go. She knew that Mieke found her attractive. And she'd have to be blind or a liar to deny that she was a beautiful woman. Though she worked hard to keep Daniel at the forefront of her mind, she'd be lying if she said during that kiss he'd been on her mind.

Mieke got into her car and pulled away as Blue gave a small whine and stretched in her sleep. Regina bounced her as she closed the door and made her way up to her room. After placing Blue in her crib, she placed a light kiss up on her forehead. She leaned over the crib and watched her daughter sleep before whispering, "Mummy's not sure what's going to happen next. But no matter what you, me, and Fae will all be together."

She took in the way her daughter's cheeks dimpled as she grinned in her sleep. Though she tried as hard as possible not to think of her, Blue looked so much like her blonde Mother in that moment there was no way Emma's imprint could be denied.

Regina rolled her eyes before going into her en suite. She brushed her teeth and washed up before changing into a light shift. As long as Blue was down she might as well get a nap in herself. She climbed into bed and grabbed her laptop. After opening up her email she rubbed absently at Lenny's
head and cheeks as she stared at Emma's reply to her last email.

I'm sorry.

It's just I miss her so much that it physically hurts. And I don't want to miss anymore time with her. I know you've moved on and I'm not trying to interfere with it. But Henry and I have a right to be in Blue's life.

Once Lenny had gotten all the cuddling he could stand, he moved to his usual spot at the foot of the bed for his nap. Lola quickly placed her head in her lap for her cuddle time as Regina's mind worked over the days events.

She'd enjoyed the feel of being in Mieke's arms. And of having the younger woman's lips on hers. It had been a long time since she'd had either.

She wasn't completely ready to say goodbye to Daniel. Though she hadn't been back to the Nether for some time that didn't mean she'd given up either. But the possibility of there being more for her than her longing after a love that was literally dead and gone sent tingles throughout her being.

Still - there was Emma to consider. Not in a romantic way. Her taking Henry from her made that impossible. There was just no realistic way for her to ever trust her again.

But Emma was going to be a part of her life from now on whether she wanted it or not. And they had to figure out a way forward if parenting together was going to work.

After pushing Lola away she pulled her laptop to her and quickly tapped out a message:

Blue's shots and checkup are scheduled for next week. If you want to come then you're welcome to.

It may not be much. But it was a start. She sent the message before closing up her laptop. She climbed off the bed and then between the sheets. She snuggled down low as she stretched out fully. Lola stretched out in empty space beside her making the King sized bed less lonely.

For the first time in a long time, her last thought wasn't of Daniel. Instead a different pair of blue eyes twinkled up at her before the oblivion of sleep pulled her in.
CHAPTER 34

“Miss Swan?”

Regina had always known that though she hated it when she called her that outside of bed, inside bed it was a turn on. “Mmm,” she moaned as she reached out with her eyes still closed. Her body instinctively sought out the warmth she was craving as she felt herself make contact with the familiar body before yanking it towards her and engulfing it in her arms. The soft curves fit against her perfectly.

“Miss Swan?!?!?” she heard a voice from far away crying out to her that she ignored completely. It was warm and comfy in her sleep fog. Regina was always miffed at her. But this was always her reward.

She flipped the slender body in her arms until she was lying half on top of her. There was a gasp but again she ignored this. Then she wedged her leg in between two slender thighs being sure to press hard into the apex. As her breathing increased her nipples went tight making her own arousal clear. She pressed herself firmly against the hip bone that met her wet core at just the right spot.

“Em – mmm - !” Regina’s outcry was cut off by lips that crushed her own. At first she was frozen in shock. She had come to pick Emma up for Blue’s checkup. It was almost 2 am their time so she wasn’t surprised at finding the blonde asleep. Nor at how much it took to wake the blonde up.

She’d always been a heavy sleeper. This was nothing new. Henry was unfortunately the same and Blue had also picked up this habit. She’d never complained since it tended to act in her favor. Especially with Blue being an infant and her being a Mom with a full-time job living in a house full of people.

Still she had been surprised when she’d been yanked down to the sofa. Then her own body began to respond to this onslaught. Her breathing sped up, moisture began to gather between her legs and her nipples began to harden. She knew she needed to stop this fast. But when she felt a tongue snake out she couldn’t help the moan that escaped her lips allowing the intruder access to the moist recesses.

It was when she felt hands squeeze at her tender breasts and activate her let down reflex that she came to her senses. Pushing frantically at the rock-hard body she wrenched her mouth free and cried out, “Emma?!?!?”

Emma jerked back, blinking hard at the sharp tone. She was confused why her hands were wet. As her mind raced to catch up with her eyes, awareness came flooding back in as she realized what she
was doing.

She’d fallen asleep on the sofa as she’d waited for Regina to come and pick her up for Blue’s appointment. Hearing Regina’s voice in her sleep muddled mind had brought her back to the good old days of the two of them together. Now Regina was squirming in her arms desperately trying to get away from her.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry,” she cried out embarrassed as she began to help detangle their flaying limbs. She quickly moved to the end of the sofa and sat staring straight ahead in shock willing her traitorous body to calm down.

Regina huffed as she rose again back to her feet ignoring the throbbing ache that had begun between her legs. She began to fluff out her hair and straighten out her clothes as best she could under the circumstances while glaring at Emma. The blonde was sitting straight as a rod and blinking repeatedly while still appearing lost in space. “If I wanted to be manhandled, I’d ask.”

She pulled her wet top away from her body as she clucked her tongue. She’d now have to change clothes putting them behind for their appointment. She hated being late.

“Are you ready?” her voice was filled with barely controlled anger as she fought to get her own body under control. She hated that Emma had managed to slip past her defenses so easily. And as always she was sitting there like an adorable idiot completely oblivious to what she’d done. To counter her confused emotions she barked out with as much harshness as she could muster, “You’ve made us late enough as it is.”

Emma sprang up and into action, “Sorry, sorry.” She ran into the kitchen and quickly washed her hands as the fog broke from her sleep addled brain and she finally understood why they were wet and sticky. Regina was breastfeeding. Squeezing her breasts must have hurt her. She shook her head and pushed the thought away as she began to gather the things she’d collected for her trip today. She’d already packed a bag after she’d sent Henry to stay with his grandparents for the next few days. She threw it over her shoulder as she looked around making sure she’d missed nothing.

An hour earlier she could barely contain her excitement at being reunited with her daughter again and being allowed to have a routine Mom moment when accompanying her to her checkup. Now she was mortified at what had just happened. She had no idea how she – let alone they - were going to get through the next couple of days being in close proximity of one another.

“You’ll need a coat. And not that god awful hot red mess either,” Regina pointed out. After a quick glance down she added, “Shoes would be nice also.”

Emma snapped out of the trance and got to work slipping into her boots before turning to the coat rack to grab up her coat. As she slips into it she asks, “what was it you wanted to talk to me about?”

Her plan was to spend a few days in England looking for a place for her and Henry. She’d already perused some of the classifieds and had seen a few that had potential. England was so much more expensive though so she was gritting her teeth at the thought that she’d might have to resort to cramming them into a studio. Or that had been her plan until Regina mentioned she had an idea she wanted to run by her on that front.

Regina looked a little surprised, then a little bashful as she bit her lower lip. “I say we table that for later,” she turned away from Emma’s confused stare. She made a turn around the place, “are you sure you have everything?”

Emma checked her bag again while ticking off her mental list, “clothes, check, undies, check,
“toothbrush, check, toothpaste, check, hairbrush, check, Blue’s carrier, check,″ she finished off with a smile. “I’m ready,″ she grinned over at Regina. The next thing she knew she was flying through space and her stomach was protesting. She clutched at it as she waited for the room to stop spinning beneath her feet, “I’m sure I’ll never get used to that.” She hated poofing.

Looking around she realized they were in a bedroom. Obviously Regina’s bedroom judging from the overabundance of purple, black, and silver. It was less austere than her usual décor. Softer somehow, like she herself now was. But still had a tasteful elegance about it. She was so busy gaping at what was in front of her, she completely missed what was behind her until she heard a delightful gurgle.

They were not alone. She grinned broadly as she skipped over to where Regina’s Mother sat on the bed cradling her baby in her arms. She dropped her bag onto the floor and with a smile, a scrunch of her forehead, and inclined head she silently asked for permission before pulling her daughter into her arms. Her grin was impossibly wide as she pulled her close, “Oh my baby. Mommy’s missed you so much.” She inhaled deeply that baby scent she’d been missing then chuckled as Blue began to burrow herself into her shoulder.

Emma felt tears sting her eyes. It seemed like it had been forever since she’d seen her Swan Princess, “I think she’s gotten bigger,” she said to Cora.

“Of course she has. It’s what baby’s do,” Regina said as she crouched down to a little boy that Emma had missed when she’d scanned the room previously. He had been lying on the floor in front of a desk with some paper and colored pencils.

“Who’s that?” she blurted out curiously.

“This,” Regina announced as the boy put his things away then stood up and walked into her arms. She rose from her crouch and turned with the boy in her arms, “this is my son, Rafael. But we call him Fae.”

Emma’s mouth fell open as she blinked rapidly repeatedly. She was sure she’d heard wrong. Once her senses returned to her she croaked, “son?”

“Son,” Regina nodded firmly as she watched the blonde process the information. For Emma things tended to take a while to sink in. She kissed Fae’s temple before setting him back down and ignoring Emma who was still playing the part of slack jawed fool. “I was accosted,” she threw a glare in Emma’s direction before continuing. “I’m going to have to change really fast,” she motioned to her top with two embarrassingly visible stains from where her milk had let down. “We’ll be just a few more minutes. Then we’ll have to fly out of here. Would you please help them with their coats and into the car Mother?”

“Of course dear,” Cora’s eyes twinkled with mirth as she reached for her grandson’s hand before turning to Emma. “Come along Miss Swan.”

Emma frowned but didn’t correct her. She instead scooped up her overnight bag and threw it over her shoulder while following her out the door and downstairs. But she couldn’t stop herself from glaring back at Regina.

Regina stood with her hands on her hips glaring back at Emma until they were out of sight before turning to her closet and looking around for something to wear. She tsked as she saw how far behind she was with her household tasks. She barely had anything clean to wear.

She had never had any previous problems working full-time while being a full-time Mom. But
Storybrooke had been frozen while Henry had been in his infant stage. Going to work wasn’t even necessary to be honest. But she still managed to put in her 8 hours a day anyway. But this time around, Mothering while working was wearing her out. She was so far behind in her housework.

Zelena had help come in for the gardens and the house. But Regina had always kept her house clean on her own. She’d insisted her room not be touched. Now she was rethinking that decision.

After sifting through the clothes left hanging in her closet instead of crammed into her hamper, she finally managed to come up with a blouse and tight skirt. She threw them on the bed as she quickly got out of her sopping wet clothes while heading to the en suite. She grabbed a towel and wet it before wiping at her chest and belly. She had just fed Blue before going to pick up Emma. But her squeezing her breasts had caused another let down leaving her with no choice now. She was going to have to pump again to keep from ruining her clothes.

She put on one of her nursing bras before slipping into her skirt. She put her arms into the blouse but left it hanging open as she grabbed her breast pump and attached it. Once she felt the unpleasant squeezing begin she grabbed her purse and headed downstairs.

She remembered to grab her breast pump bag, an ice pack, storage bags, and a few bottles as she made her way out to the car. Emma was standing in the open door playing with Blue who sat in the backseat of Regina’s new car while her Mother helped Fae get strapped in. She’d kept her classic Mercedes while splurging for an upgraded new one to haul the kids around in. She had to be honest, though she loved her car, the new safety and luxury upgrades were amazing. She really should’ve made the upgrades to Storybrooke’s antiquated systems years ago. But she had liked the old fashioned feeling of her little town.

Emma looked up in surprise then blushed as she saw Regina heading toward them with a breast pump in her hand and her blouse hanging wide open. Her face turned red as she remembered why she’d had to change.

“Oh Blue’s - ,” Regina made to turn back toward the house.

“Her bag is right here dear. Already packed and ready to go,” Cora pointed to the space just below where her car seat sat next to Emma’s bag.

“Thank you Mother,” she smiled at her before giving her a hug. “But we really have to go,” she whispered loudly.

Cora nodded and pulled back after giving her a kiss on the cheek. She leaned in and kissed her grandson before closing the door. She walked to the side as Regina ushered Emma into the car and watched as they climbed in. The sight of the family together made her feel warm inside.

She’d cost Regina a lifetime worth of love. All she wanted now was to see her daughter’s embracing their happiness. And she had a feeling that whatever had gone on with Miss Swan and her daughter was far from over.

The drive was silent at first. Emma’s eyes kept bouncing all around the car. She resembled a cartoon with her facial expressions bouncing all over the place along with her emotions. She would look at her daughter and become enraptured as a grin broke over her face, then gape at the boy in overwhelming confusion, then she’d turn back to Regina hurt and angry. When it became too much for her she burst out, “Why?” she demanded as she glared at her ex-lover.

Regina glanced behind her at her children. She smiled lovingly first at Blue who was starting to snore lightly in her rear-view mirror. Then she twisted her body and looked at her soon to be son.
His head was bobbing slightly to the music coming from his iPad while he played a game on the tablet. He was completely unaware of the tensions that Emma had just stirred up. He glanced up and gave her a big smile as he caught her eye. She gave him a wink before turning back to the road, “he’s my son. I knew it the first moment I laid eyes on him. And he needed to be home with me and the rest of his family.”

“He’s perfect. Blue’s in love with her big brother already,” she grinned over at the blonde before going back to the road before her.

“She already has a big brother!” Emma screamed out.

Regina threw one of her patented death glares her way which made her flush from embarrassment. She checked to make sure her children hadn’t been bothered by the outburst. Blue was still snoozing. The girl could sleep through anything except apparently being 5 minutes late for a feeding. And Fae was bouncing his head to the beat of whatever he was listening to. Thankfully the earbuds were noise cancellation ones and he couldn’t over hear their conversation.

Emma inhaled deeply as she tried to control herself. She swept her hair behind her ears with shaky hands before muttering softly, “Sorry.”

Regina’s jaw and hands around the wheel had tightened as she realized this was going to be one of the many things that Emma wasn’t going to let go of. She braced herself to shut her down.

“Henry’s still alive you know,” she muttered in a voice dripping with sarcasm as she watched the scenery pass outside her window. They had passed through some nice countryside but were now entering what appeared to be a small downtown area. “And he’s fine by the way since you’re so invested in his wellbeing and all.” When she received nothing but continued silence she asked, “how in the hell are you expecting to explain this to him anyway?”

Regina huffed as she pulled the car into an open space. She put the car into park before turning to Emma her finger jabbing into her chest to emphasize her next words, “that is your problem.”

Chapter End Notes

**OK. I know alot of you have issues with the Regina/Henry situation. But if you remain patient with me I promise that there's more to the situation. So please give me just another couple of chapters and you'll know all. Thanks for reading!!!!**
They left the doctor’s office with grins on their faces. Of course both kids had passed their physicals with flying colors.

The pediatrician, Dr. Kelly Noyce, had been recommended to her from her ob/gyn. And the clinic was perfect for her because it was halfway between the school and their home. It was nice knowing that they had a regular doctor not far from home or work.

Regina appreciated that she was a nice woman but the doomsday scenarios she kept painting if the kids didn’t take their vitamins or get enough exercise was a bit much for her. Still, it was a relief to know that they were in the hands of someone who obviously loved her job, knew it well, and took what she did seriously enough to care that the kids were at their best.

Blue had almost tripled her birth weight which was amazing given her preemie status. Fae was doing well physically but they all worried about his selective mutism. Regina explained to the pediatrician that she was working with him at home and that he was seeing a therapist but trauma was something that took a long time to work through. There was no magic pill to make him deal with losing 2 parents in his short life or being in an apartment for at least a week with a dead body quickly. They just had to be patient and drown him with much needed TLC. After stopping by the in-house pharmacy to stock up on vitamins they were on their way back out the door.

As they strapped the two kids into their carseats Regina looked over at Emma uncomfortably, “we need to talk.”

Emma scowled as she straightened up, “o-kay.”

“I thought we’d do so over lunch,” the brunette suggested.

Emma gave her a lopsided grin, “I’m always up for food.” She swept her arm forward, “lead the way.”

Regina nodded and they both got back into the car. After making sure that Fae had all he needed in the back and that Blue was comfortable she put on her D&G sunglasses. Then she put the car into drive and took off.

They drive was a pleasantly silent one and it wasn’t long before they were pulling up at the school. There was nothing to identify the school yet but Regina still glanced nervously at Emma as she waited for the gates to open up.

They drove down the main drive and continued down the road past the school proper. They kept driving as they passed the stables before pulling up at a small house that was back beyond them. “We’re here,” Regina announced before climbing out of the car.

Emma looked around not really caring one way or another. It had been hours since she’d last eaten and her stomach was starting to protest. She became grouchy when her blood sugar ran low.

“I thought we were going to eat,” she whined.

“We will,” Regina opened her door and began to extract Blue while motioning for Fae to get himself out of his safety harness. The boy unhooked the latches and climbed out of his car seat then scooted
around Blue’s carseat to leap from the car down to the ground. She ruffled his hair and grinned at him as she closed the door behind them.

Emma hurried out of the car and around it to swoop up Blue. She grabbed up her baby and heaved a deep sigh. Holding her baby always made everything else melt away into nothing. The baby seemed to exude a peaceful air that she was shamelessly addicted to.

“So this is the mudroom,” Regina explained as she opened the door of the cottage. She turned on the lights as they walked further inside. “And here’s the kitchen,” she wept an arm around the large room. The floorplan included an open kitchen area that had a breakfast nook on one side of it that overlooked the lake out back. The open floorplan allowed you to see into the dining room which was a decent sized room that opened up onto the living/family room. Though it wasn’t large, it was still cozy.

Emma looked around not really caring one way or another. She just really wanted to go ahead and get something into her belly. She bounced walked around with Blue not really feeling one way or another about any of it. She did think it was strange that there was what looked to be a washing machine in the friggin’ kitchen. Other than that it really held little to no interest for her.

“And here’s the stairs which lead up into the bedrooms,” Regina ushered her forward. They walked up a narrow stairway that brought them out onto the landing. Regina pointed out the stairs that led from the 2nd floor down to the family room on the opposite end from where they stood.

“Here is the first bedroom,” she opened the door that led to a good sized room. “Then you have the loo before coming to the 2nd bedroom which has its own en suite,” she opened the doors of the rooms as she spoke and allowed Emma to poke her head inside. “And the master bath and bed are over here,” she grinned as she opened the door with a flourish and allowed Emma to look around.

The house was already fully furnished though most of it seemed old and dated. Still, it was better than a lot of the homes she’d been in aside from Regina’s old mansion of course.

“Awesome,” she deadpanned, “can we eat now?”

Regina shook her head and rolled her eyes as she resigned herself to dealing with Emma’s stomach problem knowing she’d get nowhere with the blonde until she was fed. “Fine,” she grabbed for Fae’s hand, “let’s go.”

She drove them back up to the school where she pointed out various things that she considered to be of interest as she led them inside and to the kitchen. She pointed out the high chair where Emma could sit Blue down and helped Fae into his booster seat before she started to lay out the lunch she’d already prepared for them.

Emma graciously waited for their host to rejoin them at the table before digging into the spread before her. Apparently, her stomach hadn’t gotten the message that they were in a new time zone because according to it she was past starving. Once Regina brought over and set down the vin brule for herself and Emma and mulled cranberry punch for Fae, she didn’t need to be told twice to help herself.

She’d begun to load up her bowl of chili with Mexican chocolate as Regina helped the boy with his meal. It still shook her to the core that she’d abandoned one child then went out and adopted another. She wasn’t even completely sure how that was even legal.

But she noted the way the boy’s face seemed to light up and sparkle around his new Mum. And that he seemed eager and gracious to being a big brother to Blue. He kept trying to grab her interest and
doing little silly things to make her gurgle and smile up at him. She wasn’t yet old enough to laugh yet but she seemed to glow at the boy and delight in his antics.

They ate quietly and were almost done with their meal when Abby walked (waddled) in.

Emma’s eyes went wide as she took in the other blonde’s waistline, “You’re huge,” she exclaimed. Then her cheeks went red from her outburst.

Regina laughed aloud as Abby threw her a mock glare, “yes well. I am growing a human being you know.”

Abby joined the small group as they moved on from the main meal to sweets and tres leches hot chocolate. Before Regina had a chance to explain to her she hadn’t gotten there yet she turned to Emma, “I hope you liked the cottage. The architect should be along shortly. And you can talk to her about any changes you wanted to make.”

Emma was midchew with her cookie (which Regina informed her were called biscuits here) and in her surprise something happened to go down the wrong way. She thumped at her chest and coughed before gulping at her drink. “What?”

Regina expelled a deep breath and dropped her head, “we hadn’t gotten there yet.”

Abby scrunched her forehead, “sorry.”

The brunette rolled her eyes and waved her hand dismissively before turning to Emma, “If you’re really serious about moving here in the long term for Blue,” she glanced at her daughter before licking her lips, “then you’re going to need a visa to stay here for longer than a few months. And trust me work visas aren’t easy to get.”

Abby nodded her head, “just filing the paperwork for citizenship here has been murder for all of us. We had to fudge the dates to even get started on the process.”

Emma was still confused as to what any of this had to do with her but she knew it was best for her to wait patiently to find out.

“I brought Abby and Fred over to help me with getting the work my sister tasked me with done. But it is a huge endeavor. As you can see,” she pointed to Abby’s distended belly, “one that I’m going to soon end up handling alone. So - ,” she took a deep breath before finally getting to the point, ”we thought that since you were insistent on moving over here, the job will serve to help you get the official paperwork started. And the cottage is just the right size for you and your son with room for Blue when you take her for a few hours.”

Emma shrugged. This was basically a no-brainer. A place to live and a job already lined up? And on top of that she’d be able to be with her Swan Princess everyday, “’kay.”

“Well,” Abby beamed. “Let’s get you started on the paperwork,” she excused the two of them after nabbing a few biscuits.

Regina watched them leave with mixed emotions. She didn’t want Emma here. But she had to admit that she could be of help here in the long term. She turned to her son, “what do you think? Do you think having Emma and Henry here will be a good idea?”

True to form her son merely grinned and shrugged.

“You’re no help at all,” she nudged him slightly with her elbow. “You’d better be glad you’re so
The boy’s smile grew even bigger as he reached out and grabbed an extra biscuit for himself. He bit into it with a chuckle.

Regina knew she shouldn’t spoil him but hey … the kid had already had a hard life. She just wanted to make sure he knew to keep smiling and that his happiness with her wasn’t a betrayal to either of his parents. She pulled him into her arms and sat on him on her lap as she kissed the top of his head while putting her finger into Blue’s palm and smiling as she fisted it, “I think we’ll be okay here.”
I Got You

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

CHAPTER 36

"Okay my little prince. It's that time now," Regina wiped Blue's mouth after her feeding and burping. Fae gave her a long pout as he slowly got up from the floor where he'd been playing with Lola and Lenny. He just as slowly walked over toward the bed. Regina chuckled but didn't let it get to her. She'd been dealing with putting difficult kids to bed for a while. No matter how cute her son was she knew if she didn't cut him off now and make him lie down then he'd be impossible to deal with all day long tomorrow.

Both kids were bathed, brushed, and pajamaed. Now that Blue had her last feeding for the night they were both ready to be down.

"Come along little one," she patted the bed next to her. "Let's get comfy," she said as she transferred Blue to her bouncy chair where it faced her Mum and brother. She set it on low and allowed it to gently sway the baby back and forth as she collected the pillows and stacked them behind her.

She grabbed Fae and tickled him as she swung him up onto the bed. She plopped him down to the side of her and leaned down over him.

"Hey you," she whispered as she stared in awe at her soon to be son.

Fae gave a long exaggerated blink once in response to her. And the light shining out through his thick lashed eyes made her fall for the boy even more. The two had developed a pantomime since he still seemed to show no sign of speaking again on his own. Their therapist had warned her not to put too much pressure on him about the situation and his voice should return naturally on its own but she still would've loved to hear it for herself.

In the meantime, the whole family was taking classes in sign language. Even Blue was going to be onboard. Baby sign language was said to help improve verbal development and increase the bond between Mother and child. It also helped increase cognitive and emotional development.

Technically, his adoption hadn't been finalized yet. But since the only thing they were waiting on was the court date to make it official, the home was allowing him to spend the next few weeks with her as a foster child.

"Are you ready?" she asked after she helped him get snug between the sheets. Lola jumped up and made herself comfortable next to Blue. And Lenny wandered off until all the sappiness that was going on in his bed had calmed down. Then he'd take his rightful place on his thronelike cat bed that sat at the foot of the bed.

Fae nodded and looked up at her expectantly. She knew she was going to have to wean him to sleeping in his own newly decorated room but for now she really enjoyed having her children around her at all times. She gave him one last kiss to his forehead before turning to her nightstand. She grabbed the book that she'd put together for him.
Fae was going to be a member of the family and she'd already introduced him to some of her magics. He seemed to enjoy watching her fire play in her hands and the other small things she and her family had allowed him to see.

The book was a way of explaining who they were and how they came to be a family. It was basically the same as Henry's book. Except unlike the abridged version that Rumple put together, it explained all their history from the very beginning leaving nothing out. When Blue came of age she planned on getting her own copy to keep.

She glanced at her baby and saw that she was nearly out. Blue's long lashes were fluttering and Regina reached out and ran a hand through her wayward hair smiling at her baby fighting and losing her battle with sleep. "Now," she turned back to Fae who was patiently waiting for his story. She put on her glasses and leaned back against the pillows propped up at her back. She gathered him close underneath her arm and started to read, "Once upon a time there was a miller. He had no sons but he did have a daughter who ….

CF

Emma swiped the key card into the lock before opening the door with a flourish.

Henry strolled behind her with the same bored expression on his face that he'd been wearing the entire drive into town.

"Seriously kid? I spent a lot of money on this suite."

He gave her a thin-lipped smile, "It's good." He strolled over to the floor to ceiling balcony doors and opened them. He walked up to the railing and looked out. Though he was in the middle of another growth spurt the railing still met his chin.

Behind him Emma tipped the porter as she directed him which room to drop their bags of in. "Be careful out there," she called in warning.

After bidding them a nice day, the porter took his leave. She turned back towards her son. "So what do you really think?"

"It's the same as it was the last time I was here," he shrugged clearly unimpressed.

"The last time?" Emma said to herself as Henry plopped himself on the sofa and grabbed the remote. He began to flip through the channels looking for something interesting.

She'd had no idea there had been a first time. She'd been under the impression that Henry had never really left Storybrooke before coming to fetch her. Though it shouldn't have surprised her seeing as this was the hotel that Regina had taken her to on one of their excursions away from town when Henry had spent the weekend at some kid's house.

Since Storybrooke wasn't supposed to exist, she'd had to find a place outside of the town to get their passports and visas. She wasn't so oblivious as to not be able to recognize that the two of them were in a slump and needed some major changes to happen in their relationship in order to get their happy endings.

Henry had been shut down from her for a while. When they'd first come together they'd bonded over Regina not allowing them to be with one another. But after the curse broke, Henry was so thrilled about being a Charming and Emma was so confused by the entire situation that she'd pulled away.

But she was a Mother now. That meant putting aside her personal feelings to ensure that her child
had everything he needed.

"So, I looked into a few things," she waited for Henry to turn and focus on her before grinning and saying with as much enthusiasm as she could, "First we're going to order some room service. The drive here has been brutal. Then I thought we'd take a nap because tonight ...," she waited for him to show as much excitement as she had. Henry instead stared blankly at her. "Let's just say tonight, we party!" she cheered as she added a headbang to her arms that were waving above her head.

Henry wasn't amused. He wasn't a little kid and he didn't take naps. But breakfast had been pretty far away. The drive up here had taken hours and they'd only stopped twice for snacks and to stretch their legs. They were only here anyway because it was a step Emma had to take to be closer to her baby and leaving the only world they knew behind. "Sure," he shrugged.

Emma grabbed the hotel's room service menu and began to peruse it. The happy waitress looked really good but she decided to go with something healthier since what she had planned for tonight was going to really tank their blood sugars. She called in their order for 2 organic club sandwiches and waited.

Henry had gone from channel surfing to checking out the room as they waited for their meal. Emma continued to flip through the destinations guidebook that had been left on the table for them.

She'd done heavy research before getting there. She knew she wanted a place where she and Henry could just kick back and have fun. So she'd chosen a place that she already knew well but had never had the money to actually enjoy it the way she'd planned to this time around.

Regina's job offer had been a godsend. She honestly had no plans or wants to ever come back to this place again. And she would deal with the whole 'parents' thing later. There was always skype and visits if she ever got homesick though she doubted she ever would. Being with Blue and leaving her only made it clear that moving to be near her was the best option for her which meant it was best for their whole family.

They ate at the dining table with Emma pointing out things to hopefully pique Henry's interest and Henry just grunting or shrugging away any suggestion. After lunch they each went to their bedrooms. Emma immediately fell into a deep sleep while Henry played around with his phone while watching Harry Potter.

Upon awakening Emma practically jumped out of bed from excitement. The night she had planned for them was going to be awesome. She washed, brushed, and dressed quickly. Though she wanted to take more time to appreciate the luxurious bed and bath getting out and exploring the city took precedence.

After rounding up Henry and getting bundled into their coats, they were out the door.

They started the night with a stop for hot dogs at a cart that she had previously frequented. She pointed out a few of her old haunts as they quickly continued on their way to the real surprise she had lined up for him.

After a short subway ride where Henry got to know the joys of public transportation which is the only way to truly count yourself as a New Yorker, they arrived at their destination. "Tada!" Emma threw her arms out as she danced in front of the building that was every child's dream.

Henry gaped wide eyed up at what purported to be 3 floors of pure candy deliciousness. Dylan's candy bar was every kid's dream come true. That is right after Willy Wonka's Chocolate Factory.
"Right?" Emma nodded with a huge lopsided grin as she grabbed his hand and dragged him inside. They walked around for a while dazed at all the sweets that were right before their eyes. That was until Emma noticed the prices. Then she set down a budget for both of them.

After exploring all of the shelves and busting their budget twice over, the two of them ended their night over in the café. While Henry sat admiring his candy tattoos and oooing and aahing over his haul. They had chicken salads and shared an order of cheese fries which Emma reasoned would help soak up and counteract the sugar that was racing through their systems. Then they finished the meal off by sharing a s'mores best of both worlds.

It was the first time in a long time the two of them had just spent a day being silly and having fun. Emma really didn't want to end it on a bad note but knew there were a few things she needed to talk about with Henry.

"Soooo-," she began and waited for Henry to make eye contact with her. "Tomorrow we'll get the pictures and head to the office so that we can get our passports and visas. I think it'll be great to have a family photograph. Then after we get comfortable in our house we can take more with your sister."

Henry shrugged and went back to his dessert. He'd accepted that this was going to be his life. That didn't mean that he had to like any of it.

Emma had already explained that she would be working with Regina at her school though she'd left out the boring details. Honestly she wasn't completely sure what her job would be outside of assisting Regina. They'd worked together before so she foresaw no problems with this. But the pay was good, the free rooming couldn't be beat, and the time with her daughter would be priceless. She just knew it was going to work out great for her and their family.

"I need to talk to you about some of the changes you're going to see when we get there."

Henry started to slow down his slurping of the milkshake as he felt his stomach start to tighten. This entire thing was something he didn't exactly want to have anything to do with. But hey… he was just a kid. No one ever bothered to ask him anything about anything anymore.

Emma took a deep breath, "so –," she exhaled loudly. "See – what had happened was – Regina is adopting a little boy." Once Henry's face registered his surprise she went on quickly, "He's 3. And he's going to be Blue's brother. But no matter what you're going to be her oldest brother," she tried to put a cheery spin on the admission. "And no matter what it'll still be the 3 of us against the world. You know, like the 3 Musketeers," she gave him a cheesy grin.

Henry dropped the straw sat back against the brightly colored booth. For a minute he just sat staring into space. Then he grabbed his bag of candy and began to head off.

Emma sat stunned before she scrambled to catch up. "You don't want the rest of your ice cream?" she asked as she searched her pockets for a few dollars to leave as a tip.

"No. I just want to go - ," Henry had started to say home but then he had to stop. He had no home anymore. His Dad had told him that home was wherever his family was. He was now starting to doubt even having that anymore. He looked over his shoulder at Emma. "I just want to leave," he amended with a look so sad it had Emma silently cursing Regina all over again.

She threw her arm around the boy and pulled him close to her side. He was getting so tall she had to settle for her arm going around his waist since he now came up to just above her shoulder. "It's okay. I've got you."
Chapter End Notes

Yes I know this is heartbreaking stuff. But 'member ... it does get better.
Okay. I wanted to make something clear. Far be it for me to defend Henry or Emma in any way at any time. Trust. But this story isn't just about sticking it to them. It is about them facing the truth about themselves and their actions, forgiving themselves and others, learning to live with themselves, and figuring out how to move on. Even though I'm glad that there are more people who are opening up to the things that they've done being disgusting and in some cases deeply disturbing. A hate-for-all was never what I was encouraging. It just always confused me as to why people acted as if the show was great when these things were always the foundation of the show and no one ever acknowledged them. As a parent whose fostered and adopted hearing that Henry is the poster child for never adopting or fostering breaks my heart. And trust me I'd be on the same page if I thought that it was a possibility. But Henry is a special abomination who I have thankfully never had the misfortune of meeting. I've never seen the combination of stupid, entitled, with a lack of common sense or decency while exempting himself from the evil things that he does displayed by anyone anywhere. And I never want to! As I've said this story is about healing. Now that they've faced the ugliness inside and their honest contributions to it I hope to move on from here. It's still slim pickin's. But I do believe there is light on the other side for Henry and Emma.

And again thank you all for going on this journey with me. On a separate note - Please keep the comments coming! :D I love the debates! Also, you do realize that this show is nothing but a really shyte fanfiction of Buffy right? Someone hit it right on the nose when they said that it looked like a 14 year old girl's live journal. So for the person who thought that Regina had raped Graham I assure you that it was merely the shyte writing of the show. They were trying and failed to recreate Buffy telling Spike that she was just using him to feel something... anything. I'm not the only person who got that right?! And honestly- straight up real talk- it's also a white supremacist version of Buffy. I've never understood the love for any of the Charmings. But ignoring all the messed up things that Emma does in the name of the power of white which can do no wrong just horrifies me. Regina's supposed 'evils' pale in comparison against what the noble and righteous Whites have done and never been held accountable for to me.

If you're confused you might want to stop watching the show and start watching Buffy. I promise you the original was way better and should never have been touched IMO. I was drawn into the show because of the Buffy characters. But deeply disturbed and turned off by the way it was twisted into something Buffy was never meant to be. I turned to fanfiction to basically rage against the machine. Anyhew ... I'm off my soapbox. Hope you enjoy!**

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CHAPTER 37

The next morning it was a late start. It had taken forever to get Henry out of bed. Emma chalked it up to adolescence which seemed to be coming hard and fast for her son. Which again made her sad about the years they’d lost between them.

After a reasonable breakfast of eggs, tomatoes, mushrooms, spinach and toast the small family got
dressed up for their big day.

Emma wore a tight fitting blue dress and did her hair up in a coronet around her head. Henry wore a suit of his including a tie. He’d parted his hair on the side and swept the front to the back. On the outside, he looked fine. On the inside, he was a mess.

He didn’t really understand why any of this was so important. But Emma had insisted and he had no fight left in him for anything. So here he was.

Soon they’d be leaving the only place he’d ever known as home to go to a foreign place because of Emma’s baby. A baby he understood was supposed to be his sister. But he felt nothing when he looked at her. And he had no idea what being her brother even entailed.

He missed the way things used to be. The way things were with Emma when they were on the mission to bring down the Evil Queen. It was like the two of them were in on this huge secret. It had been fun to know that they were the good guys doing a heroic deed. But he also missed the way things were with his Mom before Emma came into the picture.

His life had taken a series of turns and twists that he never saw coming since the breaking of the curse. His Dad was in his life now but the happily ever after he’d imagined that long time ago when he’d first set out on his mission would clearly never be his.

Growing up with just him and his Mom, he’d spent a lot of time alone as an only child. It had sometimes been lonely when his Mom was stuck working or doing something else and couldn’t be with him. But it had never felt as bad as it did now. Now, even in a crowded room surrounded by his family he had an aching emptiness inside him that kept him from caring about much of anything.

Henry turned at the low wolf whistle he heard to find Emma grinning at him, “Hey handsome. You ready?” she called out from the doorway. “Let’s do this!”

Henry checked himself out in the mirror one last time making sure that he was presentable. He grabbed one of his monogrammed handkerchiefs his Mom had bought him and folded it into his suit pocket. He allowed Emma to fuss over his hair and even give him a hug and kiss before they turned to the door and headed out.

Emma had booked an appointment with a photographer that should take them about an hour. They needed portraits done for the passports. But she also wanted a family photograph. It was one of those foster kid fantasies that she would finally have the chance to make real.

Tears gathered in her eyes as she watched Henry sit for his portraits. And they threatened to spill over as the two of them sat for the family picture. Henry had glanced at her curiously but she’d covered it up by hugging him and declaring that it was just allergies that made her eyes shine brightly in the pics they proofed.

She paid for the photos then they went back to the hotel to change quickly before heading back out again for some lunch and sightseeing. She took Henry to the Statue of Liberty which was a necessity for everyone at least once in their life. The kid had been in a good mood and they’d both had fun goofing around about absolutely nothing. It was almost like in the good old days of the two of them together again.

The next day after a nice breakfast on the balcony they stopped by the photographers and picked up the portraits to use for their passports. Then they continued on to a post office to get the paperwork out of the way before they continued with on with their family vacation.
They walked into an almost empty post office to find a tall, dark haired guy reading a book. He was so deeply engrossed in the novel he didn’t even look up until the door gave a ding as it started to shut.

“Business slow these days eh?” Emma asked as she looked around.

The man gave them a sheepish smile. “Yeah it has been weird. I guess the internet is killing the reality star. He came and stood across the countertop from them, “so what can I do for you?”

“We’re here for our passports. We’re moving overseas as soon as possible,” Emma explained as she put her bag that carried their documents on the countertop.

“Ah,” he seemed impressed. “There are plenty of people coming in these days but not many going out. I think it might have something to do with being violated just to get on a plane nowadays.”

Henry scrunched up his face, “ew.”

“Eww is right little man,” the man whose nametag read Bernie nodded. “Now do you have the paperwork or did you need an application?” he asked politely as he put his book away.

Emma went through her bag and began to organize the items they would need to complete their applications. “I think we’re all set. I skipped signing the application just like they said online,” she said as she placed all the documents they needed on the desktop and waited.

“Alright,” Bernie began to sort the documents and applications into a couple of piles. He picked up Emma’s id, “I’ll just have to make a couple of copies of this.”

He put her ID in the copy machine and quickly made copies of the front and back. He walked back over to the desk and examined the paperwork. “What’s this?” he frowned as he lifted the paper that Regina had left Emma that gave her custody of Henry.

“Custodial papers,” Emma nodded.

“Only a judge can issue custody papers,” Bernie said as he noted the different names on the applications that Emma had already filled out while glancing up at her skeptically. “These aren’t even notarized.”

“My Mom doesn’t want me anymore;” Henry decided to pipe in. “So now Emma’s my Mom.”

Bernie looked startled at the declaration. Emma herself winced as she heard how horrible the comment sounded. She jumped in quickly hoping to smooth things over, “He was adopted before. But I’m his real Mom. And now I’m back,” she said uneasily as she wrapped an arm around her son. “Henry’s mine now.”

Emma started to feel sick as she watched a smile appear on Bernie’s lips while his eyes were saying something completely different. This wasn’t right. And she knew it. Her heart dropped into her belly as he excused himself.

She groaned aloud as she realized how what Henry had just said sounded. And she knew they were in big time trouble and needed to move fast. She couldn’t ever remember feeling as terrified as she did in this moment. Not even while facing down an actual dragon.

Her heart was pounding so loud she thought it would give her away as she leaned toward Henry and whispered, “Henry, I need you to take my keys and get into the car. Make sure you unlock my door as soon as you get in. I’m going to be right behind you,” she said as she stood watching Bernie on
the telephone throwing her an occasional dirty look.

“What?” Henry was confused. “Why? I thought we had to do more paperwork. I don’t understand - .”

“Damn it Henry,” Emma muttered as quietly as she could while trying to keep her cool as best she could. She plastered on a fake smile as Bernie’s eyes drifted over to her again. When he looked away she bent down to Henry’s eye level and gritted through her teeth, “I do not have the damned time for this. Now do what I said,” she thrust her keys at him forcefully.

Henry looked at her with hurt then anger. He whipped the keys from her hands and ran out the door.

She straightened and ran her shaky hands though her hair. Her heart felt like it was going to beat right out of her chest as she rounded the desk. She’d just grabbed up her ID and the copies from the copy machine when she heard Bernie end his call. She’d made it back to the other side of the counter and was halfway out the door when she heard Bernie return. “We had something important come up,” she threw over her shoulder as she hurried to the door. “We’ll come back later to finish this up,” she said as she bolted outside.

When she heard a “hey!” she went from a brisk walk to a run. She jumped into her car as fast as possible and locked and slammed the door behind her. She turned to Henry, “keys?” she held her hand out and waited for him to give them to her.

But Henry was angry and confused. Emma owed him some explanations for what had just happened, “what’s going on?” he demanded. “And why do you keep yelling at me? I haven’t done anything.”

“Give me the damned keys!” she yelled ignoring his whining. They seriously did not have time for this. If what she thought was going on truly was, they only had minutes to get out of there before the police showed up. And that was far worse than dealing with Henry’s defiance.

She snatched the keys out of his hands and peeled out of the parking space with a screech. She could smell the burning of rubber as she high tailed it out of the parking lot and away from the place as fast as she could.

Once she could no longer see the building in her rear view and she saw no police cars around she turned into a parking garage. She snatched the ticket out of the machine and then drove around and around until they reached the top floor.

When she saw the sky open up before her, she put the car into park. “Oh my God, oh my god, oh my God,” she kept moaning over and over as she tried to control her shaking. By this point, tears were streaming down her cheeks as her adrenaline began to wear off. Now that the imminent danger was over her nausea was returning. She opened the door and practically fell out of the car. “Oh my God!” she cried as she collapsed next to the car. She buried her head between her knees willing the sickness away.

Henry was scared as he watched his Mother fall apart in front of him. Today was supposed to be a good day for them. Another happy day like the one before. A day when it felt like they could finally be reaching a new normal that he could live with.

Emma had never raised her voice at him. She’d never even told him no before. He didn’t understand what any of this was even about. He just stared at her angry and hurt for the position it seemed she’d put them both in. He had no idea what was going on but he knew that he didn’t like this.
He turned his back on Emma as tears began to roll down his cheeks while he contemplated his life. He had no friends. At least before the curse he’d had some. And then after the curse broke everyone pretended to be his friend for a while. But then they’d remembered he was also the son of the Evil Queen and they’d turned their backs on him again.

His grandparents had been fun. But once Regina had lost interest in him it seemed they lost interest in him too. It was one thing to hurt the Evil Queen by stealing her son. It was another when she proved she could care less and disappeared. He’d seen their selfishness and the way they closed themselves off and thought they were better than everyone else firsthand and it sickened him that they’d been his heroes. Truthfully they barely seemed to care about Emma.

Now he had no one. Only his Dad seemed to understand him sometimes. And all he talked about was being back at home in his real life. With the occasional invitation for a visit to him when he remembered he existed.

He just wanted to be back home again. He wanted nothing more than to be his Mom’s little prince again and to fall back in her arms safe in the knowledge that this nightmare that had become his life was just that. But his life had been hell for so long that it was becoming harder and harder to remember the good times.

Emma was trying to get herself under control. They needed to get out of there. Hell, they needed to get out of town. But first she had to pull herself together.

She picked her head up and began to wipe away the stray tears. She turned and fumbled in her bag until she found some old restaurant napkins. She quickly mopped up her face and was blowing her nose when she noticed Henry had his back turned to her. His shoulders were shaking and she could hear the slight squeals from him trying to cry quietly.

“Oh Henry,” she climbed into the car then thought better of it. Instead she got back out and walked around the car. She pulled his door open and tried to reach out to him but he jerked away. “Henry -?” she asked confused as she dropped into a squat.

“I want to go home!” he yelled out as he turned to face the front of the car trying to put as much distance between the two of them as possible. “I hate being here and I want to go home,” he cried out even as he couldn’t figure out what or where he meant by home.

Emma nodded and again tried to reach out to touch her son. This time he didn’t flinch but he didn’t exactly welcome her touch either. “We will. I promise we’re going to go straight home after we get our things. I think it’s best we get out of here as soon as we can.”

She reached into her glove compartment and pulled out her stash of restaurant napkins. She tossed her used ones in the plastic bag she kept as a trash can underneath the dashboard as she started to clean up his face. “I’m not sure who all that guy called. I’m guessing he was talking to the police.” Henry’s head jerked around at this and his face registered his confusion over the situation. She rubbed his arm to comfort him, “It’s okay. They don’t know where we’re staying or anything. I just think we need to get out of here as soon as possible.”

“Why? What’s going on?” Henry croaked still lost and honestly a little scared. He still was not understanding why Emma had just had a breakdown. Or why she’d started yelling at him for doing nothing.

Emma shrugged as she handed him the napkins to finish cleaning his face. They were both still crying but the tears were drying up. “The custody papers. I guess we have to get ones signed by a judge. I’m not really supposed to have you,” her heart broke as she realized the truth behind the
Henry’s breathing became labored as he stared at her. Her fear had transmitted itself to him even though he had no idea why. “Why were you yelling at me?” he demanded to know still not appeased by her answers. “I didn’t do anything.”

She held up her hand to him to stem his tirade. Henry had a bad habit of taking control of situations and never letting things go. Now and here was seriously not the time. “Look we need to go and get our things while we still can. I’ll just have to get this figured out later.”

Henry caught the deflection and it was doing nothing but making him angrier. “No!” he yelled and pushed past her to step out of the car before rounding on her. “I’m not going anywhere with you until you tell me everything!”

“There’s no time for this Henry!” Emma yelled back as she stood. She could feel her own temper start to rise. “We have to get out of here! If the police track us down then I’m going to jail and you’re going into foster care! Your Mom doesn’t want anything to do with any of us! You’d never get out of there!” Emma felt the panic from a few minutes ago start to well up in her again. “Oh God,” she whispered as she fell back onto her haunches. The waves of the nightmare that she’d been trying to avoid started to rush at her and the tears started anew as the nightmarescape scenario played out in her mind.

Henry gasped then blanched as he processed through what she’d just said. “My Mom doesn’t want me?” He’d suspected. But it had never just been coldly laid out for him that way. Suddenly his head felt light and his knees began to shake. He stumbled until he fell against the half wall behind him. His legs gave out as soon as he made contact with something solid and he slid down the wall.

It took a moment to clear through the fog, but finally what he said began to register through her shock. She wiped the blurriness from her tears away even as more tears took their place. Seeing her son clutching his arms around his raised knees as he cried cut her to the core.


Henry heard her voice as if it was from far away. He felt her arms go around him and gather him close but he barely registered it. He couldn’t breathe. There was no air.

The boy’s loud sobs tore at her insides. She hated the position they were in. And hated her inexperience and uncertainty at what to do or say. So instead she stayed silent. She just held him as he cried his heart out into her arms.

It seemed like forever before their heartache had passed enough for them to collect themselves. They were both emotionally drained. “The guy back there has no idea where we’re staying,” she said as she began to work her muscles out. She’d been sitting in a cramped position for too long and her body was protesting. She flayed her limbs around trying to get her body to cooperate and move the way she needed it to. “I think it’ll be fine for us to crash at our hotel again. Then I’ll call the lawyer’s in the morning. They’ll know what to do.”

She ran her hand through her son’s hair. He’d also stopped crying but it was clear the emotional roller coaster they were on was far from over. “It’s okay Henry. I’ve got you. And we’re going to be okay,” she assured him as she helped him stand.

Henry nodded and got back into the car. His head fell against the back of the seat. He was spent and even though he had no idea what was going on or where they were going next he knew he wanted to get out of there now.
“Don’t worry. We’ll be home soon,” Emma tried to give him a lopsided smile but she knew it was more of a grimace. She took a deep breath to steady herself. Then she put the car in drive and took off.

Henry’s head lay heavy against the back of the seat as he watched the city go by his window. Home. Wherever that was. The word now seemed like a joke. All he knew was that there was no going back for him. And he had no one to blame but himself.
**My So Called Life**

Chapter Notes

**Just to clear up an earlier misunderstanding – Emma had one of her Mom’s loyal subjects that Regina had given the job of Judge to when she created the town draw up papers saying that Emma would have custody of Henry after the curse broke (canon and this story). Another show of stupendously stupid writing if you ask me. Anywho, in real life this would never have occurred as I hope you all already know. It was one of the things Emma held over her head when she decreed that she was putting her on house arrest and that it was only up to Emma whether or not she’d ever see Henry again. It’s how they kept her in line and was a part of the punishment that Emma doled out to her. You may recall Emma stalking around and allowing her to have a visitation with him for about 5 minutes before she jerked him away. (which is why I disagree with anyone who pretends Emma was just doing the best she could. She’s a selfish despicable character that I cleaned up and turn human in my SQ fics).

Now my story is canon up until after Snow has her murder her Mother. When Regina left town(my story) she basically wrote out some papers saying that she wasn’t going to fight for Henry or anything else, then goodbye, before chunking the deuce. Emma had already taken Henry; there was no reason for her to do anything more. There is a huge difference between giving up custody of a child, signing over custody to someone else, and adopting a child. As those who watch the fosters remember they spent 3 yrs fighting to get the twins. That’s because it is a broken messed up system that they are trying to bring awareness to since the show was created by former foster kids. It’s why there’s always so much drama involved with Callie. They want the audience to connect with the issues so they use her to try and make people understand that it’s not just rhetoric. The foster care system is broken and seriously ruins lives even when the kids have found a family.

Now in real life they’d rather throw Henry in the foster care system than revisit Emma having custody again even now that she’s in a better place. It’s just something they’d never do. Even if she tried to go through the adoption process there is no way they’d give custody back to someone who’d previously given it away in a closed adoption. I’ve mentioned the idiocy of the people who stole OUaT before. And with his background as a flight risk (stealing a credit card, hopping a bus to another state, and dragging Emma back) he would most def be thrown into a locked ward of a care center. Plus his delusions about fairy tales and crap would’ve led him to a psych ward which trust me means he’s almost never getting out.

Regina can give up custody all she wants. I’ve said before it’s actually pretty easy to abandon your kids. Just say you don’t want them and walk away. That doesn’t mean that Emma will be the beneficiary. But in order to dictate specifically that she wants Emma to have Henry she has to transfer custody of him to her. And that involves going in front of a judge. It’s not the same process as adoption. There is some red tape that can be skipped. Emma won’t have to go through the state deciding whether or not they want to allow it to happen. The state won’t be involved at all. It’s almost like she’s willing him to her. It keeps the state from coming in and screwing things up. That was why the passport guy was leery of the paperwork. And Emma went to Wolfram and Hart to clear up the sitch with Blue. It had nothing to do with Henry.
Hope that cleared things up. If you’re still confused then msg me.

And I’ve been having fun pointing out all the things that OUaT creators ripped off of Joss Whedon and other (better) tv shows. Another one was the Henry/gf arc they tried out. That was stolen from the Wonder Years. “Kevin always knew he and Winnie Cooper were written in the stars! Man! that Kev sure loved that Winnie Cooper.” In the pic I saw the girl even had her hair like Winnie Cooper’s.

If I liked Henry and cared I’d be mortified that they were portraying a boy who at the time was 16? 17? as if he were a 10 year old. The fact that they watch the Fosters and are aware of what kids his age are actually like makes it wickedly worse but in a good way since they deserve it.

Anywho this is just me being witchy and gossipy. Plus it is fun counting the ways in which the show’s one huge fanfiction. If you know more then def lemme know.

CHAPTER 38

“Of course they’re not official papers. Nothing’s official until a judge has signed off on it.”

Emma ground her teeth as she listened to the ass of a lawyer that Regina had hired talk down to her. “Then maybe you should’ve done your job and let me know that!” she barked.

“Maybe you should’ve done your job and gotten your facts straight!” he yelled back. “Now what in the hell do you want? You do know I’m not your lawyer right?”

Emma would’ve loved nothing more than to reach through the phone and strangle the arrogant prick. But she knew she had to keep her cool. So she gritted her teeth and continued, “I can’t get our passports until I have something saying that I have legal custody of Henry.”

“Henry?” he spat. “I recall you being told that name was supposed to be changed. That’s a Mills family name. You can name him after wherever the hell you came from.”

Emma’s cheeks reddened and her hands clenched into fists. She was glad she’d called the jackass instead of going down to their offices. She knew she would’ve ended up in jail for clocking him for sure. And that wouldn’t put them much farther away from where they were right now.

“Then you should talk to your client. She’s the one who gave him that name!” she barked into the phone reminding him. After pausing for a beat she went on carefully enunciating between clenched teeth, “I just need to know what we do next to get this taken care of.”

“I just told you that for free. Now have a nice day.”

Emma stared at the dead phone in her hand for a second and had to catch herself before throwing it across the room. As a foster kid you tend to value anything that you have and ruining something over a tantrum is a luxury for the rich or undeserving.

She was fuming but she knew she needed to get a grip on herself. There was still so much more to do. She glanced at the clock. It was only 8 am NYC time. She took a deep breath then pulled up her contacts. After finding the name she was looking for she hit dial. She waited with bubble guts for the line to connect.
“What do you want?” a thick groggy voice asked.

“Hey,” she started to respond but her voice came out choked. She cleared her throat and tried again, “Sorry. I meant hey.”

“What do you want?!?!” the voice was now laced with anger.

Emma scowled and began to fidget trying to find as comfortable a space as possible. She knew this wasn’t going to be easy. But she really wasn’t in the mood to deal with Regina’s volatile temper. She sat up straight and pressed her back against the headboard. “Look,” she exhaled a large breath, “we need to talk.”

Regina sat up not liking where this was going already. She glanced over at Fae by her side and Blue nestled safely in her crib. They had just passed out after lunch and reading time. She was really hoping that she’d be able to join them. And now this. She brushed her hair out of her face with an exasperated hand. Her patience was already in short supply as she grit her teeth and asked for the third time, “what do you want?”

Emma moistened her lips and swallowed thickly. “Henry and I went to get our passports yesterday but it didn’t work. The papers, I mean. The custody papers,” she clarified. When she received no response she continued, “The guy at the post office he - .”

Regina rolled her eyes. This conversation was already on her last nerve and obviously Emma wasn’t going to get to the point that she’d already figured out anytime soon, “I’ll call my lawyer,” she said preparing to ring off.

“Wait!” Emma yelled as she realized the call was about to be disconnected. When she heard silence but no dial tone she pressed on, “how’s Blue?”

“Asleep,” Regina practically barked. “Just like I was on my way to being before you interrupted us. I’ll call my lawyer and have him get on those papers. Good day Miss Swan.”

Emma’s chest heaved as she stared angrily at the dead phone in her hands. She stood and jumped in the air multiple times. “Grr!” she cried out as she from head to toe shook out her body trying to shake off the bad mood she was now firmly in. She left her room and went in search of Henry.

She continued through the living room after finding no evidence of him there straight onto his room. “Hen,” she called out as she opened the door to find him sprawled across his bed glaring at the tv. She smiled over at her son, “good morning.”

After receiving a grunt in response, she walked deeper into the room and took a seat on the bed beside him. “Hen?” she questioned as she placed her hand along his back.

He flinched away from her but continued to remain silent. He was angry and he felt he had every right to be. Yesterday had left him utterly confused but also sick over the downward spiral his life had taken. He just wanted to leave and hope everything would magically turn back to the way things used to be. “Are we leaving yet?” he asks in a voice tinged with anger.

Emma shook her head, “Regina has her lawyer working on getting the paperwork straightened out. I think we’re safe here for now. So we can finish up your little vacation,” she put as much enthusiasm into it as she could muster while still feeling out of sorts. “That means we still have a few more days left to enjoy the city.”

Henry just turned his back on her and continued to glare at the television. As she searched for something to engage him her belly let out a growl. She laughed as she lay her hand across it while
she remembered that neither of them had wanted to eat once they’d arrived back at the hotel. They’d just gone to their separate bedrooms and passed out from the emotional turmoil of yesterday, “I think it’s breakfast time though. Any suggestions on what we should have?”

“All of my clothes are dirty,” he reminded her just as he had been doing for more than 2 weeks now. Emma waved him away dismissively, “just grab something out of the hamper. I’ll get to the laundry later.”

Henry turned on her angrily, “that’s what you said last week. And the week before! You made me pack dirty clothes and told me that you’d do it after we got here. Now all my clothes smell like dirty underwear!” he screamed outraged. His Mom would never allow something like this to happen. If it wasn’t for the fact that he had tons of clothes he wouldn’t have been able to make things last for as long as he had already. He wasn’t even wearing underwear underneath the pajamas he’d been wearing for the past 3 nights in a row.

Emma raised her hands defensively, “whoa! Calm down kid. I said I’d get to it and I will. But that’s no excuse for your screaming.”

Henry shook his head disgustedly at her before turning back to the tv.

Emma stared at the back of his head for a minute longer as she contemplated what to say to him. She placed her hands on his shoulders and turned him around to face her, “Listen kid. I know we have a lot going on right now. And I promise, we will get everything taken care of. Just - ,” she paused at a loss of words for what to say to him.

Henry said nothing but took her pause as an opportunity to extricate himself from her grasp. He jerked his shoulders and scooted to the end of the bed away from her. “Whatever Em-ma.”

Emma gave him a few rapid exaggerated blinks as she tried processing his behavior. Maybe she tended to skimp out on household chores now and again. But they seriously weren’t that big a deal. There was always going to be more cleaning that needed to be done.

From what she could see his behavior was far and beyond what the situation called for. And worse. It was a problem that had been going on for quite a while now. Aside from the occasional good day, she and Henry had been having more bad ones than anything else lately. It was something that bothered her deeply. It made her feel inadequate and brought back the old demons of insecurity and abandonment issues. She hated feeling that vulnerable. But she was so over and done with this behavior.

“You know what?!” she spat rhetorically as she stood and returned his glare with one of her own. She planted her hands on her hips and faced him down, “I’m tired of this. And of your attitude. Now get up and get your shoes on. We’ll take care of this right now.”

The boy’s eyes widened and his mouth dropped open as he stared at her in shock, “I don’t have any clean clothes!”

“This is New York City. No one cares what you’re wearing. You have 2 minutes to get your stuff together,” she shot back at him. “You’ve been needing a real attitude adjustment for a while now. If I were you I wouldn’t make me come after you,” she warned him as she left the room to gather her own things.

She grabbed her laptop and searched until she found just the spot. There was laundry service in the hotel and even a laundromat. But she knew Henry needed a different experience to knock some of
that privilege off of him. After quickly memorizing the directions for a place nearby she gathered her stuff and went back out into the living room.

“Let’s go,” she told the scowling boy. She turned and began to lead the way.

It took Henry staring around himself as he fastened all the toggles on his coat before following Emma down the sidewalk before realizing that she had been right. No one bothered to even give them much of a passing glance the first time let alone a double take. And although he felt a little embarrassed and out of place, people around them just continued to move on with their lives.

Once they reached the laundromat, Emma made a beeline for the washers and was relieved to find 5 empty ones together. She placed her bags onto two of them and told Henry to put his bags onto the other 2 while standing in front of the other. “Wait here and no matter what don’t let anyone else talk you out of giving up these washers,” she told him before making her way over to the change machine.

The washateria was thankfully one of those newer places that allowed her to put a certain amount on a card while using her debit card to pay. She quickly did the math in her head and added the correct amount to the plastic card they provided. She bought a few boxes of soap, fabric softener, and dryer sheets and headed back over to Henry.

“Now watch what I do and do the same,” she instructed as she began to sort her laundry into different piles. She threw the appropriate piles into the washers and waited for Henry to do the same before showing him how to make sure they were on the right cycle choice and adding the soap.

He watched wide eyed as Emma sorted the pile in front of her before turning to his own pile. He carefully followed her directions as she tossed things into the washers before adding the detergent. Once the deed was done and the machines were running, Emma pointed to a table that was close to where their machines were spinning.

“Wait here and keep an eye on the washers. Don’t let anyone mess with anything. And don’t talk to any strangers,” she pointed a finger at him in warning.

Henry skulked away to a table and sat down while taking in the room around him. He was still a little embarrassed to be out in public with pajamas on. And even worse he had no underwear on. But that was wearing off fast as he noticed no one bothered looking his way at all. They were all busy on tablets or their cell phones as they waited for their laundry to finish. There was even one guy sitting there in nothing but his underwear while casually reading a newspaper as if there was nothing out of the ordinary going on.

There was a wash and fold in their town but he had never had any need to be there. His Mom had always taken care of the house. She was a complete neat freak. She even cleaned things that were already cleaned. The only household chore he was responsible for was making his bed. Which he’d stopped doing since living with Emma.

When they lived with his grandparents, the loft area had belonged to him and Emma. They’d left it up to the two of them how they chose to live though Snow clucked and nagged a bit on the rare occasions she joined them upstairs. Snow and David had handled the housework between the two of them with Emma pitching in every now and again. But since being on their own they tended to let things slide more often than not.

This experience had been a whole new low for him. Still it was all he had now and he had to figure out a way to live with the way things were.
“Breakfast is served,” Emma grinned as she slid a couple of hot dogs across to him along with a drink and a bag of chips. She slid into the chair across from him and turned to her own food.

Emma was starving. She immediately opened her hot dog wrapper and took a big bite, “Mmmm,” her head tilted back as she moaned at the burst of flavor. “No matter what anyone says,” she shook her head and chewed happily. “There’s just no beating a New York street hot dog.”

Henry nodded and gave her a cheeky grin in agreement. Though he was far from being okay breakfast hot dogs sure had a way of helping ease a troubled mind.

They ate in silence until their hunger began to abate. Once she was satiated she studied her son over her meal. He clearly needed new clothes. He’d grown so much since meeting him that it amazed her. This was her son?!?! And he was starting to come into his own. She could stare at her kids forever and never get bored.

But she knew there were quite a few things they needed to address. And it was on her to do the parenting and take care of the situation. “You know Henry,” she cleared her throat loudly before going on, “Whatever this is that’s going on with you,” she waved her hand around at nothing and everything. “You can tell me. I’m always here to listen to you. And even if it seems like my mind is a million miles away all you have to do is grab ahold of me and tell me to focus,” she stared into chocolate eyes that were so much like Regina and his sister’s it almost took her breath away whenever she made that connection. “You are still one of the most important things in my life. I don’t want you to ever forget that.”

Henry chewed thoughtfully on the bite in his mouth as he tried processing through the rush of random thoughts that were eating away at him inside. He reached for his drink and gulped down a few sips before placing the can back on the table. Emma was his Mom now. But she was also the only friend he had. “What happened yesterday? Why did we have to run out of that place? And why did you yell at me? I didn’t even do anything!??” he reminded her.

Emma grimaced. Leave it to Henry to go straight to the hardest hits. Though she guessed he wouldn’t be who he was if it were any other way. She took a breath and moistened her lips, “Technically – I’m not supposed to have you,” she confessed as her cheeks colored. “Part of a closed adoption contract means that I make a promise not to interfere with your life at all in any way. But I - ,” she took a breath even as her eyes brightened with the unshed emotions that she didn’t want to spill. Not here or now. Instead she chose a safer route.

“The custody papers that Snow’s judge friend signed weren’t going to work. They’ve done nothing but cost me my baby,” she shook her head still bitter and hurt over that situation. “Part of the passport and visa process is that only parents are allowed to apply for their child. Legally I’m not your parent anymore. I brought the goodbye letter that Regina left me saying that I could keep you thinking that it would be enough to prove that you were mine now but that was just a statement that anyone could’ve drawn up. It needed to be official. That’s why the guy was trying to stop us. I was scared he was going to call the police on us. And without the right story to explain the situation to them and no evidence to prove any of it anyway it could’ve been a disaster,” she trembled even now thinking about all the could’ve beens.

“I’m sorry I yelled at you. But we needed to move fast. If the police had gotten to us first things would’ve been the end of everything we’re trying to build,” she apologized while shaking her head. She didn’t want to share with him her fears. That he would end up saying something that would get her thrown into prison and him thrown into a locked ward of a children’s home. Despite the threats she seriously doubted that Regina would leave him there. At least the woman she’d fallen in love with would never have. But it was a fate she wasn’t foolish enough to tempt.
“But Henry, there are going to be times when you just need to do as you’re told. Not everything is about you. And just because you don’t understand something doesn’t mean that now is the right time and place for you to start a showdown over it. I’m the adult and you’re the child. You need to learn to understand that means if I tell you to do something that I’m doing it for a reason and you need to do as you’re told,” she put as much authority into her voice as she could. It was detrimental to them that he understood this. It could literally make or break everything she was striving to build for them.

Henry clenched his jaw and shrugged his shoulders. He didn’t like and wasn’t appreciating the direction this conversation was turning. She was still basically saying the same thing. He was a child and he needed to do what she told him to. But that wasn’t true. He knew things. And he was smart. Everyone said so. He was the one who figured out about the curse when everyone else looked at him with pity for believing in fairy tales.

She reached across the table and patted his arm in assurance, “But we don’t have to worry about that anymore. Regina’s working on getting that taken care of. That way you’ll legally be mine since you’re already mine anyway,” she smiled brightly at him as she tried to put a lighthearted spin on it.

Even though she was careful in her phrasing Henry instantly caught on. That would also mean that he would officially no longer be his Mom’s. And she was working to make sure that happened. His heart clenched and he felt the food he’d just eaten turn into lead. Even though he knew she hadn’t meant to put it that way, Emma’s remark about Regina not wanting him felt like a million stabs across his body. He turned his body to the side as he wrapped his arms around his now aching belly. His vision blurred from the tears that spilled down cheeks that were fast losing their baby fat as he matured.

Emma saw his face fall and she jumped up with her worry etched across her own. “Hey,” she took the seat beside him. “None of that. Today’s supposed to be one of our good days,” she grabbed a few napkins and wiped at the tears that had slid down the boy’s cheeks.

“No matter what Henry I’ve got you. Just like I said it’s me, you, and Blue. The three amigos for life,” she grinned and nodded at him before pulling him into her arms.

Henry understood again he had no choice. He’d had no choice about anything since the curse had broken. He screamed internally that this was wrong even as he clung to her arm. Emma smelled of citrus and the scent was making him heady even as he tried to pretend that it was his own Mom’s smell he was inhaling. That blend of white roses and lily that he loved so much. And something else that was just her. The smell of his past life. The smell of his Mom.

Blissfully unaware. He wasn’t sure where he’d heard that from. But it wasn’t until this moment that he realized it was true. His life had been bliss before he became aware of what was going on in the town and truth about his family. Now he desperately wished he could go back and talk himself out of even thinking about trying to break the curse in the first place.

But as hard as he wished to change the past he understood that it was time for him to put away his childish things. He was older now. And he needed to embrace it.

It didn’t really matter what he thought about anything anymore. His life had taken on a new path. His Mom was already gone. So was his home. And soon he would be too. He didn’t know how long it would take them to get to England. But now that he thought about it maybe it wouldn’t be so bad. At least no one there would know the hell that his life had become. Maybe things would get better just like Emma kept telling him.

His tears began to slow as he continued processing through his life. He wasn’t sure about how the
baby would factor into it. Emma seemed obsessed enough about her when she wasn’t there. He had no idea how that situation was going to change once they were in the same country as she was. But she was supposed to be his sister and he guessed he had to learn to live with that too.

As his tears dried he remembered his surroundings. From somewhere he heard a ding in the air. He reached for the napkins from his breakfast and wiped at his face embarrassed at crying in public. The momentary self-consciousness began to wear off as he once again looked around and realized what he’d heard about New Yorkers proved true. They were blissfully oblivious to life around them.

“Come on,” Emma prodded him as her head tilted towards the machines. She waggled her eyebrows at him as she gave him a toothy grin and bounced on her toes, “Now we learn how to dry.”
**Goodbye to Everything that I Knew**

**Chapter Notes**

**Gotta say this chapter was a doozy.  It nearly killed me. Seriously... But I'm so glad we're done with the wallowing in SB. It was depressing me as much as it was all of you. Now we move onto the next phase in all of their lives. Anywho enjoy!**

**CHAPTER 39**

Regina looked around her unimpressed with the surroundings. The loft that Emma and Henry had lived in all these months was quaint to say the least. At least with the new house finished she didn't have to worry about leaving Blue in what looked like a firetrap waiting to happen. She would remember to speak to Emma about better housekeeping though at least for sanitation purposes if she expected Blue to be a frequent visitor to her house.

Right at this moment, Emma and Henry were somewhere in the sky on their way to what she now considered home. She knew things were going to be complicated but there was no turning back now.

She'd instructed Emma to put everything she was taking with them into the middle of the living room for her to poof over to the new house. She was shocked at how little there was. She could see that everything from Henry's room and a few things from the kitchen had been packed. But she was surprised by how few worldly possessions Emma herself owned.

She had just spotted something that made her heart squeeze and was reaching toward it when a voice stopped her.

"You won."

She cringed at the whiney, high pitched sound she still heard sometimes in her nightmares. She straightened her back and turned toward the intruder.

"You stole my daughter away from me," Snow White stood before her with liquid eyes. "You got your happily ever after."

Any other time in her life, Regina would've rejoiced at the sight of Snow in tears. Now she just pitied her.

She knew that it was Snow who'd instigated what Henry'd done the last time she'd seen him before her last suicide attempt that eventually led to her leaving Storybrooke permanently. And for that she wasn't sure she'd ever forgive her. But in this moment she wasn't worth even an ounce of her energy to put her in her rightful place.

She waved her hand and poofed away the pile of boxes and furniture. "Believe it or not Snow I could care less about you or your issues. Your daughter left you of her own free will."

Though she could care less about doling out any punishment to Snow, she was ecstatic when she moved forward and Snow backed away. She did delight in making her squirm. She made her way downstairs leaving the idiot behind.
She walked down the stairs and outside. She could hear the idiot's heels fast on her tail followed by the clump of what could only be idiot number 2 joining her but she ignored them both and continued.

There on the street she ran smack dab into the yellow monstrosity that Emma insisted she couldn't part with. She had no idea why. The thing was nothing more than a death trap on wheels. And she'd already made it abundantly clear that her daughter was in no way ever to be driven in what was clearly the most hideous casket in the world.

Snow's chin jutted out as she held her head high, "It won't last though. Good always wins. Henry already knows how to handle you perfectly," the glint in her eyes made it clear that she was referring to the last encounter they'd had when she'd tried to speak with Henry. It was shortly before Emma brought over papers decreeing herself Henry's rightful parent. It had been the last straw for Regina before she'd tried to take her own life.

Regina sniffed as she rested her arms on the hood of the car and raised her voice, "And once an idiot, always an idiot," Regina countered as she opened the car door and climbed into the driver's side. "What you've always failed to realize Snow is that doing a good deed once in your life doesn't make you good for life. And that's why I've already won. I am and will always be better than you. So you're right. Good does always win," she threw her a condescending smirk before climbing into the car. And with the wave of her hand, she was gone.

CF

"Henry Daniel Swan."

Nausea rose in his belly as he uttered his new name for the first time to the immigration officer. He felt his anger rise with the bile and concentrated on the emotion to keep the sickness at bay. Somehow it felt better and helped give him something to ground himself rather than to give in to weakness.

It had been a long few months from the time they'd returned from the debacle of a vacation to get their passports and visas until now. And time still hadn't made any of it any easier.

First Emma had left him with his grandparents while she went to Boston to meet with Regina and go before a judge to claim custody of him. Though he'd insisted on going with her, he'd been refused. She just left him with what was becoming her usual excuse of she was doing what was best for both of them. He begged to differ.

Before she left she'd talked to him about changing his entire name but he'd refused. He was Henry. He didn't know how to be anyone else. He barely understood how to fit into the skin he was in.

Besides his Mom had told him many times that he was named after the two men she loved most in her life. Her Papi and her true love. He was having enough of an identity crisis just coping with his entire life changing so quickly that he didn't need the added stress.

Now here they were in jolly ole England ready to start their new life. He had no idea what was going to happen next. And at this point he felt too weary to care. His entire spirit just felt broken.

"It's a good thing we don't have any luggage," Emma said beside him as she looked around. "We still have to clear customs though," she took ahold of his hand and began to pull him along.

"I can walk without having my hand held," he complained as he pulled his hand away. "I'm not 4 you know," he glared at her.

Emma just clucked her tongue as she led them to the nothing to declare line in customs. It was
apparently a busy day and it ended up taking them almost an hour to get through the line. She handed over the form she'd already filled out on the airplane and in the end they were basically just waved through with their first official welcome to England.

When they got outside Emma looked around. She'd planned on taking a shuttle or cab from the airport to their new home but Regina had insisted she'd send someone. She hadn't said who though and Emma was really hoping it wasn't the redhead or her creepy fiancé.

They must've waited for about ten minutes before they saw a familiar face. Thankfully this one was a friendly.

"Hey Emma," Abby called from the passenger seat of a white Range Rover.

With a sigh of relief, she pushed Henry ahead of her and they quickly made their way over to jump into the backseat.

"Hi Emma, Henry," Fred nodded his head at them both as he put the car into drive and headed out.

"How was your trip?" Abby asked to fill the dead air.

"Fine, fine," Emma muttered. "No problems at all," Emma smiled. "The flight was quite cushiony actually." They'd flown British Airways because Emma had wanted to splurge. It cost her almost a month's worth of salary but it had been worth it to her. She knew Henry was still uneasy about the situation and felt spoiling him a little, at least for this occasion, wasn't a bad thing.

Henry had gotten to watch the new Thor movie. Though he'd pretended to be unimpressed with everything going on around him lately at least that had lifted his spirits for a few hours. He'd enjoyed the amenities and she'd been able to bask in her son's happiness for the 12 hour flight.

"Where's Blue?" she'd been under the impression that she'd be able to spend a few hours with her as soon as they got there.

Regina had been true to her word so far and had allowed Emma to have a semi-acceptable visitation schedule with her. Twice a week she'd poof over for her to spend a few hours with her daughter. The visits were mostly unsupervised and Regina would allow her to use the apartment that would go to the house mother of the school. But she'd made it clear that Blue was never to be taken off campus by her unsupervised ever.

Emma gnashed her teeth and dealt with it for now. As long as she got to spend time basking in her baby's presence she was good.

"She was napping when we left," Abby informed her. "Regina thought you might just want to get settled in for now. But I'll bring her over after her nap so that you can spend a few hours with her tomorrow."

Emma nodded not really happy with the arrangement. Or rather that Regina had made these decisions without consulting her about them. But she had no choice and didn't want to cause any problems. They'd flown on a first class flight where the seat got turned down into a comfortable bed and she wasn't really tired. But she knew they could use the time to settle into their new place so she sat back and decided to make the most of it.

They spent the rest of the car ride making small talk about nothing as they made their way through the day's traffic. It took them almost an hour to get back to the school. As they drove up what was now a familiar driveway for her, Emma squealed as she saw her baby sitting there waiting for her.
She was the first to hop out of the car once it had stopped and she quickly ran over to her. "Mama's home baby," she grinned as she gave her a good rub down. "I'm not leaving you ever again."

Abby's chuckling drew her attention away from her beloved car as she watched the woman exit the car with the help of her husband. "Wow," she couldn't help bursting out with. "You're huge."

Abby and Fred looked at one another before bursting with more laughter, "Another week and we'll have our boy home," she rubbed her fully protruding belly. "And Zelena's having a girl. That means we'll have 2 boys and 2 girls in the family," she beamed over at her.

Emma's grin dropped from her face as her eyes darted over to Henry but he stood with the same bored expression he'd had on his face since Neal went back to New York with his fiancé. Fred cleared his throat and pulled out a set of keys from his pocket, "and the moment I'm sure you've been waiting for. How about you do the honors?" he handed the keys over to her before moving back to his wife's side to give her a helping hand.

Emma made a big play out of opening the door with a flourish. She knew Henry was still a hard sell on this whole moving idea and she wanted to do whatever she could to make it as easy on the kid as possible. "Tada!" she exclaimed with her fists raised in the air as she turned toward him. "Home sweet home."

Henry rolled his eyes and walked around her into the house. He walked through the mud room into the kitchen as his head swiveled around taking everything in. "Why is there a washing machine in the kitchen?"

Fred and Abby laughed as they followed Emma into the house, "It's a British thing. This place is pretty old. And back then they used to put the washing machines in the kitchen because that was where the water came into the house," she explained patiently. "The loo or washroom is also one room whereas the bathroom is a separate one altogether. I kinda like it that way though," she shrugged.

She pointed out the tea that had been laid out for the two of them when they got hungry later. Regina had even thoughtfully stocked both the fridge and pantry which was a good thing. Emma wasn't exactly huge on housekeeping duties in general. But she was glad that she could put off having to navigate a British grocery store after touching ground in the country for only a few hours.

Emma threw her carry-on tote down on the new sofa before plopping down onto it. "Regina didn't like the old sofa I take it." Not that she minded, but she had noticed that some of the old furniture had been swapped out for new pieces.

She stared at the pile of boxes that were littered in the living room. Maybe waiting to see her daughter wasn't such a bad idea when she realized how much they'd have to put away. She'd only lived in Storybrooke for less than 2 years and couldn't believe how much stuff had been accumulated in that time.

"She figured it was best for you all to have a fresh start. And if Blue was going to stay here she wanted to make sure she was comfortable. She had everything professionally cleaned and everything's up to code but if there are any problems just let us know." Abby threw her arms out, "Aside from the pantry you’ve seen everything down here. Want to check out the upstairs?"

Emma narrowed her eyes at her but shrugged. Something about Abby's expression told her that there were more surprises upstairs and she wasn't sure how she'd feel about it. She'd preapproved the renovations and had sat with Mieke, the architect, to make her house her own. The walls and flooring had already been painted and retiled as per her instructions. She'd pestered Henry nonstop
until he decided upon a shade of green that appealed to him or his room. And the large appliances had been swapped out for new ones. But everything else was supposed to be untouched. It was supposed to be her home and she had some rules and boundaries of her own as far as that was concerned.

They made their way up the back stairs that passed by Henry's room first. Emma was glad to see Regina had set up Henry's bedroom furniture in his room. That was one thing off the to do list she could cross off.

They kept walking until they got to the master bedroom. Again Regina had taken it upon herself to replace the mattress set. Emma was only slightly annoyed with this. She knew it would be comfortable because Regina always bought the best. But still she'd wanted to decorate her house herself.

They entered the master bathroom where alot of the new renovations had taken place. But she couldn't stop the grin that split her face at what she saw when she entered.

Regina had obviously remembered how in love with the bathroom at the hospital she'd been. The place obviously had been remodeled after that idea. There was a lot of green and blue marble work in the room. Though the tub was smaller the shower looked just the way it had at the hospital with a lot of colorful and fragrant plants inside it. And the drying room was just off to the side of the shower. She felt like an idiot for being thrilled about her new bathroom. But she couldn't help herself.

"Let me show you how to use the toilet," Fred offered excitedly.

Emma and Henry both looked at one another then back at him slantways before moving closer to him to inspect the object.

"First the handle," he pointed to the plus and minus signs. "The minus is for going number one. But the plus sign is for going number 2," he turned the handle and demonstrated both respectively.

He pointed to a keypad next to the seat, "this is for warming up the seat," he stood back and let them feel the toilet seat. "It's for keeping your bum warm especially during these winter months."

"Now this button," he pointed to one that looked like a bum, "is for cleaning your bum. And this one," he pointed next to that, "is for the water and brush to clean your privates. And this knob controls the water pressure while this button stops it."

"Over here," he pointed to a keypad above the tub, "is the keypad for the bath. The menu will help guide you but basically this button starts to fill up the tub," he pushed it and they watched in wonder as the tub began to fill and a voice let them know that the bath would be ready in 5 minutes. "And you push the plus and minus to keep the water one temperature the entire time you're in the bath. So you never have to deal with the water turning cold on you ever again," he grinned proudly.

After some more time spent going through the house and pointing out notables here and there, Abby and Fred began to take their leave. Abby pointed to a stack of papers on the dining room table, "There's pamphlets there for the nearest doctors, therapists, schools and child care centers if that's the way you want to go. And also some names of nannies and babysitters if you prefer someone to come in and mind Henry. You can feel free to take your time before starting work until you get it all sorted."

Emma caught the hint about having childcare before coming to work and glared at her. She was aware that Regina had a nursery set up in the offices that were between her and Abby's offices. The
kids didn’t appear to have a nanny since there was her, Abby, or her Mother always available to watch them. "Fine," she hissed through her clenched teeth. She'd deal with Regina over the matter later. But it didn't seem like a fair deal to her.

"I'm too old for a babysitter," Henry protested loudly. "I'll be fine by myself."

On this one at least Emma was adamant. She shook her head and placed a hand on her cocked hip, "No way. This isn't Storybrooke. It's a whole new country. There's no way I'm leaving you to go running around with no one there to keep an eye on you."

As the two glared each other down Fred and Abby decided that it was time for them to go. But before they were out the door the blonde turned back around to them, "Oh, and make sure to keep your weekend free. Fae's adoption is finalized and we're having a big party for him on Saturday at the house."

Emma looked over at Henry uncertainly. She wasn't sure how he'd handle that news. She'd explained about Fae and talked about him openly as Blue's other brother but there was never any giveaway to Henry's expression as to how he was taking the info. When she flat out asked him how he felt about it or if he had any questions he'd just shrug and change the subject.

She put her hands in her back pockets and rocked on the balls of her feet, "that's nice isn't it? We've already been invited to a party and we just got here," she tried searching for a response from the boy.

Emma had already talked to him months ago about Regina having adopted another son. It had hit him like a ton of bricks but he'd recovered. As long as he didn't have to hear about it, he could find a way to be okay with the situation. Instead his head felt busy and his chest felt tight. Outwardly he schooled his face in a way that was reminiscent of his Mom. "What's for lunch?" he shrugged the question away.

Emma studied her son for a minute longer before answering. She knew that this was a lot for anyone to take in. And she had spent her life moving in and out of other people's homes and families and knew what it was like. The empty ache at knowing that she was living on borrowed time didn't lessen just because of her age.

She felt she'd done a good job at stepping up and being more present for her kids even though she was still freaking out on the inside. So much had happened over the past 2 years. To all of them. But now that they were all together she knew things were going to be better. Just knowing that she could see Blue more often had already lifted her spirit. Finally she could have both her kids together.

"Yeah, sure," she waved him over to the kitchen island where a spread had been left out for them. She found where the plates and silverware were stashed and they each loaded up a plate. They sat at the island bar while they ate their meal.

Emma tried again to get Henry to open up to her. But he'd been shut down for a while. If the conversation didn't stay on neutral ground then he'd go into one of his loaded silences that clearly stated for her to stay out. She wasn't sure how to handle this new side of him. But she wasn't against bringing up therapy with him if things didn't change soon.

The rest of the day passed uneventfully. After they ate they went to work on getting their house put together. Henry unpacked his room while Emma at least finished with the downstairs and most of her room before they both had a simple meal of leftovers and went to bed early.

As she sank into the comfort of her new bed (which seriously felt like lying on a bed of feathers. There was no arguing Regina had impeccable taste.) the last thoughts floating around her head were
of having the laughter of both her kids under the same roof with her.

The next day went much like the one before. And shortly after lunch, Abby and Fred made good on their promise and brought her baby over. They placed her baby seat on the table beside her designer diaper bag.

Emma squealed as she unbuckled her from the carrier and gathered her daughter up in her arms. Blue also had a huge dimpled grin splitting her face. "Oh my baby," she gushed as she held her to her face and peppered her with kisses earning her one of those special belly laughs babies gave. "I missed you so much." She turned to Henry who'd been in his room but had appeared on the stairs after he heard someone at the door. "Your sister's home," she took her baby and held her up.

Henry clomped ungraciously down the stairs. He still had no idea what he was supposed to be excited about. She was nothing but a baby. It's not like she could do anything. He came up beside Emma and stared at the girl. When she reached out her hand to investigate him he pulled back with a grimace. He still didn't understand what all the fuss over her was about.

Blue was now 6 months old. Emma had accompanied Regina to her last check up and again she'd passed with flying colors. She seemed a bit smaller than the other 6 month olds Emma had seen but figured she'd just be a shorty like her Mum.

Her hair had grown and now curls were beginning to form in the thick cloud that ran around her head to lay down her back. Another gift from her brunette Mother. And she was now much more active. She slept less, sat up on her own, and enjoyed playtime. She babbled a lot and liked to sway to the beat of music that was playing wherever she was. She interacted with her surroundings and Emma could barely contain the love that flooded her when she was with her baby. Getting her to emit a belly laugh was addictive.

"Well, we'll leave you alone," Abby and Fred offered after giving the baby a few goodbye kisses. "Regina will be by later to pick her up," she reminded Emma on her way out the door.

Emma waved them away but only had eyes for her baby. "Here," she held her out to Henry, "hold her while I get her set up."

Henry blanched and backed away. He'd never held the girl before and had no plans on starting. "No way," he shook his head firmly as he made a beeline for his room. He'd rather be there than have to sit downstairs and pretend they were an actual family. He felt nothing for the girl. And he didn't feel like he should have his life inconvenienced anymore than it already was just to make Emma happy.

Emma frowned at her son. Being a brother to his baby sister was nonnegotiable. "Get back over here," she commanded in a firm tone. Henry stiffened then hung his head before walking stiffly back over to where Emma sat. She stood from the chair, "Sit," she nodded her head indicating the chair she'd just vacated.

Once he complied, she placed the baby on his lap. After Blue was nestled safely with his arms locked around her, the baby instantly reached for his nose trying to learn who he was. Henry ducked and dodged but it did nothing to thwart the baby which only made Emma chuckle.

She double checked to make sure the baby was being held securely. Then she pulled out her baby blanket from the carrier and began to spread it out along the living room floor. "As the oldest - ," she informed Henry as she went through the diaper bag and pulled out a few toys. She really needed to go shopping and get Blue's things set up. This was as much her home as it was either of theirs. "It's your responsibility to look after your sister. She needs you as much as she needs her Moms."
Henry's nose turned up at this, "I'm not changing diapers."

"Oh yes you will," Emma countered. "This is a family not a hotel. You don't get it your way. Things don't get done around here by magic. You will have to help out," she needed to set him straight.

While she'd visited with Blue, Henry hadn't. He was usually at school when the visitations took place. When she asked if he wanted to stay home with her so that he could spend time with the baby he declined. She hadn't pushed things because the visits were way too short for her anyway. But things were going to be different now. They were going to be a family. And Henry needed to understand what that meant.

"You can bring her over here when you're ready," Emma told him as she finished setting out the toys that had been in Blue's diaper bag. There was a piano, a soft book, a set of keys on a ring, and a few other things that should keep the Swan Princess busy for a while.

Emma smiled at how quickly yet cautiously Henry brought her over to where she sat in the middle of the blanket. He slowly sank down next to Emma and gently placed Blue on the blanket while letting out a big breath.

He stared at the child in wonder. Until now he'd been able to avoid having anything to do with her. For the most part he was happy to pretend she didn't exist. But looking at her now in the flesh and knowing where she came from threw him.

She was such an amazing combination of both Emma and his Mom. She had Regina's large chocolate eyes and Emma's dimples. She grinned at him and drooled as she put the keys into her mouth. He turned to Emma with confusion on his face, "how did you make her?"

Emma had been wiping the drool from Blue's mouth. Regina had told her that she was cutting her teeth and that's why she kept a bib around her neck. She gave an exaggerated blink at the question. They'd already discussed this, "you know that already."

Henry shook his head, "I know that you did stuff," his cheeks turned red at the thought of his parents having sex. "But how did the two of you make her?"

"Magic," Emma shrugged. It was the only answer she could provide him with. Truth was, she had no clue herself.

"But how does magic make a baby?" Henry still didn't understand.

Emma chewed on the corner of her lip while studying her daughter. She had no answer to give him. All she knew was that Blue was definitely hers. She felt her in her soul. "You'd have to ask Regina those questions. I honestly don't know what to tell you."

At the mention of the brunette, Henry's face clouded. He pulled back and rose to his feet. "I'm – gonna finish my room," he said as he hustled back to the stairs.

"Henry!" Emma called after him.

But he just ran up the stairs and back to his room. Once inside he closed the door and sank onto his bed. It had only just hit him that he was going to see his Mom for the first time in a long time. Emma had thought it best that he stay home instead of accompanying her when she went to court to gain custody of him. She showed him the paperwork that now declared her his legal Mom and his new full name. She'd seemed thrilled by it.

But he himself had mixed emotions. He knew that he was the one who'd pushed for Regina to be out
of their lives. But he never thought that it would happen. He'd never noticed before what a huge presence his Mom had been in his life. Until she was gone. Now he was about to come face to face with her after a long time again. And he wasn't sure how he felt about that.

He wasn't the same childish boy anymore. He felt as if his childhood was over. He knew too much and there was no going back to innocence. Now he was someone that he barely recognized anymore. And now that he was a Swan he had no idea how his Mom would react to him.

He had been lying on his bed spaced out long enough for the shadows on his wall to move around when he heard feet on the stairs. As the footsteps grew closer they pulled him from the melancholy he was awash in. Emma opened the door with Blue in her arms. "I need to get dinner started. I'm going to need you to keep an eye on your sister while I cook."

Henry scowled but couldn't come up with a way to wiggle out of it. He knew he didn't sign up to be a babysitter and opened his mouth to tell her so. But he also noticed that glint in Emma's eyes that said she wasn't in the mood to be trifled with so he reluctantly closed his mouth and stood up. "You can put her back on her blanket. I'll follow you and watch her down there," he told her since he wasn't comfortable carrying the baby down the stairs himself.

Emma grinned as she turned and led the way downstairs. She liked the fact that he thought of his sister's safety even though she could see that he was having some issues coming to terms with her being a part of their new life together. They still had a ways to go in forging that sibling relationship she'd seen other kids have. But baby steps. At least he instinctively thought of her safety. She was confident the rest would follow.

She put Blue down on the blanket where Henry dropped onto his knees beside her. "It's okay. She doesn't bite," she told him when she sensed the tension pouring off of him. "And if you need anything I'm only going to be in the kitchen."

She moved around the kitchen quickly putting together a plate of the baby food that Regina made for her. She popped it into the microwave and then made sure it was the right temperature before walking it over to where Blue sat picking up her toys and throwing them while Henry sat staring at her as if she were an alien. "I'll sit with you until you get the hang of feeding her. Then I really need to get our dinner started."

She sat beside him and patiently tutored him in much the same way Regina had done her. Once she was sure he'd gotten the hang of it she went back to the kitchen and whipped them up a salad to go with the lasagna Regina had left for them. She followed Regina's instructions and put the pasta into the oven remembering to set the timer while making sure that she kept an eye on them. She managed to catch a smile sneak across Henry's face as the baby continued to exercise her throwing skills. Blue let out high pitched squeals whenever she tossed something and Henry handed it right back to her with an ever widening grin.

Just before the meal was ready, it was of course time for a diaper change. Emma hadn't yet gotten Blue's any furniture since she hadn't completely figured how she wanted to decorate her room yet so she laid out a towel on the floor and laid Blue on top of it. Then she began to talk Henry through the diaper changing process after laying out all the supplies.

Henry complained the entire way but Emma still made him go through it the same way she'd done before him. She knew him helping care for his sister would help strengthen the bond between them since their age difference would make it hard for them to form one in the traditional way. Still she was one proud Mama as she snapped pics of Henry grinning at his success and Blue cooing up at him. She had to remember to buy more memory cards.
After the nappy change, she put Blue back in the carrier that sat on top of the table. She and Henry sat enjoying their meal and watching as Blue's eyes began to flutter than close soon after.

Emma had just finished cleaning the kitchen and dining room while Blue slept soundly on the coffee table and Henry divided his attention between her and his video game when there was a knock at the door. She quickly dried her hands and walked over to answer it.

"Hey," she greeted the woman as she cursed herself for the way her heart still sped up at the sight of her. She pulled the door wide, "come in. I was just about to put her stuff away," she led Regina and Fae into the living room. She started gathering up Blue's toys.

Henry had paused the game once he'd heard the knock at the door. His mouth began to water and his palms started to sweat as he waited for the first glimpse of his Mom since becoming a Swan. He stood awkwardly as she walked in followed by a small curly haired boy. "Hi," he greeted her shyly. So much time had passed and so many things had happened to him that he was unsure how to act in her presence.

She gave him a tight smile and a nod in greeting before turning to her daughter. She picked her up out of the carrier gently and gave her a kiss. She always missed her daughter when she wasn't with her. And today was no exception. But once she was in her arms again, her heart and world began to sing. "How was she?" she asked as she ran a hand through her daughter's soft curls. She squatted down to Fae's level and allowed him to kiss and fuss over his baby sister.

"She's a Swan Princess," Emma grinned at her. "She's always perfect."

Regina was aware of Henry's eyes darting between her and Fae. She placed her hand on her son's shoulder, "Henry this is Raphael. But we call him Fae." She turned to her little boy, "you want to say welcome to him and Emma?" her eyebrows rose as she looked askance while she smiled down at her son.

The boy grinned and nodded his head enthusiastically. He gave them the sign for welcome then placed the large book he was carrying down on the coffee table. He began to scribble furiously on his tablet which hung around his neck.

He was only 4 but he was already reading and writing which was a great thing since he still wasn't speaking. The therapist had assured them that when the time came, he would find his voice again but they must be patient with him and allow him to set his own pace. Though his childish scrawl could be hard to decipher it was good enough to get the point across.

He turned the tablet around for Emma and Henry to read. 'Welcome. I can't wait to know u.'

Regina beamed as she hugged her baby close. Emma was charmed. The kid definitely had a certain flair to him. With those dimples and that thick, dark curly hair it seemed hard to deny him anything. No kid should ever be that cute. She grinned and said thank you for her and Henry.

"So," she cleared her throat. She didn't want to start an argument but she needed to solidify the visitation arrangement with Regina. "You're going to bring her over everyday around 2 right?"

Regina knew she was fishing since they'd never discussed a set schedule. She had known she was going to be ambushed now that Emma was here and had thought it over extensively but still had no answer. Her days changed daily and though she knew she wanted her to she just couldn't commit right now. She took a breath and answered honestly, "I have no idea what the future is going to be like. I can tell you that for this week at least we'll be on a 2 to 5 schedule. And Saturday is Fae's day. Other than that - I don't know what to tell you."
Emma bristled and stopped putting Blue's things away. She wasn't going to go through not knowing when or if she'd see her daughter again. "That's not good enough Regina. Blue's not an infant anymore. I should be able to see her everyday since you work here and all," she argued.

Regina moistened her lips and nodded as she began to rock Blue gently. Emma had no idea that they lived across the pond and she wanted to keep it that way. They had moved into the house a couple of months ago. It was great not having to drive an hour each way to get back and forth to work. But they still spent the weekends at the mansion.

Blue's eyes fluttered a few times when Emma got louder but she thankfully continued to sleep. "And on the work days that I am here that won't be a problem. But sometimes I work from home or else I have to go to a different location. There will be some days you'll be able to have her longer. And there's going to be some days when you won't see her at all." She shrugged her shoulders, "I honestly can't give you a better answer than that."

Emma's throat bobbed as she worked over that one. She didn't expect to still have problems being with her daughter now that they were in the same country. But she guessed compromising as co-parents was something they'd have to get used to.

Henry had stiffened from the tension in the room. His Mom was right there but again she wasn't even bothering to look at him. She kissed her baby while running her hands through the small boy's curls. "My room's all made up. Do you want to see it?" he blurted out to stop the two women from sending death glares at one another.

Regina's head reared back in surprise. Henry was still an enigma to her. Just before her suicide attempt, he'd been openly hostile and aggressive toward her. She was ashamed to admit she'd gotten used to his yelling at her and telling her how he hated her. But him raising his fists to her was when her heart broke. Then it became hardened toward him.

She had poured everything she had into loving her son. It wasn't until then that she began to see him not as her son but as a Charming. In that moment with Snow beaming away with pride at him, she realized how much of her and Leopold he had in him. And she knew then he was lost to her.

It was that moment when she knew she was done chasing him for love that had clearly not meant as much to him as it had to her. She'd closed off her heart and relegated him to the same place she kept her emotions for Daniel and her Father.

It wasn't until after she'd moved on with life and let go of the shackles of the old that Henry seemed to have a change of heart in regards to her. The video messages he'd sent her on his birthday almost broke her.

By this time Blue was well on her way. She had entered her third trimester and her hormones were all over the place. Her maternal instincts were kicked into hyper drive and she was nesting. There was no way she could deal with his moods on top of dealing with her own.

Seeing him for the first time after she'd had to follow Blue back to Storybrooke was a weird experience. Under her Mother's strict tutelage, emotions were something she'd been trained to turn off and on at will. Though she was good at reading other people she'd never been good at expressing or identifying them in herself. She wasn't even sure how to begin to untangle the web that their relationship had disintegrated into.

It should be simple. He was her son. But he'd spent almost 2 years hammering away at that relationship. And it wasn't going to be repaired now just because he wanted it to.
"No thanks," she coughed. When his chin wobbled, she smiled and added gently, "maybe another time. But it's getting late and I should get these two into a bath and bed," she motioned to indicate both her kids.

Hoping to break the mood that was going downhill fast Emma broke in, "Henry was a huge help with his sister. He fed her and changed his first diaper," she beamed at her son.

Regina nodded, "Fae's a really good big brother too. Watching the two of them snuggle is the most adorable thing in the world."

Emma picked up Blue's blanket and her carrier and walked them over to the dining room table. She began to fold the blanket and rearrange it properly in her seat. Regina followed her with Blue in her arms and handed her over so that Emma could say her goodbyes and put her back into the carrier.

Henry felt lost and rejected as he watched the two women who were both supposed to be his Moms fuss over their baby. He pulled at his clothes in an agitated way as he stood watching them.

He had thought seeing his Mom would lead to something good. But nothing had changed. She seemed to care more about the baby and her new family than she did about him.

He turned back to the boy that he knew to be her new son. It hurt that he'd been so quickly and easily replaced. His eyes began to burn and his chest tightened as he looked closely at the boy.

He hated the fact that again the boy looked almost like a dark haired version of Blue. He had Regina's dark curly hair and large brown eyes with Emma's dimples. He seemed to be more their child than Henry had ever felt to be.

The boy was oblivious to the glare turned his way. He was busy humming to himself while clutching at a book that was familiar to Henry. One he knew almost cover to cover by heart. This made him angry. He forgot his sadness as he focused on that anger.

"That's my book," Henry shouted as he roughly pulled it out of the boy's hands.

Regina and Emma's heads flew up as Fae gasped in shock. When his daze wore off his face crumbled and he ran over to his Mum. He wrapped his arms tight around her waist and buried his face in her side.

After being on the receiving end of Henry's ire for far too long she was completely done with putting up with his behavior. She lifted Fae into her arms where he buried his head in the crevice between her neck and shoulder. She could feel his little body trembling in her arms and instantly her temper rose. She had sworn that her son would never have to face another day of living in fear or pain again. And she would die before breaking that promise. She rubbed his back soothingly as she turned her attention back to Henry who was now clutching Fae's book to his chest, "Do not ever put your hands on him like that way ever again!"

Henry's head snapped around as a chill ran through him and his tears pricked his eyes. "He took my book," he whined.

"That isn't your book," she marched over to him and snatched the book from him before handing it back to her son. "I gave him his own book. One that wasn't corrupted by your grandparents lies."

"I'm sure yours is right where you left it at last. Close enough for you to spend every waking moment obsessing over it."

Henry whimpered out a sob. He turned and ran up the stairs back to his room. He slammed the door
and jumped onto his bed. Through the sheen of tears that had begun to fall he saw his own storybook sitting on the bedside table right where he'd left it. He kicked it off the nightstand as hard as he could and watched it fly into the wall opposite him. Then he threw himself down on the bed and continued to cry.

Emma shifted uncomfortably from foot to foot, "don't you think that was a bit harsh?"

Regina rounded on her with eyes still full of fire, "No I don't. I think it's long overdue actually. I can't believe you're still allowing him to behave that way."

Emma straightened and bristled at the insult, "Don't yell at me. I didn't do anything wrong!"

Regina shook her head in disgust. This behavior was precisely why she didn't want to have to deal with Emma or Henry. He insisted on living in a fantasy and when reality clashed with his delusion he became volatile. He reacted fiercely to anything that challenged his narrow perceptions. And Emma was even worse. She not only encouraged this behavior but used it as an excuse to fuel her own victimhood.

"We can agree that you did nothing right either!" She shook her head at her as she began to strap Blue in her carrier with her free hand. "I left him with you because I thought you could help him. I can see now that wasn't the case." After slipping the handles of Blue's carrier into the crook of her arm, Regina was gone slamming the door behind her.

Emma gaped after her confused how a happy afternoon had turned into a disaster so quickly. "What the - !?"
CHAPTER 40

Emma was up pretty early the next morning. She started with a hot freshly brewed cup of hot chocolate with extra cinnamon. Then she sat down and got right to business.

Being a parent was tough. She’d heard that all her life and always let it go in one ear and out the other. She knew that if she had parents who really loved her then that was all that would matter.

Now she knew that was false. She loved her kids so much that the thought of not having them in her life ripped her to her core. Love wasn’t all that it took. There was a lot of heavy work involved with parenting. Aside from giving them things that they wanted there was also making sure that they had everything they needed regardless of whether they knew or wanted it or not.

She’d spent her entire life searching for her own family. Only to finally find them and realize that they wanted her status of Savior much more than they’d ever wanted her. She wanted to still believe they could have some type of relationship. It would just take time to figure out how to go about that. She’d left her parents, Ruby, and Granny all her contact information and made it clear that she wasn’t disowning them. But she did have to move on and take care of her own family.

Yesterday with both her kids had been everything she’d ever dreamed of. It had been a perfect day right up there until the end. She wanted to make every other day she spent with her kids just like it.

Blue was a delight. But she had an entire army behind her. She had a 2nd Mum, a Grandmother who was constant and present in her life, two Aunts, 2 big brothers, and soon 2 cousins. She would grow up surrounded by love and attention.

Henry only had her. Though she felt stabs of guilt over the situation she knew it was something she couldn’t let distract her from what she needed to do. And that was to make sure he wanted for nothing else in his life.

She didn’t like the fact that she felt he was slipping away from her. That she couldn’t allow. He wasn’t a bad kid. He just needed some help. And so did she. So she perused the lists of therapists that Regina had left for her. And made appointments for the both of them as a family and individually.

With that decision handled, she moved on to finding them some doctors. She and Henry had gone to the dentist and doctor right before moving there to make sure they were all caught up on their healthcare. Though healthcare here was free to citizens as a guest in the country, she’d had to pay upfront for their healthcare along with their visas. But she still needed to find PCP’s for the both of them.

Blue’s pediatrician seemed a nice enough woman so she called the office and made an appointment for Henry to have a new patient check up with her. One of the names on the list that Regina gave her stuck out. She remembered her saying she was her doctor. So she called the office and made an appointment for herself too. She also made them both dental appointments.

With that out of the way, she looked around her house and began to take stock of things. She started with the kitchen first. She’d already unpacked everything she’d brought over from her old one and put it all away. Still, it seemed empty.
The kitchen was a large space built on a platform kinda like in her warehouse style apartment. There was counter space all the way around until it got to the breakfast nook. And a kitchen island in the middle of the room that divided it from the living and dining rooms. There was plenty of opportunity for her to buy some appliances and better dishes to stock the cabinets with.

She finished up the dishes that had been left in the sink then gave it a good cleaning out. She started on making herself a shopping list as she went from pantry to fridge.

Next she turned to the living room. This too had been unpacked. It was a pretty nice space. And the sectional set Regina had replaced the old one with was nice and comfy. It had recliners at the end which made watching the 60 in 4K smart tv that much more exciting. Still, she wanted to add a few more decorative pieces that would make it all hers. She put a rug and some throw pillows on her list.

Underneath the stairs was an extra half bath. There was a bit of sprucing up she could do in there. And behind that was a small alcove that she wanted to turn into a quiet corner. She could use some pillows and one of those long curtains that hung from the ceiling to make it a comfy place for Henry and Blue to chill out with a book while enjoying the outside scenery.

As she went through the house she became even more excited. She was building a home just like a normal adult. Though she’d had a nice place before Henry had brought her to Storybrooke, truthfully the place had come fully furnished. And it hadn’t felt like hers. But this – this felt like a home to her already.

Then she hit the upstairs. Regina had done a great job with the bathroom. So aside from some new linens she was basically covered. Next came Blue’s room. She had almost next to nothing for her girl. She needed everything. She quickly did calculations in her head and reminded herself not to get too caught up. She definitely needed a budget. Her savings were starting to dwindle but she didn’t care. This was for her girl.

She had a salary that was comfortable enough to live off since she had no real expenses outside of gas and groceries. Rent, water, trash, and electricity were already taken care of.

There was enough left over to put into a college fund for her kids. Most of it went to Henry since Regina had made it understood she’d abdicated all responsibilities of him over to her. She and her family seemed more than happy to ignore Henry’s existence completely. Though this angered and saddened Emma, she had no idea what she could do about the situation.

She didn’t really worry about Blue in that department since Regina was loaded and she knew she’d never be without. But Blue had 2 moms. And 2 homes. She needed to make this place as comfortable for her daughter as it was for her and her son.

She poked her head into Henry’s bedroom and took a quick peek around. The kid’s room was filled to overflowing. Regina had kept him well stocked with things. She quietly walked to his bed where he lay sprawled out and snoring. She brushed the hair from his brow before dropping a kiss on his forehead. Then she gently tucked him back under his blankets before tiptoeing out.

She knew he needed new clothes. So did Blue. But she’d wait until later when he was up to talk to him about if and how he wanted to redecorate his own space.

By the time she made it back downstairs with her notepad it was almost 9. It was funny that she’d experienced little to no jetlag. She guessed it was because the plane ride over had been so comfortable.
She knew she had precious little time before Henry was awake though. Which was good. She still had some decisions to make that she knew he would protest against.

She pulled out Regina’s lists again and made a few calls to the list of nannies. She set up interviews with them for the following week. Then she pulled out her laptop and began to research the schools. Going to private school seemed like something so snooty to her. But then again the entire concept of England seemed like one huge snootfest to her anyway. For some reason here in England private schools were called public schools. And the confusion didn’t stop there. There were A levels and GCSE’s which hell if she knew what they meant. After 15 minutes of wrestling around with that she said screw it and put all that crap to the side.

She would have to talk with Regina about that later. In the meantime, she began researching decorations for a baby’s room.

Pinks were a definite no. Same with red and blue. She had to admit, Blue really did seem like a purple girl. She chose to stick to the lighter shades because dark purple seemed to be Regina’s signature color.

Regina had used light purples, black, and silver as her main color themes for Blue’s nursery. So Emma went with light purples, white, blues, pinks, greens, and silver for hers.

By the time Henry began to clump his way downstairs, she’d already ordered a crib, dressers, changing table, day bed, rocking chair, and triptychs that were fit for any princess. Now all she needed was some paint, linens, and toys to help complete her daughter’s room.

She added a high chair, walker, bouncer, diapers, blankets, bottles, dishes, more toys and clothes to her list of things she needed to buy. She grinned over at Henry once he made it down the stairs and slumped into a chair.

Like her, her son was not a morning person. It took him a while to be up before he was fully awake. “Morning, son,” she greeted him brightly.

Henry grunted as he yawned, blinked, and looked around groggily as if confused how he’d ended up there.

Emma rose and began to make a couple of fresh cups of hot chocolate. She placed one in front of her son before turning back to the kitchen and getting started on breakfast.

She knew talking to him about anything important right now would end in disaster. She wanted him completely lucid before they got into heavy conversation. After a few cheese toasts made with some smelly yet delicious cheese that Regina had stocked the fridge with, she sent him up to shower and dress while she did the same.

30 minutes later they met downstairs again and headed out the door. There was still plenty of food at the house so she put off grocery shopping and instead headed to a baby store. She was pleasantly surprised when Henry began to pick out some things for his sister without being prompted. She bought almost everything he threw her way because it delighted her to see him engaged.

Next they headed to a store called Homesense that the shop clerk had recommended to them. They picked up a few things but still weren’t completely satisfied. Seemed they’d have to spend a lot more time shopping and getting acquainted with the ways that things worked in England.

After a quick bite to eat at a pub style restaurant, they hurried home. Emma was gathering the last of their purchases and was on the way into the house when Regina and Blue poofed in.
Emma gasped and jumped as she almost walked right through them. Her heart nearly fell into her stomach. “Oh my God!” she clutched at her heart nearly dropping the paint she was carrying. “Don’t ever do that again!!!!”

Regina laughed out loud while Blue squealed at her Mom.

Emma narrowed her eyes at her baby, “Oh you think that was funny?” which only got the girl laughing more. She dropped the paint buckets inside the house and pulled her from Regina’s arms. She nuzzled her nose, “mommy didn’t think that was funny at all. I nearly crapped my pants.”

“Language, Miss Swan,” Regina chastised her as she handed over Blue’s diaper bag. She gave Blue a kiss and said her goodbyes as she prepared to make a getaway, “I should be back around 5 give or take,” she reminded her.

“Wait!” Emma raised her arm, palm out to stop her. Regina heaved a sigh but turned and regarded her with a raised eyebrow. “We need to talk,” she motioned for the brunette to follow her inside.

Reluctantly she followed her inside. “Henry,” she greeted the boy who was on the floor putting together what appeared to be a bouncer for Blue.

Henry’s heart began to thud but when his Mom turned back toward Emma without saying anything else to him he was at a loss. He sat staring at nothing for a few minutes before going back to putting Blue’s things together. He kept an ear and an eye on out on what they were talking about though.

Emma picked up her notepad from the table and handed it over to Regina. She began to flip through the pages.

“I’ve got our doctors, dentists, and therapists appointments already set. And I meet with nannies next week for Henry,” she ignored the thud of Henry dropping the bouncer and subsequent glare he sent her way. She spread her arms out around her, “we’re turning the house into a home for all 3 of us,” she emphasized her meaning by bouncing Blue and giving her butterfly kisses. “But I’m stuck on the schools. Isn’t that what you’re building next door?”

Regina was impressed. Emma had really been on the ball this morning. From what she could see around her Blue was definitely going to come home worn out from an exciting day. “Not exactly. The school is just a small part of the entire thing. It’s going to be a child care center - if you will - where the kids will also have school on campus.”

Emma nodded to show she understood.

Regina continued on, “The structure is finished. We’ve done all the renovating that needed to happen. But we’re not just building a school, it’s a completely different way of life. The curriculum part is still being worked on by the teachers because it will be a completely innovated system. We’re doing away with paper and going 100% electronic.”

“The paperwork is up to code and the dorms will soon open. We will soon be taking in children. But for now the kids will be bused to one of the state schools down the street. Their information is here,” she picked up a pen next to the notepad and circled the information.

“So should Henry go there until your school opens? Or would a private school be better?” Emma wanted to make sure that he was getting the best education that he could.

Regina shrugged offhandedly, “You can pay for private school if you wish. Which they call public school here. But if you’re asking if it’s good enough then yes I believe so. Fae goes there for half days in the afternoon. That’s why I set up Blue’s visitation to match his schedule.”
Emma nodded and chewed on her lower lip while she contemplated moving to her next topic. She knew it was moving onto shaky ground but there was no way around it. She walked Blue over to where Henry sat on the floor with her new bouncer, “Hen, could you keep an eye on your sister for a minute? We’re going to be just outside,” she told him as she handed the baby down to him.

Henry looked at her suspiciously but she ignored him. She knew he didn’t like it when he wasn’t a part of the conversation but he was a child. Not every conversation included him. She turned back to Regina, “care to step outside?”

Regina rolled her eyes but again followed reluctantly. Once the door was closed behind them she crossed her arms across her torso and turned back to Emma.

Emma paced back and forth in front of her with her head down. After 3 laps back and forth she raised her head and met Regina’s glare head on. “I want Blue,” she blurted out. When Regina straightened her body up she rushed on before the impending no could pop out.

“I know what you’re going to say,” she pulled her hair behind her ears as she licked her lips nervously. “but she’s not an infant anymore. She doesn’t need to breastfeeding constantly. You’ve already said she sleeps through the night now. We’ve been shopping and her room should be all ready in a couple of weeks. I was thinking that I could have her for a weekend sometimes. And maybe Wednesdays nights. That sounds fair to me.”

“No.”

“But - ,” she started to protest but Regina had already poofed herself away.

Dejected, but still determined, Emma re-entered her house. She was not going to give on this. Regina may have weaseled out of this battle. But she was definitely going to be in for the fight of her life over this one.

When she walked back into the house she practically bumped right into Henry who was lingering at the door. She scowled realizing he’d been eavesdropping, “Henry! What did we talk about with your snooping?”

He shrugged before handing Blue back over to her, “I have a right to know what’s being said about me.”

“As a kid, the only rights you have are what I allow you. If someone’s having a private conversation you don’t get to invade someone else’s privacy,” she chastised him. “Have I made myself clear?” she used a firm tone with him.

Henry squirmed around before moving back to the bouncer, “whatever,” he muttered. He wasn’t used to being talked to that way. And he didn’t like it one bit.

Emma stared after him. She knew it shouldn’t be left that way but she was unsure what her next move should be. As she watched him snap more toys into place on the bouncer he changed the subject.

“What did you mean about those appointments?” he asked her. Though his eyes were on the bouncer, he was fully focused on her as he watched her through his lashes.

Emma went through the baby bags until she found the booster seat she’d bought for Blue. She set it on the coffee tabletop and made sure Blue was secured inside of it before she started unpacking the bags. “We’ll talk later,” she waved him away. “For now, we’re going to have another good visitation with your sister.”
Henry narrowed his eyes at her not liking the situation. He had a feeling he wasn’t going to like any of what was about to come. He wanted to protest but one quick look at the stony set of Emma’s face told him that it was best if he left it alone. So for now he turned his attention back to the bouncer and continued snapping the toys together.

CF

It wasn’t until after Blue had been picked up and they were upstairs in her room taping it off before painting the walls that he brought the situation up again. “You said we could finish talking after Blue was gone.”

“Hmm?” Emma had been in the process of mentally putting Blue’s room together. She sat in the middle of the floor with her ipad reviewing her purchases. The furniture she’d ordered was the convertible kind that would grow with Blue. It would last her at least up to year 5 or so.

She had decided that instead of painting the wall one color, she would go with doing a mural herself. She’d found a lot of stencils online and at the baby store. She figured since she wasn’t working that she’d be able to have it done by the time Blue’s furniture arrived.

She turned from what she was doing and focused on Henry, “what was that?”

“You said there were some appointments,” he told her in an exasperated voice. “With some nannies that I don’t need and a therapist that I’m not going to.”

“Oh yes you are,” she put the iPad aside and stared him down. “The appointments have been made. I have to work. And while I do I’m going to make sure that you’re here with someone who will make sure you don’t go running off.”

“I don’t need a babysitter! I’m 11 years old.” he yelled. “And I don’t need a therapist. There’s nothing wrong with me!”

She could tell he was working himself up. Normally she would’ve caved in to his demands. But she was officially a single parent now. There was no one there for her to lean on. And they lived in a different country. If it wasn’t for GPS she’d still be lost in London’s traffic now. She didn’t even want to think about the nightmare of trying to track him down when neither one of them had an idea of getting around.

“You’re not acting as if there’s nothing wrong with you right now. And this is nonnegotiable. I wasn’t asking you about any of these things. I’m letting you know what’s about to happen,” she kept her tone firm but low to try to calm the situation down before it got too far out of hand.

“And there’s a lot more,” she pointed to a space on the floor next to her, “sit down.”

Henry already had his face twisted into what was clearly fight mode for him. But there would be no squirming out of this. It had to be done.

He sat across from her glaring daggers at her. She ignored it because this was a talk that had been long overdue.

He moved the stack of stencils and iPad that separated them to the side before scooching closer to him. “Now I know what we’re about to talk about involves you thinking like a big boy instead of a kid. Some of it may be hard to listen to or to understand. We’re going to take it slow and if you have questions then please ask. Alright?” she paused and waited for him to acknowledge that he understood.
He crossed his arms defiantly across his chest. “I’m not a little kid,” he declared even though the pout across his face said differently.

She cleared her throat and moistened her lips as she collected herself. Then she started with the easier part of the conversation. “I’ve said repeatedly this is a new country. And the things that you got away with in Storybrooke will not be allowed to happen here. There will be no running off, deciding for yourself that you’ve got a reason for disobeying. There are going to be rules here. A lot of them,” she nodded as he shook his head at her. “From here on out all of your defiance ends. You got what you wanted. You and I are together and you’ve banished the Evil Queen,” she caught the flicker of something dark across his face but ignored it. “In Storybrooke, we were still trying to figure out our way. But here we’ve been lucky enough to be able to build a life together from scratch.”

“First off, I bought you a cell phone,” she pointed to his pocket. “For safety reasons. And I’m going to need that back for a minute,” she held out her hand for his phone.

Henry shook his head confused. “Why?”

She rolled her eyes but straightened her back and glared back at him, “because I said so. Now give it here.”

He pulled the phone out of his pocket and handed it over. Emma looked at it then handed it back to him, “unlock it.”

After he unlocked it then handed it back to her she began to pull up his apps folder, “Getting us new phones is on my to do list. But in the meantime I’m putting parental blockers on this one. Just so that I don’t end up with a phone bill for like $1000 bucks or anything.” Henry’s scowl had turned into a full blown glare by now but she just kept tapping away.

“I’m also putting on a tracker app. When you leave the house this phone goes with you. And if you try to disable it I will get a notification and there will be consequences to pay,” she glanced up from the phone to find Henry’s chest tucked into his chin and his breathing had become labored letting her know he was close to a meltdown. But this was a serious situation and he needed to listen.

She waved her hands in front of his face, “hey! We’re not finished yet,” she handed him his phone after the app had successfully downloaded giving her partial control over his phone. She could adjust the settings remotely later but for now at least his online profiles would be curtailed. She made a mental note to do the same for his laptop and ipad.

When Henry returned to staring daggers at her she took a deep breath and went onto what she knew was going to be the hardest for him to deal with. Again she knew it had to be done.

“We’re not in Storybrooke anymore. And that means none of the baggage that we had there needs to be following us. I’m your Mom,” she lowered her voice as she talked to him earnestly. “And you should be calling me Mom,” her throat worked as she tried to clear it so that she could speak around the choked feeling that was starting to rise. She felt hurt, sad, and embarrassed that this even needed to be a topic of conversation.

He was her son. And she knew giving him up had been a huge ordeal for both of them. But that had been rectified now. She was trying really hard to make them all a real family.

If he went around calling Regina Mom or making mention of her being his Mom in anyway that would just end up making things awkward for all of them. She knew that Regina didn’t speak about him outside of the family. No one knew that he existed. He would be presented as her son which
again – he was. He needed to get used to that idea.

Tears pricked his eyes and Henry had to choke back the feeling of wanting to scream. Yet he had no idea why. On one hand it felt like Emma was trying to change everything about him. But on the other hand there were parts of what she was saying that made sense to him.

He had called her Mom after the curse had broken. He’d been so glad that now they could start getting their happily ever after. Then Emma started spending more time at the station and away from the family he thought they should be enjoying. But after the first few nights away from home, he started to miss everything. Especially his Mom.

He tried to remember he was a Charming and they were the good guys. But his Grandparents were so wrapped up in themselves they didn’t notice that he felt like he was sinking. And with Emma gone most of the time the special connection he’d felt with her had somehow gotten lost.

Then his Mom would come around. Trying to see him and apologize to him over and over for everything. But he didn’t care. He was a Charming and everytime she came around she would agitate his real family. It made him so angry that he lashed out at her. And the last time he saw her – he was ashamed to admit even to himself - he’d even almost hit her with his fists.

It was shortly after that he learned that she was gone and not coming back. Without even a real goodbye to him. She’d even used magic to make sure that he could never go home again. She’d even taken that damned apple tree that she obviously loved more than she loved him. All he’d gotten was a note saying she hoped he’d find his happiness. That had really cut him up inside.

Then everything again changed suddenly when Emma decided she was going to be around more and they would be moving into their own home. They had more space between them. But there was also more emptiness and loneliness between them also.

She was around more. And trying to be a Mom. But it wasn’t the same. She didn’t know what he liked or even bother to ask him if he wanted or liked something. She just did things and would tell him that this was how it was from now on.

Meeting his Dad had been great. His Dad was an okay guy. He guessed he couldn’t complain since he was the only real Dad he’d ever known. But his Dad made it clear that though he wanted to get to know him, Emma was really the main person for him.

Then he’d gotten thrown for a loop with this baby business. Now that he was getting to know her he guessed he could understand why Emma was so preoccupied with her. She was cute and all now that she did more than just sleep. Still Blue had his Mom. Emma was supposed to be his.

Now here they were with Emma trying to change things yet again. And she wasn’t asking him if it was okay with him. “Are you done yet?” he barked. He just wanted to escape to his room and hopefully forget about this nightmare.

Emma studied her son for a minute longer. Henry was closed off and the anger radiating from him was palpable. Where did that adorable little kid she met almost 2 years ago go? He’d been so sweet when she’d met him. And though the way he treated Regina made even her cringe she thought that his behavior had all been because of the curse.

Now he was an angry, defiant child with almost everyone. The efforts she’d made for his comfort and safety didn’t seem to sit well with him. She just wanted her sweet little boy back.

Her face fell and her voice softened as she stretched out her legs and readjusted her sitting position.
She moved back until her back was propped against the wall. Then she continued, “no. I’m not finished. We have to talk about our story.”

“What story?” he looked at her quizzically.

Emma ran a frustrated hand through her hair and blew out a hard breath. She locked her eyes onto her son’s, “You can say whatever you want about the curse or anything else,” she held up her finger in warning. “As long as it’s to me or anyone back home. But here we’re going to tell another tale.”

“When you see the therapist, you cannot go on and on about you being right about a curse and your Mom being the Evil Queen and your grandparents are Snow White and Prince Charming.” Before he could protest, she held up her hand, “No one here is going to ask you about being Regina’s son so there’s nothing you ever need to say about that. You’re my son and that’s the story we’re going to stick with.”

“With the therapist, you can tell her that you were adopted by Regina then you came looking for me. That part’s fine. And you can talk about how you wanted to leave home and live with me.” Henry narrowed his eyes at her but she just continued with her story.

“You can say you were having a rough time dealing with things with her. So you decided that you wanted to come and live with your real family. But you are not to bring up anything about a curse, Evil Queens, Saviors, or fairy tale characters or life,” she warned.

She went on trying to explain to him, “this is the real world. And in the real world all that stuff is make believe. Yes you were right and you won. You beat your Mom down. But we’ve moved on from that now. And we won’t be reliving it or rehashing it anymore.”

She didn’t want to scare him. But she knew she needed to get him to understand. This was critical to their stay together. Though he was now legally hers that didn’t mean the state couldn’t come in and declare him insane if he went off onto one of his rants. It was painfully obvious that he needed therapy and she didn’t want to do anything to impede it being successful. But she needed to make him understand the risks that were involved with him trying to bring back everything that had already happened and was already over in Storybrooke.

“You have to understand Henry, I’m not saying this to hurt you in anyway,” she hurried on when tears began to fall from his eyes. “Or to take away your victory because you were right. The curse is over. You won. But you’re going to have to let it go now. Because if you go around talking about Regina being your Mom and I’m your real Mom to strangers then there’s going to be a lot of questions and eyes on us that none of us want to get into.”

“And if you go around talking about a curse people will think that you’re crazy,” she became choked up just thinking about the horror storm that would follow. Her eyes were red rimmed by now and had begun to water, “And you could be taken away from me. And there’d be nothing that I could do to stop it,” she couldn’t stop her tears anymore and they began to flood down her face in a long trail before falling off her chin. She sniffled and wiped at them but they didn’t stop flowing.

“You want me to lie and pretend just for you!” he yelled. “You want me to pretend that it’s all my fault when,” he rose and began to punctuate his words by jabbing a finger into his chest. “I was right! The curse was real and I’m not crazy,” he ran from the room slamming the door behind him.

Emma’s head thumped into the wall behind her. “Friggin’ great.”
“Phlew!!!”

Regina blew a raspberry into the tummy of her squirming baby boy. As his peals of laughter rolled through the air, she felt the stresses from the past week roll off her back.

This time in the mornings was always special for her. By the time she finished her workout and shower, the kids were just starting to wake up. She’d give Blue breakfast in bed as her son lounged beside them snuggling up. She felt the intimacy brought them closer. It was precious family time that she wouldn’t trade for the world.

It had been a long week. But a good one. The finishing touches of the shelter had been taken care of. The school was opening up next week and soon it would be filled with children that hopefully they’d helped take a step in the right direction of a bright future.

“You know today’s your day right? There’s going to be so many people here who are just as happy as the rest of us that you’ve come to stay!” she lovingly stroked her son’s hair as he rested against her still trying to catch his breath from her raspberry and tickle attack.

Fae pulled back and grinned. He pointed at her, then his baby sister who cooed as she dribbled milk from the side of her mouth, then himself. Then he gave the sign for forever. It melted her insides.

She never would’ve imagined that this would be her future all those months ago when she tried to take her own life. Losing Henry had crippled her in a way she never thought she’d recover from. And she hadn’t wanted to try. Not until she and her entire family got this second chance together.

Though she thought of Daniel everyday and still wore his ring close to her heart, she had learned to embrace her present once again. Her family and children had brought her happiness that she could never repay or make them understand after those dark days. And today they got to show themselves off to the world.

Growing up as a princess had never really affected her. There was no way her Father would ever be king. He was the youngest of 7 sons who all had families of their own. And even though her Mother had always aspired to her one day becoming Queen she’d always known that wasn’t the road she wanted to take.

The spectacle of royalty disgusted her. She’d hated it before and after marrying the King. And watching how disgustingly spoiled and selfish it had made Snow she’d vowed that she would never be like her.

Though she’d used makeups and costumes during her reign as the Evil Queen they were merely that. Meant to cover up how scared and vulnerable she felt in the face of vultures who’d eat her up alive if they were to discover her weaknesses.

But this time was different. Her son was a Prince. And her daughter was a Princess. And she couldn’t wait to show the world how much they and her family meant to her.

Blue released her breast with a loud pop followed by a loud burp which got her brother giggling as he bounced beside them. She wiped the milk off her daughter’s chin with a grin plastered across her face, “Come on you two,” she stood up and held her arm open for her son to jump into. “We’ve got
a day we’ll never forget waiting for us,” she said as she walked them to the bathroom to get the day started.

CF

Emma and Henry hadn’t had any idea that the party was going to be so big. They’d thought it was just a few friends and family to help celebrate Fae’s adoption. But they were completely wrong.

Pulling up to the address that Regina had texted to her for the party first thing that was impossible not to be astonished by was the mansion. Seemed her entire family was obsessed with recreating castles for themselves in this land. But this place didn’t even compare to Regina’s place back home. This was the kind of sprawling place that had wings on either side.

The next thing she noticed was driveway that was littered with cars. Expensive looking ones at that. There was even a valet at the door. He stared in something akin to shock and horror at Emma’s bug before handing her a ticket. Though she couldn’t be sure at whether that was because of her car being an American car with the driver’s side opposite where he thought it should or because it looked out of place in this setting. Either way her cheeks reddened as she grabbed the present she’d forced Henry to help pick out the day before and made her way up the walk after a few other people.

Once they walked around to the back of the house, it was again their turn to stare in shock. This was no ordinary gathering.

The party appeared to start from inside the house and spill out into the gardens. Or vice versa. There were hundreds of people. Some were walking around with dogs while others walked around with tags around their necks showing pictures of different animals they’d adopted from the rescue shelter.

And that was far from all. There was a carousel, Ferris wheel, pony rides, and food stands. On the periphery were viral booths in addition to the camera people and videographer wandering around. There were lanterns waiting for the dark so that they could be lit up and string lights all around. There was a stage and dance area. And even a DJ who was spinning a wicked mix of old classics and some newer dance tunes. And that was just for the humans.

For the animals it was even wilder. There was a dog walk and an area that was blocked off for the dogs to run and play. There were designer dog food and treats set up on a buffet. And a bunch of workers had been hired to go around and babysit them all.

Emma and Henry openly gaped at the spectacle. Regina had told them to come in casual dress so they were only wearing jeans thinking they were only going to be there with her family. Thankfully though they were new jeans and their jumpers were somewhat dressy. Still they felt out of place here and pulled at their clothes uncomfortably.

Emma was looking around for the gifts table before she headed off in search of her daughter when she heard the voice she could never forget ring out from the speakers. “If I could have your attention please. Everyone please gather around!” she called from the stage area.

Regina looked amazing in a small yet casually chic dark purple dress that made her eyes and skin pop. And the Gods had looked down upon this celebration with favor and graced them with beautiful weather which had allowed everyone to break out their best spring wear. Her hair was curled and had a flip to the ends that drew attention to her flawless face. Emma was always breathless when she looked at her. But something in how bright her eyes were and her cheeks flushed with a sparkling glow made it hard to look away. Once the guests were gathered around and settled she began to speak, “I’d like to thank everyone for coming here today to share in celebrating this happy day. My family and I are grateful for your love and support you’ve shown to us.
She raised her son into her arms. Henry looked hurt then angry at the move, “I took one look at my son and knew that he was mine. And that he should be home with his family,” she motioned to her family who stood behind her. Blue was being juggled in her mom’s arms.

From Emma’s vantage point she could see a huge grin across her baby’s face. She seemed thrilled to be a part of the festivities and unnerved by the crowd. She swelled with pride. “When I got home and told my family that I was adopting him they immediately opened their hearts to him. And his little sister Blue cracked her first smile when she saw pictures of him for the first time. Now the time has finally come that he’s here to stay,” Fae beamed and giggled in her arms as she cupped his cheek and bent his head to hers for a kiss. The crowd aah’ed and clapped wildly for them. “We want to thank everyone for their donations today in lieu of gifts.”

Emma frowned and looked around self-consciously as she realized why she hadn’t spotted the gift table yet. She shifted the silver and blue wrapped gift she’d gotten for Fae slightly to her other side. Henry noticed the motion and raised his eyebrows at her. She merely shook her head before returning her attention to the stage.

Regina beamed as she continued, “We have one another and we have all that we need. But there are so many others out there who don’t. We appreciate you standing with us in helping to end homelessness among children and animals. And with creating a new foster care system so that there are no more children or animals who ever have to go through life alone.”

“Thanks to all of you who’re here tonight and our other donors who couldn’t be here - our school will be opening next week. We will be taking in the children from the local children’s home,” she motioned to someone from offstage to join her. A woman with wild red hair stepped up and walked to her side. Regina embraced her then kept her arm wrapped around the woman’s waist as she turned back to the mic. “We were lucky enough to have the support and expertise of Merida DunBroch to assist us. She has not only lived through the same experience as the children we’ve committed to help but has also become a champion for those children. And with her help she has taken our humble beginnings into this journey and turned it into an epic adventure.” Again the crowd erupted into cheer.

“Now if you will – please join with my family in today’s festivities. And again thank you all for your generous donations.”

The crowd gave yet another round of applause as the two women again embraced. As they exited the stage they began to disperse and go back to enjoying the party.

“God she’s hot,” a boy next to Henry breathed out. He was standing with a group of other kids who – he wasn’t sure how or why– but something about them gave him the impression that they were from this shelter he had been hearing about.

His cheeks reddened. It’s not that it was the first time he’d heard that about his Mom from kids before. But he’d never liked that people were looking at her in that way. To him she was always Mom. Having to be reminded she was also a woman made him uncomfortable.

A boy beside him clapped him on his shoulder, “Our new place is going to be awesome man. We’re going to have a room with only one roommate,” the boy exclaimed excitedly.

“Yeah and like our own desk and place to put our own stuff,” another boy chimed in.

“There’s going to be games and we even get our own horesies,” a tiny golden haired girl piped up with. She was holding the hand of a brunette girl who was loudly chewing on gum and blowing large bubbles with it before letting it pop and doing it over again. She was staring off into the
distance but something about her made it hard for Henry to keep his eyes off her. He began to nervously straighten out his clothes and lick his lips repeatedly. His cheeks became bright red as he hoped no one would catch on that he couldn’t stop staring at her.

“We’re not going to get our own horses,” a red headed boy rolled his eyes at the little girl. “But we will get to ride them, and play with them, and feed them. It’s going to be awesome!”

Just then Fae walked over to the group carrying a large daisy with a purple center. He handed it over to the little blonde with a large dimpled smile. She smiled back at him as she took it from his hand. The two walked away hand in hand.

“That kid sure is lucky,” the red-haired boy shook his head as he watched the tiny couple wander off.

A boy with dark brown hair that was styled over his eyes tossed his head making his hair cascade to one side, “Yeah,” he grinned. “But we are too now. Let’s go take a ride on the Ferris wheel. I want to see how high up we can go.”

As the kids ran off Emma and Henry stared after them. They were stunned speechless.

For Henry, he couldn’t believe that these kids were excited to be sharing a room with someone. He’d always had his own things and his own room. He’d never had to share anything with anyone. This experience was weirding him out. He’d never been around people who didn’t have things. It didn’t even occur to him to think of such a thing.

He’d never been denied anything in his life. If he wanted something – all he had to do was say so. And yet these kids were excited about something as simple as having their own things and video games. He wasn’t sure what to make of all of this.

Emma was starting to feel embarrassed and ashamed of herself. She’d spent so many years running away from being a street rat that she’d purposefully repressed everything about that life. Once she’d left the system behind - she’d never cared to look back. She had just been thrilled that she never had to live that way ever again.

Yet here Regina was – the Evil Queen herself - building a school for these kids. Most of them were probably kids who never even had homes before. And from what she’d already picked up about the school it was going to be an amazing experience for kids who’d always gotten the short end of the stick.

It suddenly made her feel more energized about starting work. She’d only been focused on Blue and getting her family settled since being there. She knew that Regina worked hard and long. And that offering her a job is what had allowed her and Henry to establish a foothold here. She’d just never thought about the work in general. But listening to the kids made her realize how impressive and important what they were doing was.

Since Henry was starting school next week it seemed the perfect time to acquaint herself with the goings on in the school. She hadn’t yet found a nanny for him. But she wanted to let Regina know that maybe until then she could come in while he was in school and start whatever job she’d put her in.

“All these kids have no home?” Henry wondered aloud as he looked around him. These kid all looked so normal to him. Back home there were no homeless. He knew there were some kids who’d been homeless back in the Enchanted Forest. But all the kids who had been homeless before
the curse were adopted by the families that Regina had put them with during the curse. The town had even had a huge party celebrating families reuniting. He’d remembered that much of the situation. But this – this was different.

“Yes Henry,” Emma told him in a voice that sounded hard to his ears. He looked up at her confused. For some reason it was like she was mad at him again for reasons he didn’t understand. “Not everyone is as lucky as you were to get adopted.”

She didn’t see the anger that crossed his face. Or even notice him wander off. She was too busy trying to find a way over to Regina.

Merida and Regina still had their arms wrapped around one another’s waists as they stood just offstage. Some people crowded around to offer their congratulations, hopes, and wishes for the school and the new family. Emma stood to the side and waited until she could have a word without competing with a hundred other people.

“Regina!” she called out as she hurried over to her once the herd had thinned out.

Regina looked startled at her sudden appearance before plastering on her professional mask, “Miss Swan,” she inclined her head in greeting. “We’re so glad you could make it.”

“Well you didn’t tell me this was going to be a county fair. I thought it was just going to be your family at a casual party,” she whined still incensed that she’d had no prior notice of the situation.

The brunette smiled pleasantly at her while nodding, “originally. Then Merida came up with the idea of turning Fae’s celebration into a fund raiser that would help bring awareness to the home and the foster and adoption crisis at large. It makes for a great news piece. I think there’s even some press here,” she pointed to a camera crew behind them.

“I didn’t know that! A little heads up would’ve been nice,” she said as she thrust Fae’s present into her hands. “I would’ve come better prepared.”

Regina scowled not clear on exactly what Emma’s problem now was but she was determined to not let her dampen her happy mood. She looked around prepared to make a getaway, “yes well. I hope you enjoy yourself all the same.”

Emma’s ire rose as she watched Regina’s eyes dart around. She could tell she was brushing her off and she didn’t like it. “Where’s Blue?” she demanded to know.

She had already spotted her Mother and baby next to the area where the photographer had been setting up. “She’s with my mother right where I’m supposed to be,” the brunette pointed. “We’re doing family photos now. If you want to spend some time with her afterward you’re free to. That doesn’t mean hog her for the entire party though,” she warned her knowing how possessive Emma got when it came to her baby. She began to make her way over to where her family had gathered.

Emma glared after her as she watched her take Blue from her Mother’s arms. She, Fae, her Mother, the redhead, Abby, their husbands, hell even the cat and dog had all gathered beneath what appeared to be the same tree Regina had kept in Storybrooke. She watched them for a while with something akin to jealousy boiling inside of her. It was only when she started to become angry about the unfairness of it all that she noticed Henry was nowhere in sight.

“Damn it,” she muttered as she pulled out her phone and went looking for her tracking app.

She found him in the shade of a tree not far from her. He was staring at the family as they posed with beaming faces for the photographer. She felt torn.
On the one side, she felt jealous, angry, possessive, and bitter. Henry was after all her son. She had a right to be in his life. The only thing she’d change about the past was giving him up in the first place. She couldn’t even bring herself to think about not having him right now. And Regina had been more than happy to let her take him.

Regina had been the Evil Queen. Yet she had gotten everything while they were left only with pain. She had a new family and was more than happy to forget about them. While she and Henry were left struggling to pick up the pieces of themselves and move on when they were the ones who had lost the most. She hurt deeply. For herself and her son. Being abandoned was a wound that lasted a lifetime. She knew better than most that some wounds never healed.

She put her hand along his back determined to distract him, “Hey Hen, I saw an ice cream bar. We’d better grab us some food before all the good stuff is gone.”

Henry looked at her thoughtfully as he chewed on his lip. He knew she was just trying to be nice but he really didn’t like the fact that she was treating him as a kid. He was almost as big as she was. He came all the way up to her shoulder now.

He looked back over at his Mom and her family. They were so happy together. She didn’t seem to miss or need him at all anymore.

He knew that he had hurt her after the curse broke. He’d seen the pain he’d caused her in her eyes and he’d reveled in it. She deserved to feel bad. She’d tried to mess with his real family and take away their happy ending. She was a villain who didn’t deserve to be happy.

But the glow on her face when she hugged and kissed her kids felt like a thousand knives slicing across his body. He deserved that. Not her. They were the good guys. He couldn’t understand why he was the one who was suffering.

He turned back toward Emma. His grandparents had one another. His Dad had a fiancé and a new life. She was all he had. He nodded his head and stepped closer to her, “okay Mom.” She grinned and ruffled his hair before throwing an arm over his shoulders. With a pretend smile on his face that did nothing to alleviate the sorrow he felt inside he allowed her to lead him away from where his Mom seemed more than happy to not care about him.

The two loaded up some plates and found a nice spot where they could sit back and watch all the activity around them. They both pretended not to see the Mills family laughing and enjoying themselves around them.

After they had grabbed some samples from the ice cream bar and had dug in the peace they’d managed to find became unsettled when the redhead’s slimy husband oozed over towards them.

“We- he-hell,” he grinned over at Henry. “The master villain himself in the flesh,” he offered his hand to him. “I have to say I’ve admired your work.”

He came around the table and bent down over Henry’s shoulder. “You know – in my line of work I’ve seen it all. Lovers turn against lovers. Brothers against brothers, sisters against sisters. But you my boy,” he clapped him on the back. “Are a source of true evil I’ve never seen before. I don’t think I’ve ever known a child to turn on their Mother the way that you have. I have to say that’s some darkness you have brewing away inside you in order to pull that one off. You’re just the kind of man that our side is always looking for.”

Henry winced and dropped his ice cream. He looked as though he was about to cry.
Emma put her cup of ice cream down and squared off against the slime ball, “stay away from my son.”

“Or you’ll do what?” Hades got right up in her face. “Last time I checked you were just like your Mother. Waiting for other people to fight your battles for you.”

Emma bristled at the insult, “he’s my son - ,” she started.

“Is he?!?!?!” Hades put his hand over his heart. “Is that what you call it when you abandon a helpless infant and have someone else raise them?”

Emma sucked in a shaky breath. She could duke it out with the best of them. And she had been at the end of Regina’s tongue lashings enough to be proud enough to say that she could hold her own. But that was the one dig she had yet to develop an armor against. It was such a deeply personal regret that it was always an easy raw nerve to pick at.

She wanted so desperately to slug the man. But one look around at the attention they were attracting let her know it was best to back off. She knew was going to have to be the bigger person here. She took Henry’s hand and pulled him away as she blinked back tears, “come on Henry. Let’s go and try out the rides.”

They took a turn on the Ferris wheel before Emma noticed that the Mills family were done with picture taking. By now the sun had set but again fate had smiled down on the party. It was still unseasonably warm which gave everyone a chance to enjoy some outdoor nightlife after a season of being locked indoors with the heat on full blast.

She quickly made a beeline for her daughter. It had been almost 24 hours without her girl and she tended to go into withdrawal without her.

She pulled Henry behind her as she interrupted where Regina sat. She was in one of the many cabanas around sitting with Abby and talking to the architect, Mieke while Lola lounged beside them. Emma remembered her from the few times they had met to talk about her house renovations. The blonde seemed to be sitting unnecessarily close to Regina and for some reason that bugged her even more than it should. But her holding her daughter on her lap made her even nuttier.

“Hey,” she broke into what looked like an intimate conversation. Regina blew out a big breath which made the scowl on her face turn into a glare. She instead turned to her daughter, “Hi princess. Mommy’s here,” she held out her arms silently asking for the blonde to hand her baby over.

Mieke continued bouncing Blue on her lap and playing with her fingers, “ahh! Miss Swan. How are you?” she asked with her customary thick German accent.

“I’m fine,” Emma snapped. When the woman fluttered her lashes at her, she softened her tone, “I’ve been waiting all day to spend time with my baby though. Do you mind if I steal her from you?”

“Mind?” she asked while laughing. “Why yes. But will I allow it, yes of course. Here is your schatzi.”

Emma smirked at the woman before grabbing up her baby. She held her close as she kissed her temple with Blue squirming and giggling the whole way, “Oh my baby. Mommy’s missed you so.”

Mieke turned toward Regina. She rose and held out her hand, “now how about that dance?”

Regina accepted with a smile and the two made their way past Emma and Henry and onto the dance
Henry openly gaped after them. He’d never seen his Mother in a romantic situation before. He was still confused how she and Emma had created Blue.

It seemed since coming to England he was seeing sides of his Mother that he’d never even known existed. She was supposed to be a villain yet she chose to work building a home for kids and animals who didn’t have one. She had 2 more kids when he’d never been able to imagine her with anyone other than himself. She had animals when she’d always been against them having any. And now she was moving around a dance floor carefree with a woman who seemed to be more than just a friend.

He was so preoccupied with his musings he never noticed that Emma had the exact same surprise and envy written across her face. But someone did.

Abby watched the way the pair looked after the woman she considered a sister. “They’re not serious you know,” she offered her.

Emma’s head whipped around and her cheeks stained red as she realized she’d been caught staring. She offered what she hoped was a carefree shrug, “it’s not my business.”

“No, it’s not,” Abby agreed. “She’s been through way too much. And has had to deal with a lot of pain that no one ever should,” her eyes strayed to Henry making it clear what she was referring to. “But I know she’s explained to her that though she enjoys the flirting, she’s not in a place for a relationship.”

Emma couldn’t help the slight smile that momentarily graced her face as she took one of the unoccupied seats. She was again solely focused on her baby and it allowed Henry the opportunity to slip away.

“So how have you been?” Abby asked as she squirmed in her seat. Her back had been killing her for the past couple of days. She’d found it almost impossible to find a comfortable spot. “Any problems with the house?”

Emma shook her head slightly, “No. The house is great. For the most part everything’s going well,” she lifted her baby in the air a few times earning her a few giggles and some squirming.

“She’s had a rough year. She deserves some happiness,” Abby insisted as she readjusted the pillows behind her. She looked around her for her husband. He was supposed to be bringing over some water. Instead she noticed he’d gotten sidetracked with some kids and was busy kicking a ball around. She shook her head ruefully as she watched him go in for a kick then feign hurt and allow a small child to step in for him.

“Yeah. As long as the Evil Queen gets her way then who cares about anyone else right?” she muttered sarcastically as she stroked her baby’s hair.

Abby frowned at her as she cocked her head to the side and studied her. “What do you want Emma?” she asked softly.

Emma was taken back by the question. No one ever asked her what she wanted. No one ever cared. She was just meant to perform whatever task they’d set before her. But want? That wasn’t a question meant for even a former foster kid.

She was pulled out of her reverie by a loud gasp. Her head swung around to the blonde next to her as her face scrunched in concern, “are you okay?”
Abby was clutching at her large stomach and breathing heavily through her mouth. “No,” she breathed out. She looked up at Emma with a cross between wonder and pain on her face, “I think my water just broke.”

Emma’s eyes widened comically as she leapt up cradling Blue across her shoulder, “Oh my god. What do you need me to do?”

Though she was in pain Abby was able to laugh through it, “well first you can relax. You won’t have to deliver the baby or anything.” She nodded her head in two different directions. “If you could run and grab my husband and Regina though I’d be grateful.”

“Of course, of course,” Emma’s head bobbed. “I’ll be right back,” she threw over her shoulder before turning and doing as asked.

Jim immediately ran over to assist his wife after she told him what was going on. After breaking into Regina’s dance and informing her of what was going on, she followed her back to where the blonde was now sweating as her husband bent over her attentively.

Regina sat beside her and took her hand. She smiled over at her old friend, “Leave it to you to ruin the party,” she teased.

“You know me,” she rolled her eyes. “There’s nothing like an amazing after party.”

Regina patted her friend’s hand before rising. She went into take charge mode and began to shout out orders, “Jim, you take Abby upstairs and get her cleaned up. Then grab your bag and we’ll be on our way. I’ll find Mother and make sure she knows to keep an eye on Fae and Blue. The guests should stay and enjoy themselves for as long as they’d like.”

Jim wandered off and Regina went in search of her Mother. Emma trailed behind her, “Blue can stay with me. You’re going to have your hands full here and - ….”

“No.”

Emma scowled at the woman, “you’re not even going to be here! You have your hands full for now. Just let me take Blue and - ….”

“No,” Regina caught her Mother’s eye where she stood watch over Fae. She motioned for her to join them before turning to Emma. “There is no circumstance where I’d ever allow you to take my baby. The answer is no and it will remain that way.”

By now her Mother had joined them. She put her hand on her arm as she turned toward her, “Abby’s in labor.” Her Mother’s face first registered surprise then joy. Regina continued smiling broadly at her, “I’m going to take them to the hospital and the rest of you can join us later. She knew that her sister had gone to lay down earlier and had no idea if she was up yet or had any plans to rejoin them. “If it’s alright with you, I’m going to need you to keep an eye on Fae and Blue,” she turned toward Emma to return her baby to her.

Emma drew back cradling Blue protectively against the side farthest away from the brunette’s outstretched arms. She shook her head fiercely, “No Regina. You’re not even going to be here. I see no reason why my baby should be left alone to be cared for by strangers when I’m her Mom. And I should - .”

Regina wasn’t in the mood for arguments. She didn’t have time to spare with this bull. She looked around her before wriggling her fingers sending a shot of magic in Emma’s direction. She grabbed her baby as the blonde froze before giving her a kiss and handing her over to her Mother.
Cora chuckled while accepting her grandbaby. “Don’t worry about us here dear. We’ll be just fine,” she waved her daughter away.

Regina stopped to interrupt Fae as he played with a small blonde girl. She bent down to his level and whispered quietly to him before leaning over and giving him a hug and kiss. Then she made her exit back into the house.

Emma struggled to regain control of her body. She caught herself just before hitting the ground as the corners of her mouth pulled back baring her teeth. She growled as she watched the brunette disappear before turning back around.

Cora watched her with an amused expression as she rocked gently with Blue cradled in her arms facing Emma. Blue herself seemed to be extremely entertained with the situation and gurgled as she wrapped her hands around her toes while grinning up at her Mom. “She always did know how to make an exit,” Cora chuckled.

Emma thought about putting up a fight with her Mother. But truthfully the woman terrified her. There was a glint of something ancient in her eyes. Ancient and dangerous. If Rumplestiltskin who was the darkest soul in the world was terrified by her then she’d be a fool to even try and tangle with her.

With her head hung in defeat, she bid her goodbyes to her baby before going in search of her son.

CF

Once Emma became preoccupied with her baby, Henry took it upon himself to enjoy his freedom. He wandered into the house to have a look around.

The inside didn’t impress him much. He’d grown up in a mansion. Even though this one was twice the size of his house it still didn’t faze him. Living in luxury was no big deal to him.

Looking around and seeing nothing that caught his eye he decided to ignore the downstairs. There were too many people strolling around and it wasn’t what he was interested in anyway. He’d wanted to see how his Mother was living with her new family. After glancing around to make sure that no one had seen him, he made his way upstairs.

He wandered through the rooms until he came to a suite that could only have belonged to his Mom. To the left was obviously Blue’s room. The décor was a mix of lavender, black, and silver furniture and accents. It really didn’t interest him much.

To the right was obviously a young boy’s room. Though he wanted to explore it he had no idea how much time he had on his own. So he continued forward to his intended destination.

As soon as he opened the door he knew it was hers. It smelled just like her. He inhaled deeply a scent that he knew well yet had somehow forgotten. It left him with a melancholic feeling inside. He pushed past it and continued forward.

The room was a surprise. Not because of the setting or anything. It was just that his Mom had always kept everything immaculate. She cleaned things that were already cleaned repeatedly. She never allowed clutter to build up.

But this room was different. There were robes carelessly thrown over the arms of chairs. And though the bed was made and the blankets were smooth, there was a fleece throw flung over it with Justice League characters across it.
In the corner close to the bed was a small crib. It was round and didn’t take up much room but from what he could tell about that and about the fleece throw it seemed the baby and the boy both slept with his Mom.

Though he remembered climbing into her bed some nights when his room seemed too large and scary, he’d always been tucked into his own bed at bedtime. He just had a hard time reconciling the carefree happy woman that he’d seen of her since being in England with the woman who’d always appeared to him stiff and burdened.

He was looking around when he noticed a book on the nightstand. He checked behind him to make sure that the coast stayed clear before moving toward it. It was the same book he’d mistaken for his and had snatched from the boy Fae.

Upon turning to the first page, it became clear that this wasn’t the same as his storybook. Instead of telling the story of Snow White, the story seemed to start with one about a miller. He had no idea what that had to do with anything. But it aroused his curiosity.

Before he could finish the first sentence a voice cried out surprising him. “Henry,” Emma called sharply from the door causing him to stand quickly and drop the book. She seemed too wound up to notice the guilty expression on his face, “Let’s go.”

One look at her face and he could see the tears that she was trying to hold back. Her breathing was hard and labored and he knew arguing with her would get him nowhere. He had no idea what was going on but he knew better than to ask. He picked the book up and clutched it in his arms as they walked out.

Emma said nothing to him as they waited for the valet to bring the car around. She seemed to be lost in her own mind. Which was fine with him as he was lost in his own world too. Henry continued to keep quiet hoping she wouldn’t say anything to him about the book.

On the long ride home he kept glancing at his Mom. She was hunched over the steering wheel muttering to herself. She still hadn’t said a word about what was wrong with her now. Or why they’d left so abruptly without saying bye to anyone which his Mom had taught him was just bad manners. But one thing he knew for certain as he clutched the book closer to his chest. Tonight was going to be a long night.
**Ever a Surprise**

**Seriously is pissing me off right now. It keeps turning my script into formatting language instead of regular font and I'm getting reviews days after they appear on my feed. Anywho... Enjoy! :)**

CHAPTER 42

By the time that they got home it was still early. The dashboard clock had marked the time at barely 7:45. Henry wanted to burst through the door as soon as it opened and make a beeline for his room but he knew it was best to make a casual exit. He wanted to be alone when he studied the book.

Emma had glanced at the book that he'd carried out of the car first suspiciously then she'd looked at him and sighed. Thankfully she never actually asked about it.

He knew that she had wanted him to give up on his storybook. But he couldn't. It had given him the power to see past the magic that the town was cloaked in. And gave him the strength to help break the curse and free the town once and for all.

Emma had grabbed herself a beer before settling in. She'd sat at the table and asked if he wanted to keep her company but he'd declined. He had more important things to do and she probably only wanted to talk to him about her baby anyway. Ever since they'd learned of her existence everything in his life was always about the baby.

He made a mad dash to his room and with a deep exhale he rested momentarily against the door. He wanted to rip right into the book but forced himself to slow down. His heart was beating rapidly in his chest and he seriously needed to get ahold of himself.

After storing the book on the nightstand where his previous book had taken up residence, he grabbed his things and went to take his shower. He brushed his teeth afterward and went through the rest of his nighttime routine. Then he hurried back to the comfort of his room.

He kept an ear out for Emma's footsteps on the stairs. Though they had no organized bedtime ritual, he was aware that she sometimes checked on him before going to bed herself. He turned off the main light in the room hoping she'd think he was asleep. Then he grabbed his flashlight, his original book, and Fae's version. He pulled his blanket over his head and with a nervous and excited tickle in his belly, he opened the books.

On the first page of his book there were the words he knew by heart now. Once upon a time there was a young princess. She was the fairest in all the land. Her skin was as white as the snow she was named for and her lips were as red as rubies....

Then he opened Fae's storybook. What he saw had him frowning yet leaning in closer at the same time. Once upon a time there was a miller. The miller had no sons but he did have a daughter.... "What the - ?!!" he muttered.

He shook his head and burrowed in deeper. Then he began to read.

CF

Emma sat slumped at her kitchen table staring at the empty beer bottles in front of her. She just wanted to drink until her mind would stop thinking. But she had a child to raise. She knew her
carefree blackout days were long behind over. She was a big girl now. And times changed. She knew what she needed. She needed a friend.

She glanced at the clock and did some quick calculations in her head. It would be early afternoon in Storybrooke right now. With that reassurance in mind, she pulled out her phone and unlocked it. She found the name with all the heart emoticons around it and dialed.

It wasn't long before the brunette's face popped into view. She flinched as she squealed aloud.

"Eemmmmmmmmmmmmaaaaaaaaa! How're ya?"

Emma smiled and rolled her eyes. She loved Ruby. She just had a way of worming herself into your heart somehow. She hadn't been looking for a friend when she'd first come to Storybrooke. But she was glad that she'd found her, "I'm good Rubes. You? How's Granny and everything there?"

Ruby flicked her wrist at her, "same old same old. You know nothing here ever changes. Sometimes I even think it's like the curse never ended. I'm not going to bore you with mind-numbing details. How's life on the other side of the pond? How're Henry and Blue? Tell Aunty Ruby everything!"

Emma managed to push out an agonized small smile. She just really didn't feel in the mood to perform her duties as Savior and put on a fake front. Instead she'd wanted a friend to talk to. "Henry's fine. He's still moody and unfortunately still obsessing over that book. We just went to a party and he even brought it with him," she shook her head as the weight of her lot in life fell on her slumped shoulders.

Ruby frowned worried about her friend. She really didn't look right. Her face was pale and drawn. There was obviously something serious going on, "are you sure you're ok Em? You know you can always come home."

Emma lifted her weary eyes to her friend. She gave her a small, tired smile, "Storybrooke was never really my home. And yea, I'm sure I'm fine Rubes," she sprawled her legs out in front of her as she slumped further in her chair. "It's just been a really long day. Abby/Kathryn went into labor today at a party Regina was throwing to celebrate abandoning her kid so that she could get a new and improved son. I guess – maybe – it just brought up some of my own issues, ya know?"

"Sure Em," the gangly brunette nodded.

"My heart breaks for Henry. She treats him like she would a dog. No," she shook he head, "scratch that. She treats her dog better than she treats him. She says hi to him and that's about all."

Ruby scrunched her brow and a scowl graced her face, "Emma, isn't that what you wanted?" A quiet sob broke through Emma's guard even though she was trying desperately to hold it in. Ruby continued as if she'd never heard it, "You wanted to be his Mom. So now you are."

Tears began to snake their way down her face as Ruby's face became nothing but a blur. Her voice came out broken and choked, "Not like this. It wasn't supposed to be like this Rubes. We were supposed to be together. And now Henry and I are the ones suffering while she gets her happy ending," Emma cried.

"She has her Mom and sis- ters, a new son that's be-be-tter than Henry and even my baby," she swiped her hand across her face to mop up the tears that just kept falling. Ruby's face showed her sympathy but she remained quiet as her friend unloaded.

"She even has a damned cat and dog. I always wanted a dog," getting fed up with the wallowing and tears Emma sniffed and tried to get ahold of herself. She knew she sounded nuts and probably
looked even crazier. But she couldn't help herself.

She was supposed to be the savior. And she'd gotten squat out of that deal except a shite childhood and mental issues that would last forever. She just couldn't understand how a prophecy would pick one person to make them miserable their whole life. Didn't she deserve at least a break? How could the fates just decide they were going to shite on her for life? What the hell had she done to piss them off?

These were the same questions she'd asked herself throughout her childhood and some of her adulthood. Why her? When was the misery going to end?

It was supposed to have ended with her reuniting with her son and parents. But she'd gotten tired of pretending that the two of them making a choice for her to save them as an infant and pushing her into a cruel world to stand alone was something they'd done for her own good. She tried to do her best to stay upbeat and face each day with a smile. But seriously?

Once she'd gotten over the Charming shite show she tried to move on with her son. But Henry was as angry and moody with her now as he had been with Regina. It seemed she could do nothing right.

Regina hated her. She'd thrown her taking Henry in her face multiple times now. And she could tell from the look in her eyes that it was something she'd never forgive her for even though she did it to protect her son. Why in the hell was she the one in the wrong?!

Blue was the best part of her life now. And now even the thought of being away from her for a full 24 hours was almost too much for her to bear. She needed her baby. Holding onto her was the one thing that made everything else bearable.

"Oh Em," Ruby said softly drawing the blonde's attention back to her. "I'm so sorry you're hurting. But it will get better. Henry's just growing into a teenager. Moody and angry is what they do. And you still have a nice new house and a beautiful baby."

Even the thought of Blue could put a smile on her face, "Yeah," she said quietly as she grabbed some napkins from the holder on the table and began to mop up her face. Her tears were drying up and the tightness in her chest had lessened. She was starting to feel like a fool. Calling someone just to blubber at them.

She sat up straight and nodded. Though her eyes were still red, her face still blotchy, and her chest still congested she was feeling a little better. She finished mopping up her face and crumpled the napkin in her hand, "I'm sorry Rubes. I guess I was just feeling sorry for myself. Thanks for the hand up from a deep depression."

The brunette scrunched up her nose, "You're welcome?!" She shook her head, "Seriously though Em. Are you doing alright?"

Emma sniffed again and nodded her head faster this time, "Yeah Rubes I'm fine. I mean – Henry starts school on Monday. And I've decided I'm going to start work. Regina always brings Blue with her to work and they have a nursery there. I'll be able to spend time with my baby and help out making this school the best child care center in the world for these kids."

Ruby contemplated the answer as she studied her friend's face. She was still worried about her. It seemed like she was going through a harder time than anyone knew. Even saviors need saving sometimes. But the light that shone in her eyes when speaking of Blue was unmistakable. It was the same light she'd had when speaking about Regina and Henry back before life blew up.
From this standpoint there was nothing to be done except let it play out. "Well, alright then," she flashed a bright smile. As she opened her mouth to say something, a loud noise of glass breaking sounded behind her. She winced, "I'm really sorry Em. But I gotta get back to work," she grimaced as she saw the mess just behind her. They were training a new waitress and she was getting a headache already. This was definitely going to be a long day.

Emma had heard the crash and seen her friend’s face as she'd surveyed the damage. She'd figured as much. She reached for her beer and took a swig, "I'm good Rubes. And hey, sorry about hogging the convo. Next time you'll have to tell me all about that knight of yours."

"He's a duke," Ruby corrected while waggling her brows. "And yeah, call me tomorrow?"

Emma nodded, "sure thing Rubes. Bye," she disconnected the call.

She looked around her as she finished her beer. The place was definitely becoming lived in. There was evidence of her baby all over the place. From the highchair and bouncer to the toys strewn around. Henry's shoes lay carelessly in the hall and their jackets were strewn on chairs just in front of the actual coat rack.

She sipped on her beer as she tossed her used napkins. Then she picked up their coats and placed them on the hooks. She straightened hers and Henry's shoes near the door and went around the house making sure that all the doors and windows were locked before heading up to bed.

She stopped by Henry's room and stuck her head in. He lay sleeping beneath the covers. She walked across the room and checked his window was locked before heading to her own room. She did a lockup sweep of her own windows before turning on the alarm. After a quick rundown of her nighttime routine, she headed off to a dreamless sleep.

MF

"He's so big," Regina exclaimed as she compared Abby's now sleeping baby to her own. Blue had been so tiny. And her skin had been almost translucent. But Frederick James (Jim) Jr had burst out screaming with reddened skin at a whopping 4.08 kg. That put him around 9 pounds. Blue hadn't reached that weight until she was almost 2 months old.

"Yep," she exclaimed exhausted yet proudly as she lay against the pillows. She'd already had her shower and the bed had been changed. Regina had helped her with her first breastfeeding and her son had went right off to dreamland afterward. The hospital and doctor had been as efficient with this delivery as they had been during Regina's. And soon Zelena would join the new Mom's club.

"You're telling me. I'm the one who had to push him out."

"You did good," she told her as she grinned at her from near the isolette. She turned to take in the woman that she had once called friend and could now call sister. She walked over to the bed and placed a kiss upon her forehead, "Now you can sleep," she whispered to her.

Abby nodded and smiled. She didn't need to be told twice. No one ever told you that after birthing a baby your need to fall into an almost comatose sleep would be so strong. As much as she wanted to fight it and continue to stare at her boy, she could do nothing but fade to black.

Freddy exited the bathroom and walked over to check on his son, "I can't believe he's here," his voice trembled with emotion as he stared down at his boy.

"Trust me," she said. "It gets harder and better at the same time."

Fred's head twisted around to look at her, "I can't wait. I'm sure it's quite a ride."
Regina nodded. Now that Abby was asleep she was finding it hard to be in the room. Seeing their son brought back a flood of memories about her own that she would rather not have to face again, "I'm going to go and get some fresh air," she smiled and waved as she made her way out the door.

Since finding out that Abby was having a son, she had been feeling out of sorts about the situation. She couldn't readily identify what it was but she knew that she hadn't been happy to hear she was having a son. But being a good sister, she'd plastered on a smile, oohed and aahed over the ultrasound pics, and congratulated her. But it was all a ruse.

The pain of losing Henry was something that cut her so deeply that she'd resorted to purposely trying to repress any memory of him. She'd been thrilled that Blue had been a girl. It made it easier not to dwell on the child she'd lost.

She'd had a little bit of reservation when she'd met Fae. But he'd quickly banished those fears. He was nothing like Henry. And she was grateful for that.

But after staring down at a big baby boy who had similar coloring to Henry she'd become unnerved.

She knew that she needed to get herself together. The problem was all hers. But the memories that flooded her were overwhelming.

She walked past the reception desk and out the back door. Abby was in a different suite than she'd been. Her suite had overlooked the gardens. Abby's suite was on the other side of the hospital. It faced out to the city. Though the view was nice at night when the city was alight, she'd preferred the garden.

France's customary 3 day minimum hospital stay seemed like a prison sentence to her right now. But Abby had been there for her. And she knew she needed to spend at least the next few days doing all she could to help alleviate her stress.

She would grin and bear the circumstance. Then she would hurry home to her own kids and wrap them up in her arms. As she made her way out to a bench alongside the lake behind the hospital, for the first time in a long time, she didn't try to force the memories of her former life away.

She and Henry had started on a rocky road. He was colicky and wouldn't stop crying for days on end. As a new mother, she'd been completely unprepared for the situation. After being sleep deprived and overwhelmed for days she'd even been tempted to give him back.

Then, unexpectedly, a change. Small to say the least. They'd shared a moment. And he'd become burrowed in the empty space in her heart that she'd never been able to fill before.

Life with Henry had always been up and down. But none so horrifying as after Snow and that damned storybook.

After that life had become a living nightmare. As unbelievable it sounded Emma had taken over as the only bright spot during those dark times. Even though they'd only expressed the love they'd shared between the two of them in sighs against shoulders before collapsing into deep slumber, she'd known even before Emma began to demand more from her that it had to end. So she'd had to push her away in hopes that she would never see the truth. She was the Evil Queen. And Emma was prophesied to strike her down.

After Archie told her that Emma was planning on taking off with Henry. And even worse, he'd help her do it, she'd been left with no choice. Emma had to be taken out. Because taking her son was something she could not allow!!! It was a betrayal beyond any words or condemnations.
The sleeping curse was merely meant to buy her some time to gather herself and figure the situation out. At that point, she could care less about the curse. The adage if you dig a grave for someone else, you should just dig two had never been more apt. The curse had turned out to be nothing for her except a prison that she had trapped herself inside of.

But finding out that her child had been the one who'd fallen victim was too much to bear. So she set off with Emma to do her best to reverse the situation.

Once Henry awoke from the curse, he'd changed. The breaking of the curse sent him off on a downward spiral they'd never recovered from. He fully immersed himself into Charming life. He spewed venom at her every chance he could to drive home to her heart that she was nothing to him. He had his real family. And that was what he wanted.

He was full of so much rage in his self-righteousness. Though the parallels to him and Snow were never as obvious as after the curse breaking, she'd always tried to convince herself that it wasn't so. He was still her son. And she loved him with everything in her just as she'd done from the first moment he'd been placed into her arms.

So she put her pride to the side and accepted his vitriol. She convinced herself it was a phase and they'd move past it. Except that was nothing more than a pipe dream that she'd lost hope in on that last fateful day of meeting Henry on the streets.

She'd only wanted to make sure he understood she was still there. And she still would always love him. But he took care of that easily enough.

She'd been horrified when he'd actually raised his fists to her. She had no doubt from the look on his face and in his eyes that had she not flinched and backed away that he would've hit her directly in her face. Her own child?! She'd been mortified.

How could he have become that way? She knew she'd screwed up. A lot. But to get to a point where her own child would raise his fists at her fully prepared to use them?!

Then Emma appeared on her doorstep. At her Mother's bidding she was sure. To proclaim herself Henry's sole and rightful parent. And tell her that she would not be allowed to see him unless she decided it was okay.

She'd been so angry. She'd felt hurt and betrayed by Emma and Henry both.

There she was again. With no choice. So she'd taken the only way out that she'd had left. Or so she'd thought.

She would be eternally grateful to Zelena for allowing her the chance to spend some time with Daniel. Those days had been more precious to her than anything she'd ever received in her life.

And her baby Blue. Her tiny Savior. Without her she'd be dead right now. There was never enough she could do to repay the joy and gratitude that child gave her just from existing.

She pulled out her phone and unlocked it. She noticed an email sent from her videographer. She opened the app and clicked on the link.

She sat back as the heaviness lifted from her heart and she began to watch raw footage from the party. Her eyes followed her son and daughter as they flit from scene to scene.

Henry was part of a past that she didn't exactly want to run from but didn't need as a constant drawback to hold her back as she tried to move forward in her life either. As she watched her family
together with newly acquired friends celebrate her son's adoption she knew that this was the life. This was the family she'd always longed for. And now this was her happy ending come true.
First Day Jitters

Chapter Notes

Sorry guys about the long wait. But life will always supersede fanfiction. I've been really busy. But I will never forget this nor my other unfinished works. I am still working on them.
On a lighter note, the next chapter is almost written and will be up soon.
Enjoy!

CHAPTER 43

"Smile," Emma commanded from behind the camera.

Henry tossed his head to flip his hair out of his eyes. Then he pulled the corners of his mouth up in what was supposed to be a smile but instead ended up a grimace.

Emma's nose turned up but she snapped the pic anyway. She'd just have to remember to try and get another one before the day was over. She also made a mental note to get his hair cut. He looked like he was trying to bring back grunge.

"Let's go," she ordered as she turned toward the door. Henry pulled his backpack straps tighter and hoisted it further up on his back as he followed her out the door.

They drove to the school in the silence that had stood between them since yesterday. Henry had spent the entire day in his room curled up with his book. And she'd given him the space hoping that he'd eventually get bored or hungry and come out. He hadn't.

When she woke him up for school this morning she'd steeled herself for a tantrum. Henry had merely blinked his annoyance up at her from bed after waking. Then he'd gone about his morning routine.

They'd eaten breakfast as two strangers across a table from one another. She'd kept waiting for him to say something to her. But he never did.

"Henry," Emma began after the silence had reached its breaking point for her. She put down her mug of hot chocolate and shook her head, "This being a Mom is new to me. I'm sure I'm screwing things up," she muttered while running a hand through her hair. "Blue's just a baby. But you're almost a teenager. You can talk to me. I can't read minds. If I'm doing something wrong then just let me know," she was practically pleading with him.

Henry continued to stare down at his half empty plate of rubbery and watery scrambled eggs. He was on the verge of breaking down and it was making him angry. He didn't want to be in this position. He just wanted everything back to normal like it used to be. Before he had to deal with all of these emotions that he could barely even identify running through him.

"We used to be best friends," she reminded him.

He looked up at his Mom with fire in his eyes, "Can I go now?"

Emma sat back in her seat and crossed her arms over her lap. Her face was stony as she heaved a
sigh, "Go," she relented. Before he could zoom away she called after him, "School has already started. You have 5 minutes to get back down here so we can go."

Henry looked back and started to protest but the sharp-eyed look she was giving him made him stop. Instead he gave her a terse nod and ran back into his room.

She cleared the dishes and did a quick cleanup of the kitchen. Then she followed him up the stairs to finish getting herself ready.

They met again at the bottom of the stairs. Emma demanded he pose for the first day of school pictures. And now here they were sitting in her car staring at the school. School was already in session and they needed to get moving but for two different reasons neither was yet ready for that to happen.

The wall of silence that had been slowly erecting itself for some time between them stood higher than the Great Wall of China. They were both at a loss for what to say to one another.

Henry was lost in his confused thoughts that he'd been left with since reading Fae's book. Add that to the anxiety of starting a new school in a new country no less. He'd always known everyone in Storybrooke. Though he'd never been the most popular kid, he'd never been completely an outsider either. The school loomed above him cold and foreboding amongst the backdrop of the grey skies that surrounded them.

Emma sat unsure of what to do next. She knew there had to be some type of protocol to helping a kid start a new school. But Henry was 11 not 5. And she had just walked into this Mom thing months ago. The parenting books she'd bought to help her try to cope with being a single Mom were still so intimidating. She hadn't found one that actually helped yet.

Pulling herself away from the road of negative thoughts she was in the middle of going down, she turned to Henry with a watery smile. Only to find that he had already hopped out of the car and was making his way inside. She followed along behind him at a slower pace.

Inside the front office, she finished filling out his registration paperwork. When the registrar let her know she could leave now, she turned to Henry shyly, "well guess this is all you kid," she reached out and pulled him in for a hug.

Henry returned her embrace halfheartedly. Then he quickly stepped back. He wasn't a kid who needed his Mommy to hold his hand through the school day. School was school right? He was a smart kid. Everyone said so all the time. And it held the comforting promise of a routine that he could easily understand and slip right into the pattern of. It was precisely what he needed. A few hours of respite from his own miserable life. Or at least that's what he hoped.

He knew the way things were lately wasn't Emma's fault. She was doing the best she could. Now it was up to him to decide how he was going to deal with this new life. He turned quickly leaving Emma behind him as he hurried after the registrar to start his day.

Emma – for her turn – watched him leave with a heavy heart. It might not exactly be his first day of school. But it was the first that they'd shared together. Her little boy was growing up so fast now. But he also wasn't all she had in her life anymore. Knowing she didn't have time to dawdle she turned on her heel and quickly made her way back to the car. She skipped her radio since she'd tried that when she'd first gotten to this country. Though this was England and they spoke English she still had no idea what the hell anyone was talking about. They used weird slang that she still wasn't familiar with.
She and Henry had had the usual shopping and dining out excursions here. But they really hadn't had much time or opportunity to actually socialize with anyone. They were still newbies in a strange land.

So upon moving here she'd opted for just blaring tunes through her phone as she drove. Before backing out of the parking lot, she switched playlists and turned the music up to ear-splitting levels as she made her way back to the school.

She was giddy with nerves and excitement as she parked her car in the driveway and then began to make her way from her house to the school. Her house was technically a part of the school's grounds but it was still a hike of almost ¾ of a mile to get onto the main campus.

She kept up a brisk pace as she made her way enjoying the dewy, cool morning air and the way the wind felt nipping at her cheeks and making her hair blow. It was a little more on the cooler side, but still nice. Her thoughts drifted as she followed the little path that would take her up to the school.

Henry was her first thought. He was her son and she loved him. But she could see how badly he was struggling to come to terms with the change that had taken over his life. He'd spent his entire life being an oversheltered, overprotected kid who had anything he wanted at his fingertips. Now everything had changed.

Emma couldn't afford to keep him in the same way Regina had. And parenting was still so new to her. She made sure he was clean, fed, and as comfortable as could be at all times. But still she sensed a sadness in him that she hadn't seen since before the two of them had bonded. The changes in his life were permanent ones. Though she knew it must be a lot for him she'd already been as sensitive and stretched as much as she could with him. The rest was kinda up to him.

She still wasn't sure how to chase those shadows inside of him away. She didn't like the distance he was holding her at. They were all the other had. They needed one another. But the fact that he was shutting her out made her question herself and filled her with doubt. It was a terrifying place to be in as a single Mom.

They wouldn't meet their therapist until tomorrow. And she really hoped that the interviews she'd set up later today for a babysitter for him would work out. Then they could get into a routine and hopefully things would calm down. Routines were soothing for children. Or so she'd heard once upon a time.

She picked up her pace as the school came closer into view. She practically jogged to the front door at the thought of being able to do inspiring work and spend even more time with her baby. Blue's furniture would arrive sometime that week also. She'd have to check online and stay abreast of the tracking. But she was still hoping that sometime soon Regina would agree to let her have Blue for an overnight.

She entered the administration building and made a beeline for the offices. She had spent tons of time there already during her visits with Blue just before moving so her Assistant was already familiar with her.

"Hi," she greeted the petite brunette at the front desk. Her placard read Moira Offred, Assistant. "I know your headmistress is out but - ."

"No, she's here," Moira broke in and corrected. Her hand was already moving toward the intercom, "did you need her for something?"

Emma blinked her surprise then hid her hurt feelings. She thought that Regina would be at the
hospital with Abby. She'd heard no news of the baby which made her feel a little sad and brought the situation of her and Henry's isolation into sharp focus. She would've thought since she knew Abby too that a courtesy call or text to say all was fine would be in order. Especially with Regina's stick up her butt Miss Manners act. But apparently she wasn't important enough to keep in the loop.

She plastered a tense smile on her face and nodded. "If you could please just let her know that I'm out here that would be great," she pushed through a tightened jaw. She walked over to the seating area and took a seat.

She waited upfront for a few minutes nervously shredding her hands as if she was waiting to be called into the principal's office. Which, she guessed she kinda was. Finally, after what felt like half of forever, there was a long beeping noise before Moira rose and ushered her into Regina's office.

Regina's head was buried in the laptop before her, instead of the desktop that sat off to the side, as the keyboard continued to clack when Emma walked in and took a seat. Fae sat beside her doing what appeared to be some basic math in a workbook. The small dimpled boy waved and grinned before returning to his work. Emma couldn't help but smile and wave back. The boy really was a cutie. It was clear he'd be a heartbreaker one day.

Off to the side sat a nursery/office that Regina had set up for her Mom and the kids. Cora greeted her with a nod of her head in her direction before going back to whatever work she was doing. Emma knew she was slowly acclimating to being in this new world. And that she was kept on a short leash by her daughters as far as driving and the internet was concerned. It was no surprise to see that her desk was setup to ensure her monitor could be seen at all times.

She knew from past visits that further in the room, there was her li'l stinkums snoozing away in her crib, another crib done up in blue soccer stuff which she guessed belonged to Abby, and a toddler bed for napping. There was bright shelving holding plenty of toys and books for the kids, a changing table, a dresser with clothes, a large comfy sofa set with comfortable pillows and blankets, a reading corner where the kids could sit in a mound of pillows, soft blankets, and stuffed animals and read. And of course the room wouldn't be complete without a large tv with gaming consoles. There was a private restroom in the room. And the closet held a double stroller and a highchair along with booster seats for the kids. It was a kid's dream playroom/punishment office for Cora.

Emma stifled a chuckle at the woman sitting amongst all the kid things. Maybe one day soon her kids would allow her to be an actual grown up on her own being as she ruled a Queendom, cut off heads, and ripped out hearts for – well – however the hell long these people had been reigning hell and ruining lives for.

She grinned as she watched Blue take a deep breath and tense her little body up before exhaling and relaxing again. If her baby hadn't been napping she would've went right inside and swooped her up. She missed the li'l stinker when she wasn't with her. Here it had only been 2 days and the sight of her baby already had her hands itching to cuddle her up and her eyes dewy.

"Yes Miss Swan?" Regina moved her glasses further up her nose but kept right on typing up the latest acquisition form for supplies. With the school's Grand opening happening in a matter of days, they were trying to make sure they were well stocked for the incoming flood of students.

Emma's thoughts and head snapped back to the present. She knew her arriving before they'd agreed on a starting date would be a surprise but this couldn't be helped. She was ready, willing, and able to help and that's what she meant to do. She sat up straight in her seat and leaned forward, "I'm ready to start work," she cried enthusiastically.

Regina's eyes swept over to her then went back to the current task at hand, "I thought we agreed you
could take the time you needed to secure daycare for your child."

Emma sneered at the way she referred to Henry. It irritated her to no end. She gestured toward the nursery, "well you do have a nursery here and - ."

"No."

The blonde's head snapped back, "No?"

Regina jiggled her knee before finally stopping what she was doing and looking up at Emma. "My nursery is off limits to your child," she made sure to emphasize the pronouns. "And it will stay that way. This is a school, a place of business, but it is also home to these kids. Their comfort here is one of our top priorities. They will be made to feel as if this is their home whether it's temporary or they permanently live here until they can become successful on their own."

Emma's jaw tightened as Regina continued to scold her as if she were a wayward child, "Your home is on an isolated part of the property. The borders of your home and the school are pretty well defined as far as I'm concerned. But just to make it clear," Regina sat up and reached into her desk and pulled out a brochure that had a map of the school inside of it.

"This is your home," she drew a circle where her house was located as well as a large part of the area around it. "This is a safe zone," she drew lines surrounding the property and the grounds around it. Then she grabbed a purple pen and drew a line definitively separating it from the rest of the school grounds. "And the rest of this is school property. Your child will not be allowed to come and go at will. I suggest you explain this to him and the rules and consequences of trespassing so that boundaries are not crossed," she folded up the map and pushed it toward Emma.

Emma snatched up the map and folded it before lifting her hip and slipping it into her pocket. She was angry even though she knew she really shouldn't be. What Regina said had made sense. Henry shouldn't have specialized treatment and be allowed to roam someone else's home and yard.

But when she looked back into the open door of the large nursery she just felt sad. She knew that the door on the other side opened into Abby's office. If they could share the nursery she saw no real reason Henry couldn't either.

Except the borders that Regina were drawing were clear. Henry wasn't welcomed. He was no longer a part of her family and he didn't share their lives. She could hear Ruby in her head asking her again 'wasn't this what she wanted?!' And the answer was the same. No. It was never supposed to be like this.

She cleared her throat and held firm to her composure. She wasn't going to start bawling just because Regina had made sure there was no confusion between them about the circumstances they were in. She was an employee who was gifted a beautiful home. They shared Blue. And she and Henry were on their own. Though she didn't like it, she'd learn to live with it.

She sat up straighter in her seat as she wrapped her arms around her knee to keep it from bouncing. She inhaled a deep steadying breath, "I want to work. I know that you can use the help with the kids coming in a few days. I'd like to be a part of that."

With another glance at the nursery she turned her attention forward again, "Henry's in school until three. That leaves me almost the entire day to help out. We have therapy starting tomorrow on Tuesdays and Thursdays in the late afternoon. And I'm meeting with some of the names you gave me for a babysitter later today. My childcare has already been taken care of," she concluded in what she reasoned was a sensible way. At the continued silence she threw up her hands and huffed, "You
brought me here to work Regina. And I'm here to do that."

Something about this situation didn't sit quite right with Regina. She'd already given up so much of her life and personal space to Emma's demands and it seemed like it was never enough. She inhaled a deep breath as she fought with herself internally.

But Emma did have a point. And she seemed sincere. Which was why she reached out to tap her intercom. She dialed in the connection to Merida's office and spoke into the handset, "If you have a minute do you mind stepping over to my office?"

Emma grinned and sat up straighter in her seat understanding that she had won. But her victory was short lived as she turned to Regina, "what am I doing again?"

Regina rolled her eyes and gave an exasperated sigh. She knew that Abby had filled Emma in on some of her duties during a few of her visits here. But she'd been so wrapped up in taking as much time with Blue that she'd obviously let it go in one ear and out the other. Thankfully there was a knock on the door to pull her attention away from her irritation.

Her 'come in' was quickly followed with the redhead from the other night entering the office. Regina smiled at her while extending her hand in her direction, "Merida DunBroch meet Emma Swan," her hand swept in Emma's direction. "She's going to be the new you."

The young redhead smiled warmly at Emma as she shook her hand, "It's nice to see ya 'gain."

"Nice to see you too ma'am," Emma rose from her seat to shake the woman's hand. "I'm looking forward to working with you."

Merida's smile turned into a full-blown grin, "Well, we always love to see that enthusiasm. We have a hard job here and we need as much sunshine as we can get to help us through the stormy days. Now," she squared her shoulders and nodded her head toward the door. "How about we get out here and get to it!"

"Please do," Regina deadpanned.

Merida chuckled and waved as she ushered Emma out the door. Just before she ducked out she turned back around, "when does Blue wake up from her nap?"

Regina had been in the process of replacing her glasses so that she could get back to work. She glared at Emma above them as she settled them in place already understanding what Emma was truly asking, "after her nap she'll have some lunch. Then you're free to spend time with her until you leave to pick up your child."

Emma nodded and turned to follow the redhead. They walked past Regina's assistant desk and over to the other side. The door opened up onto much the same setup as the other side. There was the assistant's desk where a young blonde sat putting even more makeup on top of the already garish amount of bright colored eyeshadow, lipstick and blush that she had on. Past there were 3 more offices and what judging from looking through the glass windows what appeared to be a meeting room on the other side.

"This is Lydia," Merida introduced the two. The woman put down her compact and grinned broadly. "She seems useless but trust me, she's going to be one of your closest allies by the time you've settled in here." She turned back around to the assistant, "Lydia, this is Emma. She's going to be taking over here once our building is completed."

The two exchanged pleasantries before Merida gave Emma a tour of their office suite. "I left your
office vacant and I've put off the interviews for your own assistants until after you've settled in. Since they'll be your assistants and not mine I thought that it'd be best for you to handle that."

"Right," Emma stood nervously looking around her trying to take in the enormity of the task before her.

Merida clapped a hand onto her shoulder, "it's okay. One step at a time. For now, why don't you give your chair a spin?"

Emma smiled her thanks at the trust that was being put into her and walked around the desk. She took a seat onto what felt like the most comfortable chair in the world. Her head and body practically sank into the faux leather.

The redhead grinned at her childlike responses. She could see why someone as hot as Regina would make a baby with someone as cute as the blonde before her. She clapped her hands together, "Now. Let's get to go work."

**CF**

When Emma made her way through the throng of the pickup line at the school, she was all grins. Today had been a great day. Hopefully all the rest to come with be the same.

Henry approached the car as unenthusiastically as always. He ignored the stares and whispers around them as they took in Emma's yellow bug. Not only did it stick out like a sore thumb because of it's bright color, but it was clearly being driven from the wrong side. He hopped into the seat and buckled up then stared forward waiting for them to move. When they continued to sit and block traffic he looked over at Emma annoyed. "Can we go now?" he snapped.

Emma's head reared back slightly but a honk from behind her had her putting the car in gear. She pulled out of the parking space and began to head back toward home. "How was school?" she asked as she navigated traffic.

"Fine," Henry huffed not wanting to get into anything. Though it hadn't been exactly bad, it wasn't exactly great. He had been paired with the head boy of his class who showed him the ropes. Though he wasn't the most popular kid in class, there really wasn't anything bad to say about it either. No one called him names or tried to bully him so that was a step up from Storybrooke already.

Emma just let it go at the brief response not wanting to push things and end up in a foul mood. She could see Henry was still what for him was becoming a regular mood and they still had an afternoon of interviews to get through. She preferred to stay in an upbeat mood until she could finally wind down for the night.

"Damn it," she groaned as they entered their driveway. She glanced at the clock on her dash. Yep they were late.

"Who's that?" Henry asked curiously as he stared at the young girl with purple hair who stood on their front porch.

"Could be your new babysitter," Emma replied as she ran her hands through her hair trying to make herself presentable.

Henry's head turned sharply as he screeched, "I don't need a babysitter!" He was outraged at such an asinine suggestion. He was eleven. He wasn't a baby.

Emma opened her door, "this is nonnegotiable." She stepped out and ducked her head back into the
open door, "now fix your face and come on."
They say the third time’s a charm. Not this go around. For Emma, it seemed it took the fourth time to seal the deal. Her childcare mission was complete.

Now she and Henry sat sharing a celebratory pizza to the end of their first day. As she reached for her fourth slice she looked over at her son as he stared at the tv screen. She’d agreed to get a movie off the pay per view for him that he’d been dying to see. But right now she needed his full attention while she spoke to him about future expectations.

“Hey!” he complained as she grabbed the remote and put the movie on pause. He scowled over at her, “whad’ya do that for?”

She sat up straight from her slouched position and took a hard swallow, “because it’s almost your bedtime.” She held up a hand before he could protest. She hadn’t ever really given him a bedtime before. He usually took himself off to bed eventually. That was then, and this …, “But we have to talk first.”

Henry’s scowl turned into a glare but he merely crossed his arms and waited for her to speak up.

“Now I already told you and Mandy,” she referred to the babysitter she’d hired on the spot despite Henry’s protests. He still wasn’t happy about having a babysitter. But that was just going to be something he’d have to learn to live with. This wasn’t Storybrooke. And she wasn’t going to be leaving him alone for hours nor allowing him to traipse around as he pleased unsupervised.

She continued with the conversation she needed to have, “That I’m not going to work fulltime until next week. By then I think we’ll be settled in enough that a couple of hours without me after school will be fine.”

She’d already gone over her planned schedule with Regina and her co-workers. And she’d talked in front of Henry with the babysitters too. But she wanted him to get it directly from her so that there was zero confusion.

“I’ll be going to work until 5:30. I’ll have plenty of time to drop you off to school in the mornings then you’ll be picked up by Mandy in the afternoons. On our therapy days, I’ll meet you guys at the office and then it’ll just be the two of us after that. But on other days I expect your homework to be done by the time I get here. And either I or Mandy will take care of dinners. Is that clear?”

“I don’t need a babysitter,” Henry reiterated for the twentieth time.

“Noted and denied,” Emma dismissed him with the wave of her hand. “This is not Storybrooke and you will not be running around unsupervised the way you did there. You’re to check in with me before leaving the house always. And Mandy already knows that when you leave the house she’s to be with you.”

Henry huffed and turned up his nose. He ended up moving the coffee table back as he used it to push off when he slumped against the back of the sofa, “can we get back to the movie now?”

“No,” Emma nervously chewed on a corner of her lip as she got into the more delicate issues they needed to talk about. “You remember what we talked about in Blue’s room after moving here right? That you can say what you need to with the therapist. But you’re not to bring up the past outside of
that unless you’re talking to me right?”

He tensed up as he listened to his Mom talk about dismissing his life as if it was nothing. Breaking the curse had meant something to him. It meant that he had been right all along. And now everyone had to listen to him. Even though that’s not what ended up happening.

She watched her son began to retreat. He turned further away from her and moved to the end of the sofa. He really didn’t like having what he saw as his thunder stolen from him. But he’d just have to get used to it. Because she was not going backwards in her life anymore.

Now she had to ensure that he understood the same. She pulled the map that Regina had given her out of her back pocket. Pointing to the lines that Regina had marked down she went through explaining the exact borders of their property and making sure that he understood there was no gray area. He was not to be running around as he pleased and the school was off limits to him in every way. If he needed her than he or Mandy could put in a call or text her on their phones.

By the time she was done she’d discussed with him in no uncertain terms the new rules. And her hopes that now that they had a routine things would settle down and they could concentrate on just being a family. Her, him and Blue.

“Any questions?” she asked the brooding boy who was pouting away at the other end of the sofa from her.

“No,” he gritted through his teeth while blinking his eyes repeatedly to hold back tears. Though if they were more from anger, upset, or sadness he couldn’t say.

“Then off to bed with you,” she gestured toward the stairs. “Shower then bed. We have another long day ahead of us,” she bent to retrieve their mess leftover from dinner. She quickly counted the slices. There were enough for cold pizza and cokes in the morning for breakfast. Her fave!

Henry didn’t need to be told twice. He jumped quickly from the sofa and made his way upstairs to the bathroom. He took a quick shower then shut himself up in his room again.

He suffered through Emma stopping by to wish him a good night before going to her own room. Then he grabbed his flashlight and Fae’s storybook.

He stared longingly at the pictures. In his book, he had never been mentioned. But he was talked about in Fae’s.

His Mom explained how he had once been her light. He’d been such a glorious sight that it made her and everything around glow from the inside out. Then the light burned bright and hot and nearly burned everything in its path. Over time, the light had dimmed and faded. And now it was merely something that had been set out into the world.

For the life of him he couldn’t understand any of it. But he still wondered.

MF

Fae bouncing on the bed woke her up. The little boy was so entranced by his action hero movie that he wasn’t aware of anything else around him.

Regina pushed the hair from her face as consciousness slammed into her.

She had poofed herself back home once she’d been assured that Abby and Fred could handle night duty on their own. As new parents they were of course nervous but also excited about the upcoming
challenges that awaited them. They had supported her through her pregnancy and delivery and she
wanted them to know that she would be there for them in the same way.

Despite having spent a full day at work it had been 3 am when she’d gotten home. Before she left,
she’d assured Fred and Abby that she’d return to the hospital to pick them up and bring their baby
boy Freddie Jr home after she gotten some sleep.

When she got home, she found her Mother and children asleep in her bed. Cora had roused and
she’d reassured her all was well as she’d taken Blue from her and placed her in her crib. Though she
loved her daughter being close she wasn’t a fan of sleeping with babies in the bed. She preferred
them to be old enough to be able to put up a fight in the case of an accidental rollover.

“How was last night?” Cora asked quietly.

Regina smiled through her yawn, “Great. He’s a really big boy.”

Cora nodded. Regina had sent pictures home shortly after his birth. She also had footage from the
labor itself on the video cam that she’d left behind with the happy couple and their new addition.

“I hate to say it, but thank goodness he takes after his Mother,” Cora pulled a face as she said it.

“I don’t know,” Regina answered thoughtfully and quietly in turn. Fae was so engrossed in the
action of his movie that he still hadn’t noticed that either woman was awake yet. “I think there’s a bit
of both there."

Cora leaned over and patted her daughter’s arm, “Why don’t you stay in bed this morning?” she
asked as she prepared to get out of bed. “I’ll take the kids. We might go and do some shopping.”

Regina smiled her thanks just as Fae turned his head and noticed the women awake. He bounced
over to them excitedly pointing at the Tv, “Yes, yes I know. Thor’s the best,” she caught him as he
fell forward onto her front. She gave him a kiss and then pulled back and stared into his eyes, “Good
morning my sweet prince.”

Fae closed his eyes momentarily and grinned his morning greeting. Regina pulled him in closer and
turned them both to their sides, “Grandmother’s going to take you and Blue out for a happy fun day
today. Then tonight Tio, Tia, and the baby will be home. And we’re going to have a big party to
welcome them all back. Isn’t that great?”

Fae cocked his head to the side and scrunched up his nose. He pointed at her silently questioning.

She shook her head at him, “Mummy was out with Tia and the new baby all night. I’m exhausted,”
she tossed her head back in an exaggerated passed out pose.

“Come along big boy,” Cora held out her arms to her grandson. She gave him a hug and kiss as he
leaped up and into her arms. This was a day she never even dreamed would come all those years
ago when she ripped her own heart out of her chest. Now here she was, the queen of hearts herself,
blessed with being able to bask in the love and joy of her own family.

After taking a minute to just enjoy the moment, she pulled back as she brushed his long hair out of
his eyes, “Let’s get ready. We’re going to have so much fun,” she said as she took him into the
bathroom to start his morning routine.

Regina lay in bed lightly dozing as she waited for her family to get ready. By the time Blue was up,
fed, and dressed she was barely conscious. But she did come around long enough to kiss and hug
her kids, Mother, and sister who’d decided to join the fun goodbye. Then it was fade to black.
Emma spent the day buried in paperwork. She was loving this job but she also knew that it was going to be hard work. And the fact that the kids were coming in a matter of days had her a nervous wreck.

By the time she got off work and picked up Henry for their first therapy session she was in a really pissy mood. Regina hadn’t bothered to tell her that she wasn’t coming in to work today which meant she’d had no time with Blue. She vowed that when she returned she’d force her to have a conversation about their custody arrangements.

Henry jumped in the car in what was becoming his usual sour mood. She ignored him and instead concentrated on driving. She peeled away from the curb and headed straight to the therapist’s office.

As they sat out in the waiting room of the therapist’s office Emma continued to weigh the pros and cons of using the same therapist that she knew Regina had. One pro was that they didn’t need to really go in depth to how and why the three of them were linked. But a con was that the woman would know all their secrets. It was a bit intimidating. Which was why she sitting in the waiting room biting her nails down to the quick and swinging her leg back and forth vigorously while waiting to be called into the office.

Her anxiety only grew when the door opened and a lovely woman with short spiky red hair and large, wide eyes the color of apples opened the door. She walked out to where Emma and Henry sat in the waiting room. She offered her hand first to Emma then to Henry, “Hello. It’s nice to meet you. I’m Karen Hall and I’m guessing you’re Emma Swan?” she turned it into a question so Emma nodded her head in answer as she shook her hand. She then turned to Henry who was kneeling on the floor in front of the coffee table. His homework was open in front of him and he had to drop his pen to reach up and shake the woman’s hand. “And you’re the infamous Henry Swan I’ve heard so much about.”

Henry scowled not liking the sound of that. But before he could question it, Emma had jumped up quickly in a move that made turned her face red before she buried her head in her hair.

Over the years as a foster she’d been forced many a time into counseling. It had never worked. If it was up to her she wouldn’t be here today. But she knew she needed to try for Henry’s sake. Her cheeks burned at how she’d already embarrassed herself. One minute down and she had already made a complete fool of herself and this was only the initial consultation.

Karen turned back to Henry to try and make him as comfortable as possible. “Do you mind if I speak to your Mom for a while first? I promise we’ll have plenty of time to get to know one another soon enough,” she smiled kindly at him. At his nod, she turned back to Emma and led her into the office.

Before she followed her into the room, the blonde turned back to where Henry was supposed to be doing his homework. “No wandering around when you’re done. If you finish before we do then I expect to still find you in the exact same position. Understood?”

Henry scowled at her but nodded. He wasn’t a small child and he didn’t appreciate her talking to and treating him like one. He waved her away with his hand, “whatever.”

Emma returned his scowl with one of her own at the way in which he dismissed her. They were going to have to have a talk about his lack of manners soon. She turned back to the therapist flustered as the door closed, “Sorry. He’s just – well being Henry,” she frowned as she tried and failed to find a way to explain away his behavior.
“No problem,” the redhead held out hand and gestured to the seating area, “please have a seat.”

The office was done up in dark cherry stained wood furniture which should’ve made it seem imposing but it was also littered with tons of plants around the room that softened the effect. The accents in the room were a warm mix of greens and blues that added a calming effect to the room.

In one corner sat a large desk with a bookcase behind it filled with books. On the other side there were cubbies filled with games and toys for the younger patients. There was a large comfy sofa, coffee table, and two winged back chairs across from it. Emma chose to sit on the sofa.

Karen sat across from her in one of the winged back chairs. She picked up a small tablet that rested on the table and opened it up. “Now in the interest of open communication I’m sure you’re aware that I’m also treating the Mills family.”

“Yes, I know,” Emma nodded. “Like I told your secretary she’s the one who gave me your number. I’m still not completely sure how I feel about it. But this is about Henry so,” she shrugged and sat back crossing her legs. She folded her hands in her lap and waited for the redhead to make the next move.

“It’s not just about Henry when he has an entire family around him. The people around him being supportive goes a long way in helping him so I’m very glad that you’ve decided to come as well,” she tapped on the tablet before smiling over at Emma and handing it over to her. “Regina and her family has given me permission to be as open as I felt necessary about their family in order to help Henry. She’s signed an agreement which would allow me to speak freely in here.”

“That,” she pointed to the tablet, “will allow me to do the same with you and Henry. You are allowed to dictate what I am and am not allowed to speak to her concerning your therapy which is precisely that … your therapy. If you wish for me to say nothing at all to her about anything that we talk about that is perfectly fine. If there is something that you specifically do or don’t want me to talk about you can make that clear also.”

Emma took the pen attached to the iPad in hand. She immediately checked the box giving the therapist free will to decide what to speak to Regina about. She had no secrets and didn’t see it as a big deal. She signed the form and the line giving her permission to speak about Henry as well and handed the tablet back to her.

Karen took the tablet and tapped in a few things. Then she turned back to Emma as she placed it back onto the table, “so do you want to tell me what exactly brought you here today?”

Emma gestured toward the door, “you just saw how Henry is. He’s been like that for a long time now. I just want my sweet little boy back,” she began to speak excitedly and sat slightly forward. “He used to be my best friend. Now he’s just – god,” she ran her hands through her hair. “I feel like I’m doing everything wrong and I don’t even know what I am doing wrong. I just - ,” she shook her head. “Ever since Regina just decided to dump us – and I really hate to say this – but living with him has been a nightmare. He should be mad at her and not me. But I feel like he wants to blame me for everything that’s all her fault,” Emma sat back winded from the long explanation.

The therapist took a moment to tap in a few notes on her tablet that had Emma frowning at her. But then she turned back to her, “I hear you saying that you’re concerned about your son and how he’s handled the separation between the three of you. Is that correct?”

“Well yeah,” the blonde grumbled. “Things were fine up until Regina decided we weren’t good enough for her and she went off to get herself a better family. And a better son than Henry is. Now we have nothing and she’s got everything. Better son, better Mom, a new sister,” she pursed her
Karen wanted to keep them both on the same page. She needed to make sure that she understood how all the pieces fit together first though. She had some background information from her time with Regina and her family. And Emma had submitted some previous paperwork about their situation but Emma was speaking of quite a few different things at the same time. “It’s my understanding that Regina raised Henry for the first ten years of his life. Then he decided he wanted you, his birth mother,” she gestured to Emma. “In his life and he began to push her away in favor of you. Was that when you two became best friends?”

“Well yeah. Basically. He came and found me all on his own,” she gave a small smile at the memory. Someone saying that they wanted her had never happened to her before. She’d been blown away with a mix of overpowering sadness at the situation, joy at being wanted, happiness to being able to have her son in her life, and fear and excitement of what was to come. Little did she know this would be the result of her deciding to stay in Storybrooke after returning him home. “Then when she left, it seems he completely turned. He’s sad. And angry. And it’s there all the time now,” she finished sadly. She had no idea how her life had come to this.

Karen moistened her lips, “sounds like you want to have more open communication with your son.”

Emma nodded, “and more with Blue. I deserve that. Henry and I both do. She’s my daughter too but Regina hogs her all the time. She only lets me see her when she’s decided it’s okay. And she says that Blue has a big brother as if it’s not important for Henry to know his sister. Or spend any time with her,” she pursed her lips and shook her head.

“I can hear that you’re here for your kids. But is that really all that’s going on right now?”

Emma waved a hand dismissively. She wasn’t going to be fooled into psychology tricks. This wasn’t about her. It was about Henry. And Regina. And her baby. But mostly getting Henry back on track and hopefully seeing the sweet boy he had once been. And for Regina to know what a jackass she was being.

“As long as I can see my sweet boy again, I’m fine. I just – I don’t like to think of him hurting,” she stared at the closed door as if she could see through it.

The therapist took a deep calming breath. She could feel the blonde’s energy was keyed up and thought that now might be a good time for a break. “If you don’t mind I think this is a good time for us to take a break. I’m going to call Henry in here and have a chat with him.”

Emma watched her through hooded eyes. She wasn’t sure what all she expected from this but so far her need to flee hadn’t kicked in so she guessed it was alright.

Karen continued, “I’m basically going to ask Henry precisely what I asked you. In the meantime, I’d like for you to really think about what it is you want from our sessions together. And when you come back in here I’d like to hear your plans and expectations for what you feel a successful therapy would look like.”

Emma rose slowly and walked to the door. Before leaving she turned back around, “I want you to understand that we really need this to work. I just – I don’t even know what else to do,” she threw her hands up in the air and hung her head. If this didn’t work she had no idea where they’d go from here.

Karen sensed an air of defeatism and walked over to her. She tentatively reached out a hand to her. When the blonde didn’t pull away she rubbed her hand along her arm until she looked directly at
her. Then she leaned over and whispered, “You’re already doing better than you know. Please don’t see this as the end. But as the beginning of you getting things back to good. For you and your family.”

Emma gave her a small smile and opened the door. She locked eyes with Henry who had apparently finished his homework and was sitting and playing a game on his phone. When he looked up she waggled her eyebrows at him and gave him what she hoped was an encouraging smile. “Your turn.”
Henry swallowed thickly unsure what to make of that comment. He packed his books into his
backpack and hoisted it over one of his shoulders. Then he rose and followed the therapist back into
her office.

He’d been angry when his Mom had made him start seeing Dr. Hopper. But at least he’d liked
Archie. And they’d become friends. Now here he was being forced to see another therapist over
issues that were his Mom’s problems and not his again. Even worse … it was Emma. Now he just
felt betrayed all over again.

It sickened him that the one person he had in his life was now someone he couldn’t trust. Emma had
been acting as if the two of them breaking the curse had been nothing. But to him – it had been
everything. Because without it – he had nothing left.

“I’m so glad to finally be able to put a face with the name Henry,” she smiled kindly.

At least she had red hair like Archie even if hers did spike up kinda crazily unlike Archie’s wild
curls. Maybe she was as nice as Archie had been. And Emma had said that it was fine for him to
tell her about the curse and all. But she’d also said it would make him sound crazy to tell anyone
else which had only confused him. There’d been a lot of confusion for him lately. He just didn’t
understand anyone or anything anymore.

“How are you doing today?” she asked as she waved him over to one of the seats in the lounge part
of her office.

“Good,” he muttered as he took a seat on the big comfy couch letting his backpack slide down
beside him on the sofa. Then he winced at the embarrassing screech to his voice. He cleared his
throat loudly. He had no idea what was going on with him. I mean – he knew they had talked about
things happening with your body in health class. But he wasn’t sure he was okay with everything
that was going on with him. At least he wasn’t alone though. He’d noticed a lot of the boys in
school seemed to have the same problem.

Karen sat in the same seat she’d occupied previously and crossed her legs. She leaned forward and
clasped her hands in front of her, “I’m sure you’ve been curious as to what we talked about earlier.
And I’m going to tell you the same things that I’ve already spoken to your Mum about. First, in full
disclosure, I am also the therapist to Regina Mills and her family.”

Henry’s eyes blinked rapidly in surprise. He hadn’t known this. She knew his Mom? He looked
back at the redhead and waited for her to continue.

“She - as well as Emma - have already given me permission to speak openly and freely to one
another about one another. And that permission also extends towards you. But I promise you that
this is your space and time. As long as you’re not talking about hurting yourself or someone else, I
will not be talking to them about anything that you don’t want them to know. Whatever you say to
me will be kept between us. And the only time I will ever break that confidence is under the terms
I’ve already said. Or if you would like me to. Otherwise what we say and do is all about you.
Understand?”

Henry nodded his head though his thoughts were swimming. She saw his Mom. And she had
already admitted she knew about him. He was curious as to what was said about him behind his back. But he also knew he needed to play it cool if he wanted to find out. Emma was already giving him the same looks his Mom had given him after he’d found out about the curse. He didn’t want anyone else thinking there was something wrong with him. “I’m not crazy,” he blurted out.

Karen sat back in her chair with a troubled frown on her face, “I never thought you were. Was there someone who made you think that?”

He shook his head, then nodded, “My Mom – I mean – my real Mom – I mean, Regina. She tried to make me think I was crazy. And she made me go and see Archie. But I was right. The curse was real. And she was the Evil Queen,” Henry spoke excitedly. “Now Emma is making me come to see you. But I’m not crazy. I don’t need therapy. I didn’t do anything wrong.”

“I’m sorry if you got the impression somewhere that you had,” Karen gave him a friendly smile. She noticed that he used Mom to refer to both his Mothers. She had background information on how they had all ended up together. But for now she thought she’d stick with proper names to cut down on the confusion. “But it was my understanding from Emma that she brought you here because she thought you were sad. And angry about everything that had been happening in your life. She thought that you could use someone to talk to. And that it seemed there was a strain that had developed between you two that was making it hard for you to talk to her.”

Henry scrunched his brow as he chewed his lip while processing this. He was angry. And sad. But mostly he was just confused. He shook his head, “you wouldn’t understand,” he said sadly and dropped his head. Talking to anyone had proven useless to him. Everything he thought should have happened hadn’t. He’d lost everything from trying to make things right. So now there was no point in him even bothering to try anymore.

Karen looked at him concerned. She could clearly see that the boy was suffering. She was glad that Emma had brought him here. But first she needed him to open up to her. “Henry,” she paused until he raised his eyes to hers. Then she rose and sat beside him on the sofa. “I can tell from looking at you that there’s a lot troubling your mind. And you’re too young to have heavy burdens weighing you down. My job here is to help people ease their burdens. I’d like to be that person for you. If you’d let me,” she spoke with certainty and sincerity to ensure he understood that he had someone on his side. “Whatever is bothering you, I’m here to help. For you and your family.”

Henry thought hard on that. He did have a heavy burden on him. He was so tired of carrying it alone.

His Mom had left and Emma was fixated on her baby. His grandparents were only concerned about themselves. And his Dad had his own new life. There was no one for him anymore.

He was lost so deep in his thoughts that he never even noticed that he had begun to cry. He felt a nudging in his side and his head whipped around as he saw he was being offered some Kleenex. Unthinking, he flung himself in his new therapist’s arms and gave himself over to loud body wracking sobs. He cried harder than he could remember crying in a long time. She held him to her side and let him.

He cried because he was sad. His Mom was gone even though she was so close. She worked literally right down the road from him. But she wanted nothing to do with him. She never called or came by or asked to see him at all.

He was angry because he knew he had no right to care. He was the one who’d told her to leave him alone and never bother him ever again. It was all his fault. He couldn’t even completely blame her for doing as he asked.
He’d be lying if he pretended that at one point it wasn’t all he wanted to happen. He’d thought the only way he would really have a family was if she was gone and stopped angering and frustrating his real family. Her presence was standing in the way of them really being able to embrace being happy. But her leaving had left a hole inside of him that he was only barely beginning to understand wouldn’t be filled by the Charmings. He needed his Mom. She was all he’d known his whole life.

He cried because he knew that Emma was doing the best that she could. But her best never seemed good enough. He didn’t know exactly what he was wanting from her. But he hated that their home just felt empty and hollow. And their friendship which had once been the most important thing to him in the world now felt fake. Even in his own head now thinking about her being the Savior and how it was important to him made him feel like an idiot. Had he really been that stupid?

Still he loved Emma. She was his Mom in a way too. Not like Mom was. But she wasn’t at the same time. And he knew that made him sound crazy. But he didn’t have any other way to explain it. And he was angry and frustrated that this had become his new life.

He cried because both his Mothers now had a new baby. And she was the only thing that was really important to them. He knew he was nothing but a burden to both of them and they’d prefer it if they didn’t have to deal with him at all. But he had nowhere else to go. No one else wanted him.

He cried because he knew it was his fault. But he didn’t understand how or why. The curse was real and it needed to end. And it had. But nothing had gotten better. Everyone in town just went about their lives. They were all doing fine. He was the only one who’d seemed to have to pay the cost of it all ending.

Mostly he was crying because he didn’t know what else to do. It hurt, saddened, angered and frustrated him. He felt weak and helpless. And he just really needed a good cry.

After what felt like forever he began to get sick of crying. His tears began to dry up and he was pulling away.

As he’d cried, the therapist had rubbed his back in a soothing manner. And repeated over and over to him in a calm voice that he was safe. And everything was going to be okay. They’d work on it together. He sure hoped she was telling the truth. Because he didn’t know how much longer he could carry on this way.

He took the Kleenex that she handed him and mopped up his face. Then he blew his nose loudly as his cheeks colored from embarrassment, “sorry,” he muttered as he flung his Kleenex in the bin she held out to him.

She took his hands in hers and looked him deeply in the eyes, “don’t be. Crying is a great release. And you seemed to really need it. I’m glad that I was here to be a part of you letting go of all that stress you’ve been keeping locked inside you.”

Henry shrugged and looked away. Then he looked back at her warm, open smiling face and returned it with a small one of his own. He really did feel a lot better already. Maybe she could be a friend of his just like Archie had been.

“I dunno about you but I think we’ve actually done some really good work here. I’m honored that you’d allow me to be a part of you being able to release some of your pent-up emotions.”

Henry wasn’t sure how that was supposed to make him feel. But he did know that talking to her had seemed to open something inside of him that needed to be released. And he wouldn’t mind seeing her again. Maybe therapy wasn’t the worse thing after all.
“Now, I spoke with Emma earlier about and asked her to really think about what she felt a successful therapy would look like. And I’m asking the same of you.”

Henry pulled one side of his mouth taut then the other as he contemplated this. Karen patted him on the hands that she still held.

“If you don’t mind I’d like to ask her back in now. And the three of us can find a way to all get on the same page of the expectations for how our sessions are going to go. Would that be alright with you?” At Henry’s nod, she smiled and went to open the door.

Once Emma re-entered the room and took a seat beside Henry she smiled at them both, “First I want to say that I’m very happy you’ve come to see me. I think that together we can get you both to a healthier and hopefully happier place in life soon.” Emma and Henry exchanged skeptical glances but still seemed to be open to the idea. “Now Emma, I asked Henry the same question I asked you earlier. But I’d like to hear from you first. What do you feel a successful therapy will look like?”

Emma began to jiggle her knee nervously. She hated being put on the hot spot. But this was for Henry and she knew that things couldn’t continue to go on between them as they had. “Like I said, I’m here to support Henry in whatever way he needs me to. And hopefully in the future we can possibly get back to being best friends again.”

Karen frowned slightly before leaning forward in her chair. “I understand that you’d like a more open and friendlier relationship with your son. But the truth is you met him as a little boy. And Henry is now starting to come into his own. I’m not saying this to discourage you. Or to even suggest that you can never be friends again. But the reality is you are his Mother and he is your child. And that needs to be understood by both of you.”

Emma scowled though she understood what she was saying she didn’t like it much. Henry was still – holy cripes! Henry was almost 12. He was becoming a teen. She knew that. But she didn’t want to know that at the same time. Because that seemed to get him closer to 18 and farther away from her than she wanted him to ever be. She’d only just found him again.

“I understand we probably will never be as close as we were at first. But I don’t see why we can’t still be friends. I think he’s still a pretty neat kid. As soon as he relaxes and stops trying to be more than that, hopefully he can go back to being carefree again.”

Again, Henry was confused. He had no idea what she was saying. It sounded like she was saying things were his fault again.

Karen, who was facing both of them, saw the various emotions that crossed Henry’s face at hearing his Mother speak of him. She’d already identified clear communication as one of the main issues between the two of them. She turned to him in hopes of clarifying the situation. “Henry what did you just hear your Mum say to you?”

Henry turned to Emma with a frown on his face, “what do you mean as long as I stop trying to be more than that? What did I do?”

Damn it! This with him again was exactly the problem. Emma took a deep breath as she fought for time to say what she meant in as concisely as possible. “Henry, you tend to confuse things that are grown up issues with things you need to get involved with. Not everything is your business. And not everyone owes you explanations of everything. Sometimes you just need to listen and accept that you’re a kid. You’re not going to get everything you want when and how you want it. Just relax and be a kid. And let the adults handle things their way.”
He was getting angry again now, “You’re the one who ruins everything! We were supposed to be a family. But you wanted your baby more than anything else! So now my Dad, Grandma, and Grandpa get left behind and we have to live here! Where no one even knows or likes us. This was all your fault!!” he yelled before storming out the room.

Emma sat staring after him with a pained expression across her face. "Was he always this much of a little shit?" she mused aloud. She scratched her chin. "I know you don't know my parents or his Dad. He didn't exactly get the deep end of the gene pool. Those were slim pickin's indeed. But you do know Regina. This has to be all her fault right?"

She twitched as if physically shaking herself out of her thoughts and turned to the therapist, “you think twice a week is enough or should we add more?”

Karen chuckled and rose, “I think you’ll be surprised to learn that some of that is just basic adolescent angst. His body is flooded with emotions that he can’t even begin to identify with.”

Emma groaned as she picked up Henry’s discarded backpack. She didn’t want to have to know anything about her son’s body in any way, “I guess I need to have the talk with him right?” She grimaced as she thought about her own birthday not being too far away. There was no way she was going to be a 30 something year old grandma.

Karen put a hand on her shoulder as they walked to the door, “believe it or not this really wasn’t as bad as it could be. I’d actually put it closer in the success column myself. Henry made quite the breakthrough today and I’m certain that I can help the two of you get back on track,” she opened the door for Emma to step through.

Henry stood glowering in the lobby. “Finally!” he pushed past them and headed for the elevators.

Emma looked skeptically at the therapist, “that’s the face of success?”

Karen chuckled, “I’m still cautiously optimistic. For now Josie can help you at the front desk to get you scheduled.”

Emma thanked the therapist then headed to the front desk. She had Josie set them up with Tues and Thurs late afternoons. That way she could put in a full day at work and Henry had a full day at school and nothing was interrupted.

Henry had thankfully calmed down as they rode the elevator together. By the time they were headed to their car he was back to his usual sullenness. As they walked to their car, Emma put her arm around Henry’s shoulders. He was a big boy now. He no longer stood at her waist. His head now came up to her shoulders. His own shoulders were a lot broader now. But he was still her little boy. She still saw that little impish face grinning up at her when she looked over at him.

She couldn’t believe he’d be 12 soon. It seemed like he’d only barely turned 11. But seeing how much her baby had changed during the past year made Henry’s changes slight in comparison.

She had to remember she herself was getting older. Her own birthday was a mere few weeks away. Not that she was expecting anything from anyone. But it was nice to know they could soon put this year behind them.

“So how was it kid? You think we made the right choice?” she waved her head toward the building behind them to make it clear that she was talking about the therapist.

For the first time in a long time, Henry gave her an easy smile as he plodded ahead. “I liked her. Yeah, I really think this will be good for us.”
They stopped off at a restaurant on the way home and had dinner. It wasn’t Granny’s but the food was just as good. And the company that night was even better. They let their past differences melt away and just stayed mired in the present. It was just the two of them that night over nice hot meals. It was a good day.
Chapter 46

Henry grabbed his coat and hurried out the house. Blue's furniture had finally arrived and he knew Emma would be upstairs obsessing over her room for a while. He took the opportunity upon himself to give her some alone time with her delusions of Blue staying for longer than a few hours to get himself some fresh air.

He knew he wasn't supposed to leave the house without permission but he didn't care. It had been weeks since they'd moved in and he had no friends to socialize with. Not that he ever really had. But for a while after the curse broke he had been a hero before everyone just went back to living their lives again. And Emma could fill that peer to peer friendship void for only so long. He just wanted a short break.

He walked in the opposite direction of the school knowing that he had been strictly forbidden from being there repeatedly. He had no idea what the big deal was. They practically lived at the school. But Emma had told him that it wasn't just a school but a home for kids who didn't have any other place to call theirs. So he respected the no trespassing ban.

He walked a path that ran from behind their house. It was a wooded path that ran parallel to the lake. He put on his gloves and then shoved his hands in his pockets while enjoying the nip in the air as he took in the scenery.

His grandparents had taken him camping multiple times in the woods around Storybrooke. And his Mom had taken him a few times before while he'd grown up also. He felt comfortable amongst the trees. Though the sun was fading, he loved feeling like they shielded him from prying eyes.

He had been walking for a while just lost in his own head when he caught a scent in the air that was most definitely not something that should be in a wooded area. It was the strong stench of someone smoking. Though Regina never smoked he had caught Emma a time or two sneaking one when she thought he wasn't around to see. And he could smell it on her even though she took great pains to wash her hands, chew gum and mints, and spray body spray around when she did it. He didn't think she was a heavy smoker. But still … cigarettes were bad for your health. Even he knew that.

For a minute he was scared. The kids had moved into the school a few weeks ago. They'd even had a welcome home barbecue for them. But they had been expressly forbidden to be off campus without permission. And the lake was 100% off limits without adult supervision. It even had a fence around it and keep out signs everywhere in case someone missed the numerous announcements about it. There should be no one out there at all.

But after considering over whether or not it was safe he decided to just follow up on what he was smelling and see where it took him. He was surprised by what he found.

Up ahead, sitting on a fallen log, was the girl he recognized from his Fae's party. Though her tightly curled sandy brown hair had now been streaked with dark blue he could still see her face clearly. He nervously licked his lips as he watched her from behind a tree.

"Perv much?" she called as her eyes stayed focused ahead of her. She puffed on her cigarette and blew out a ring of smoke in an almost bored manner.

Henry's cheeks reddened and he stepped from around the tree, "I was just walking here - ," he
shrugged and muttered trying to cover his embarrassment at being caught ogling someone. He walked closer to the girl and grew even more nervous as she continued to smoke and ignore him. He briefly considered leaving her to herself but then decided he really didn't want to. There was something about her that drew him in. "I'm Henry," he said by way of an introduction.

He watched her blue eyes flash in the waning twilight as she turned and smirked at him before turning back again without introducing herself. He followed her line of sight and his heart almost stopped at what he saw.

Across the lake sat his Mom surrounded by her family. She was busy breastfeeding his baby sister while they were all enjoying themselves near the lake. He could see his Aunt Kathryn who he now guessed was his Aunt Abby breastfeeding who he guessed was her new baby, the redhead, and the woman he now knew to be his grandmother Cora all sitting around a backyard terrace. Fae was running around with Hades and Abby's husband, Fred playing soccer along with the little blonde girl he remembered from his Mother's party.

His breath caught in his throat and his heart sped up as he watched them all having a fun time in what appeared to be their garden since he could see the house up ahead of them. His chest heaved as his breathing sped up while he processed the scene. He had no idea they even lived there. His Mom lived less than a 30 minute walk away from where they lived and she never said one word to him about it. She was right across the lake from him! Not that she'd said anything to him about anything.

His emotions flittered from sad to angry. Had Emma known? Is this why she was forbidding him from being anywhere outside without supervision? He was hurt but he was also confused by this new revelation. This was a new betrayal that was cutting him up inside.

He was pulled from his reverie by the whisper of a voice saying, "Maybe it's better this way."

He wasn't sure if the brunette was talking to him or not. Or if he was even supposed to hear what she'd just said. But he couldn't stop himself from asking, "huh?"

She shrugged offhandedly tossing her long hair over her shoulder, "they seem like a really happy family." He stared mesmerized at the way her caramel colored skin made her blue eyes pop as she stabbed out her cigarette on her shoe and pushed the butt into her jean pocket. "Maybe they'll adopt her too. Then she won't turn out like me."

"You don't seem so bad to me," Henry replied. He'd guessed from the protective way she'd stood around the little girl at the party and the way she was trying to drag her eyes away from her now but was clearly failing that they were family. Though the brunette girl was trying to keep up a brave front it was clear that what she was saying was the opposite of how she was feeling.

The girl stiffened before turning up her nose, "You don't even know me."

Henry glanced across the water at his Mom then back at the girl, "someone once told me that you don't have to know a person's history to know their heart," he winced as he recited his Mom's words. He felt awash with shame. Here he was espousing his Mom's life's lessons that he'd wanted so desperately to forget after his storybook came into his life when he himself had purposefully not learnt from them.

Then he looked across the water again at what was kinda his family. But kinda not. They didn't need him. And his Mom had never bothered to pretend that she even wanted him once she left. It was just him and Emma now. And the thought of that being his new reality still cut him to the core.

His throat bobbed as he tried to swallow the choked feeling away. She wasn't his real Mother
anyway. How many times had he screamed that in hopes that she would finally get it through her head and leave him and his real family alone? And now that he had precisely what he’d wanted … it just wasn’t good enough for him.

"I'm Jewel by the way," she moved over to allow Henry room to sit beside her. He quickly scurried over to the empty space, "That's my sister, Khaleesi." At Henry's amused look she nodded, "Our Mum wanted us to know that we were precious. She really liked Game of Thrones. Ya know, before the whole addicted to drugs and serving at her Majesty's pleasure and all," she recounted bitterly.

He stared across the lake at his Mom. He remembered her telling him that the reason she was named Regina was because her Mother had decided before she was even born that she would one day be Queen but she'd named him after the two men that she loved the most in her life because that's the only expectation she had for him. To always know that he was loved.

"We'd better get back before there's even more hell to pay," she told him as she began to gather herself.

Henry looked at her puzzled for a moment until he realized what she was saying and he shook his head, "I don't live at the school." At her curious glance he continued, "My Mom - ," he hesitated unsure as to what to tell her about his situation. He wanted to tell her the truth about his Mom. He didn't like lying about the situation. But Emma had been adamant that they were leaving everything in Storybrooke behind them forever. And she got angry and annoyed anytime the curse or fairy tales were brought up.

He was still angry about that. It had been his life for his entire life. He didn't really know who or how else to be. There had been too many changes in his life too quickly and he wasn't alright with any of it. Not that anyone except Karen seemed to care. And she was getting paid to pretend she did. Instead he settled with, "She runs the place. We don't live at the school. We live behind it."

She scowled at him, "Miss Mills is the head Miss. And Miss DunBroch comes after her."

Henry moistened his lips before answering, "My Mom works for them. She makes sure that everyone has whatever they need." Or so he’d gathered from her talks about the school.

Jewel tilted her head as she studied him, "You mean Miss Swan? The lezzie who's always talking to herself? She's always basket shopping the head Miss," she nodded her head as a smile grew across her face. "She's your Mum?"

His head piped up as he heard the weird description of Emma. He had no idea what basket shopping was. She was his Mom. He never looked at her that way. She did tend to mutter to herself when she was stressed. And he knew she was really stressed but really happy with starting this new job.

Since she had been an orphan she wanted to do a really good job and not let anyone down. He guessed there was a lot of pressure on her right now since none of the kids had parents. So the school was basically their family. Since she was the Savior it was obviously her job to save all the kids at the school.

Though she still refused to talk to him about her past outside of his Dad much he knew that it must've been hard on her with no one there for her whole life. Without the curse she would've grown up a Princess. And he would've been her little Prince.

He had no idea what to say to her so he just shrugged and turned to face forward again.

"She's alright your Mum," Jewel nodded in approval. "She even lets us hold her baby sometimes."
Suddenly her eyes grew wide and she looked across the lake again. "Hold up! Your Mum and the Head Miss used to shag? Now they have a baby together? Wicked."

Henry turned up his nose. Emma and his Mom had hidden the fact that they were together from him the entire time. He'd thought that Emma was on his side and understood that they needed to defeat the Evil Queen. And he'd help her because he was her son and it was their destiny to be together. And really the entire time she'd had this secret 'thing' with his Mom.

He felt bitterness well up inside him as he thought about all the lies he'd had to endure from the both of them. And the unfairness of his life having been upended for their happiness when no one cared about how he felt or what he thought about any of it.

He stared across the lake at his Mom. She had handed Blue over to her Mother and had gathered the little girl in her arms as she held Fae's hand who danced along beside them. The family were all making their way back up and into the house. They really did look happy.

He blinked back tears as suddenly a need to run over took him. Without another word to the girl he took off back along the path he'd come down. He ran until his lungs began to burn.

He slowed as he made it back to his new house and walked in slamming the door behind him. Emma was grinning to herself as she turned in surprise. She had a beer in her hand and looked to be back on her way up the stairs.

"Where've you been?" she asked as he took off his gloves and put them into his pocket before taking off his coat.

"I went for a walk," he told her as he pushed past her. He could feel her eyes on him but he didn't want to talk to her right now. He just wanted to hopefully stop thinking about his pitiful life. "I'm going to take a shower now," he told her as he began to make his way upstairs.

After his shower and Emma coming in to tell him goodnight he did what he'd taken as his new nightly ritual. He lay in bed examining both storybooks over and over trying to find where and how he belonged. As always he fell asleep before an answer came to him.

MF

"I think this is the first time I've ever actually seen you working at work."

Emma looked up in surprise to find Regina leaning against the doorjamb. Her arms were crossed casually across her chest as she smiled lazily at her. She was wearing a tight red top and an even tighter black skirt. The outfit was complete with her customary killer pumps that always made the blonde's mouth water and today was no exception. She swallowed hard. Then smirked at her, "I have been known to get the job done from time to time."

Regina pushed off the doorjamb and began to slowly walk over to the desk. She smiled at Blue whose head had snapped around and face had lit up at the sight and sound of her Mum. She banged her tiny chubby hands on the desk in front of her while babbling Mama loudly.

Emma followed her gaze and her cheeks heated up at her annoyance. She glanced at the clock on her laptop. It was barely 4:45. Usually Regina gave her until the end of the day to bring Blue back to her. "I was just finishing up. Then I was going to bring her back to you." She quickly began to finish up her email while holding Blue tighter in her lap.

Since working together they'd fallen into a schedule of Emma collecting Blue for a couple of hours after she got to work. Then she'd hand her back over to Regina for her afternoon nap and lunch.
After her daughter's needs were met she'd pick her back up again. She'd spend the rest of the day with her baby who loved helping her get her work done before bringing her back to her Mum before she left for the day.

Emma had adjusted quickly to working with one hand while being able to balance entertaining and holding her daughter with the other. Though she was sure she'd get twice as much done without her, she had 10 times the fun working with her baby.

Regina gave her a Mills’ patented eyeroll as she made herself comfortable in one of the chairs across from the blonde. "I'm not here to complain," she informed her.

Green eyes narrowed at her suspiciously, "then why are you here?"

They usually didn't cross paths much. Regina had her own small kitchenette off the side of her office so there were no awkward meetings in the break room for them. There were staff meetings bi-weekly but they usually only spoke about business there. And Merida was still training Emma to eventually be able to do the job on her own so she was basically her immediate supervisor.

When they exchanged Blue they made idle chitchat before the arguing started again. They definitely didn't drop by one another's office without a specific reason.

Regina leaned forward and grabbed ahold of one of her daughter's wildly slapping hands. Her babygirl was now 9 months old. She had grown so fast. And so much had changed for them both in the past year.

Blue was alert and obviously had inherited her Mum's intelligence. Her face beamed brightly and she was normally a happy baby. Her hair, which had been a nightmare from birth, had grown out from its wild out of control curls to curling gently down her back. It was now long enough to actually style.

She had been saying Mama since she was 8 months old. Though she used it in regard to her and Emma both which irked Regina to no end. She was speaking more everyday. And what she couldn't say she could still communicate and leave no doubt to what she was babbling about. No was of course her favorite word. Damned genetics.

Her mobility had increased also. She could pull herself up and she crawled at the speed of a rocket. She hadn't yet taken her first step but she was using the furniture to move herself around. And she would sometimes go from a squatting position to standing straight up on her own without any assistance.

Regina tilted her head as she regarded the blonde. "I actually came to offer you something."

Emma's eyebrow rose and she remained silent as she waited to hear what came next. Regina didn't offer her things. Almost every interaction with them was a fight for dominance. Neither one of them ever wanted to back down or give in. It had been that way with them from the beginning. Even in the bedroom.

The brunette chewed on her lower lip nervously. She wasn't used to being in this position with Emma but for some reason she felt compelled to try and keep the peace between the two of them. She took a breath and dove in, "I know your birthday is on saturday. I was thinking you could take Friday off. And maybe spend it with Blue."

Emma was speechless. Her mouth fell open and she stared slack jawed. She wasn't sure which was the most surprising. That Regina had remembered her birthday. That she'd cared enough to do
something for it. Or that she was offering her a gift.

Her arms tightened around her babygirl and she clutched her to her. She buried her face in her hair to hide her quivering chin. She looked up at Regina over her head, "of course I want to spend the day with my baby. That's a question you never need to ask," she gushed emotionally.

"Right," the brunette nodded and stood anxious to leave quickly. Though Emma's superpower of being able to spot lies was obviously bs she did have an uncanny knack of picking up on things that were better left buried. Regina didn't want to spoil the real gift she had waiting for her.

"You can pick her up on Friday morning. But you have to bring her back to the house by Saturday evening," she warned.

The blonde was grinning from ear to ear now. This was the first birthday she wasn't going to have to spend alone. Or worse – by consoling other people when it was supposed to be her day.

Her last birthday had been spent with Snow in tears about this being her first birthday with her real family. She'd almost smothered Emma to death with her overbearing presence as she rotated between holding court for the town idiots to ensure they knew she was the Mother of the Savior and turning her birthday into a pity party for all that she'd lost. And feeling like a shit for wanting nothing more than to run and never look back. She'd settled for drinking herself into a stupor and waking up with the mother of hangovers.

And the way that Henry had been since – well at this point she couldn't remember when he had been a joy – she'd had little to no high expectations for this one. But now this. Blue's first overnight visit. She wasn't sure she could've asked for a better gift.

She turned Blue in her lap to face her. "Mama's going to have to say bye to my baby girl now," she frowned exaggeratedly earning her a pout from her daughter. Then she picked her face up, "But I'll still see you tomorrow babygirl. Then Friday it's me, you and your brother!" She held her baby close and raised her above her head earning her giggles. She loved watching how her lashes fluttered as she tossed her up in the air before she'd erupt into more giggles and laughter.

She kissed her daughter repeatedly on her cheeks before handing her over for the day. Then she followed the duo to the door and waved while calling 'bye bye' to her until they rounded the corner and she could no longer see her. The entire day and night with her baby!

She finished up her work for the night and locked up her office with a grin on her face. As she walked home she decided once she got there she'd take Henry out for dinner to celebrate. Then the two of them could work on some plans of what to do with their baby.

Regina felt pleased with herself as she made her way from Emma's office holding her daughter tightly to her. Though she was still nervous about Blue being away from her for so long Emma's happiness just now helped to stifle it. Even though she wasn't her responsibility she still couldn't shake how she felt about the blonde. No matter how desperately she wanted to.

She kissed her daughter's chubby cheek making her erupt into giggles as she scratched at her rounded baby belly, "now let's go and plan Mama's party."
CHAPTER 47

Emma waltzed into work with a huge grin on her face. Nothing could drag her down from the cloud 9 she was flying on. She was going to spend an entire day just being able to be a regular Mom to her baby. Her grin and energy knew no bounds.

Her day continued on what had become for her a perfectly normal schedule. She'd spent the morning with Blue. Then handed her over a couple of hours later so that she could have her nap and lunch. All while managing to knock out an impressive amount of work even for her.

She had just wrapped up her own lunch and was on her way to get her daughter when she heard that there was an emergency and a lot of staff were out trying to help with the problem. Being the Savior, she figured a short detour to make sure things were under control wouldn't hurt her. Blue, after all, wasn't going anywhere.

She asked where she could pitch in and was directed outside to the farm. She jumped in an available golf cart and took off. The school grounds were somewhere around 100 acres. That was basically the equivalent of 100 football fields put together. Golf carts and cars were the best way of getting around.

Across the street from the school proper was the farm. It was part of the animal rescue department. They didn't buy new animals. They only took in rescues that no one else wanted. The animals' sufferings ranged from heartbreaking abuse to neglect. Some had been in accidents with their owners unwilling or unable to pay for the surgeries and rehab needed to restore them back to health. Instead of being euthanized they were given sanctuary here. This school wasn't about giving up on any living creature. Human, plant, or animal.

There were farmhands who lived on grounds and some day laborers. There were a staff of more than 50 people already and they were still hiring. They even had a few vets on staff.

Some of the land was farmed to provide healthy organic food for the students and animals. Once the actual school part of the school was up and running, one of the proposals was to have the students help on the farm to be a part of growing their own food and helping with the animals. The hope was that they would learn empathy and real-life skills which they'd hopefully learn to carry with them throughout their lives.

Emma always felt conflicted over the situation. She knew that it was a great idea but she was also aware of Regina's thought process behind the initiative. She felt Henry was too spoiled and self-absorbed and that's where most of his problems lie. She was basically saying he was ungrateful and entitled. She would often throw in her face that Blue and Fae would never be like him.

She agreed that the kid was spoiled and all. But he wasn't the one who made himself that way. Though his gene pool was shallow, it was a cop-out to say he was just a bad seed and blame Emma and her family for the way that he was. He was raised by the Evil Queen. That had some effect on him too.

She shook herself out of her dark thoughts as she concentrated on the present. The place was looking good. Mostly everything at the school and farm ran on solar or electric power. They were in the process of building their own solar grids. In just a couple of years the school and farm would be 100% self-sustaining.
Emma passed horses, pigs, goats, sheep, cats and dogs as she made her way across the land. There were also exotic animals here. There was an alpaca, sloths, lemurs, 2 meerkats, an ostrich, and exotic snakes and lizards. The large dangerous animals like lions, tigers, and elephants, or any other wild animal humans smuggled into the country and tried to turn into pets that could not be re-released were sent to the nearby sanctuary. There they could live out the rest of their days as peacefully as they could inside a cage. When Regina professed that they would turn away no animal or human again, she really meant it.

It never ceased to amaze her that Regina had built all of this from scratch. And as usual, she did it wearing high heels and looking like the Queen she was. Emma just felt so honored to be able to be a part of all of this. For the first time in her life she knew that this was a place she'd never run from. This was as much her forever home as it was to the kids and animals who now lived there.

She saw a lot of activity up near one of the barns and aimed the cart that way. There were about 5 of them splayed across the campus. Though they did hold adoption events and were constantly looking for foster and adoption homes for the animals that could be rehomed their expectations were also realistic. Regina had already told her that more than likely this would be the last stop for most of the animals there. And she wanted to make sure they were as comfortable as possible.

And they were. The kennels for the dogs were large and homey. There was always someone on board to stay with them 24/7. They were in the process of partnering with the prisons for a program that would allow the animals to be fostered by prisoners until a home opened up. The companionship would have a twofold effect. The animals would get more personalized care and even some training. The prisoners would have a goal to work toward and be providing a needed service to the world. And if they showed promise, maybe even a job once they were released.

As Emma pulled up to where a group were all together out near some animal trailers, she spotted Regina near the men. She was a little surprised even though she knew that Regina wore every hat in the school. Still she was needed in the offices. They had worked hard to build a staff that they could trust to perform their duties well.

She walked over to the group a little nervously. She even had to remind herself she had been Sheriff of a town before. And she was still the Savior even without the badge. "What's going on?" she asked around.

Regina seemed as surprised to see her as she was to be seen. She frowned at her, "why are you here?"

The blonde was offended at the rude tone. Her hackles immediately rose. "Someone said there was an emergency. I came to help," she scowled.

Regina expelled a deep breath and crossed her arms. She walked back over to the farmhands shaking her head as if her offer was rubbish.

Emma followed her intent on making her presence known. She stood prominently with the others and listened as they were filled in what was happening.

They had gotten in a new animal. Normally this wasn't a problem as the shelter was only at 35% capacity. But this was no ordinary case.

The horse they'd received was pregnant. And then it got worse. She also had a broken neck. Transporting her had already been a pain. The vets hadn't wanted to sedate her because they were still shocked she was even still alive with a clearly broken neck. They'd instead double packed the
trailer with even more hay than usual, added padding to the sides of the trailer, drove as slow as the law would allow without locking them up for possibly causing an accident, and hoped and prayed for the best.

So they had a tired and terrified new expecting Mother who had no idea what all the noise and activity around her was about who had locked up once they'd gotten to the farm. Now she was refusing to step down and enter the barn. And they couldn't force her to move. Everyone was terrified that her next move could quite literally be her last.

Regina consulted with the vets one last time to no avail. They had no hopeful expectations for the situation. The only concern they had was whether or not they would still be able to deliver the foal healthy when the Mother passed.

When she was met with nothing but nervous nellies who could only tell her that she should just pray what came next was over fast she scoffed. Then she sent everyone away. The Mum was obviously panicked. And having a bunch of people around wasn't helping. Horses were highly sensitive and emotional creatures. She'd unfortunately picked up on the anxiety and tension all around her and was petrified.

Emma went back over to her golf cart and watched the scene from afar. She sat transfixed as she watched Regina go into the trailer and speak with the horse softly. Then she reached up and stroked her along the length of her face. The horse seemed to melt into her hands.

Emma remembered exactly how that felt as she watched her urge the horse down the steps of the trailer and toward the barn. They got almost all the way there before the horse spooked again.

Again, without missing a beat, Regina just took this in stride. She found a chair nearby and pulled it up to the mare. Then she sat beside her and continued to speak to her softly.

Emma was mesmerized as she watched the woman in action. This was the woman she'd fallen in love with. The way Regina looked at the horse with her face beaming with love and pride was the way she looked at Blue and Fae now. It was the way she'd once looked at Henry. And Emma had once loved her so much that she'd thought she'd seen it when she looked at her too.

All the tension and sadness that the former Queen carried with her seemed to melt away as she sat completely comfortable in her element. She was wearing an outfit that had to have cost more than Emma's car but she still seemed completely at home in the farm setting.

Watching her in Mama mode never ceased to amaze her. It was the memories of that look of pure love, joy and adoration that had spurred Emma to defend her even when she wanted to rip her apart with her bare hands. Even after Henry had fallen prey to her poison turnover. This was the true face of the woman many referred to as the Evil Queen. The other had been nothing but a mask to hide the fear of an abused, neglected, and too well used little girl.

It was that look that caused Emma to leave her golf cart and follow as Regina slowly coaxed the mare into the stables. She poked her head around the barn door as she kept a close eye on the two of them. But it was the woman more than the beast that drew her in. Just as it always had.

"She's still trying so hard to trust," Regina said as she continued to stroke the horse's head. "She's barely three. She's still really only a pony herself. Just a babe," she shook her head and frowned slightly.

She turned to Emma with tears glistening in her eyes, "Even after all of this," her throat bobbed as she tried to fight back the tears. Her next words came out choked and they ripped the blonde straight
to her core, "They found her tied up on the side of the road just left to die. And she's still trying so hard to hope that it'll be okay after monsters did this to her," she gestured to the horse's broken neck. And the wounds that were still visible along her body.

Emma had always been a sucker for tears. And Regina's tears were even worse. Even when she herself wanted to be the one to cause the damage she'd understood this woman had been damaged enough and her protective instincts rose within her. She stood nervously shifting from foot to foot. She pushed her hands down into the back of her jean pockets and tried to swallow back her own tears as she silently agreed. Monsters were precisely what it took to do something so brutal. And that was coming from the former Evil Queen herself.

"No one will ever hurt you again little one," Regina swore as she continued to stroke her as gently as she could. She wanted to hug her but with her neck and the wounds she was afraid of hurting her.

Horses always were her weakness. Well – horses and apparently stable boys too. Seeing the evidence of human cruelty never ceased to amaze her. Even after being raised by a woman who literally had no heart.

She continued to talk to the mare gently as she urged her forward. She had almost gotten her completely into the generous stall but the pony was still clearly anxious.

It had taken almost an hour just to get her that far into the barn. Her body was almost in but she still needed a few more steps before they could close the stall doors behind her. With the wave of her hand and a little puff of purple magic, a bright shiny red apple appeared. The pony's eyes lit up as she bent to devour the treat. Regina chuckled as her mouth tickled her hand.

"I've got her back here," Emma called as she stepped up to try and push the horse the rest of the way from behind. She put her hand on the horse's flank as she grabbed the stall door with the other.

Regina's eyes widened in shock as she processed what was and what was about to happen. "Emma no!" she screamed.

But it was too late.

She never even heard the scream or felt the thud as she faded to black.
Recuperating Losses

Chapter Notes

I don't really know what to tell ya 'cept I suck at naming chapters. Enjoy!

CHAPTER 48

Though he didn't want to admit it. Henry was scared.

The day had gone on like any other. School. Then Mandy picking him up and bringing him back home where he had an afternoon snack and worked on his homework until it was time for them to meet up with his Mom at Karen's office.

Emma not being there as soon as they got there wasn't really something to worry about. Neither was being called into the back by Karen with her still not there. Josie was told to put in a call to make sure she was on the way before Henry entered the office. It was rare but Emma wasn't always the most reliable when it came to time. This wasn't her first time being late and it wouldn't be her last.

But when Karen went in search of her after their session he started to worry. This had never happened before. Josie explained that her previous calls had gone straight to voicemail even as she tried again.

By the time the office was due to close everyone was looking nervous. Mandy, who would normally have been gone an hour ago, tried her best to laugh it off, "I'm sure your Mum got mixed up at work. She's probably waiting for us at home now."

But when they got there they saw her car still parked in the driveway. Emma was nowhere to be found.

Now Henry was downright terrified. This situation most definitely had never happened before. And the consequences of no longer having Emma around had him in a near panic. What would become of him? He was sure his Mother wouldn't take him in. He'd instead end up a resident of the school that she ran.

Emma was all he had. If she flaked out on him he'd be down two mothers.

His thoughts started moving over to the dark side. It had rained earlier. What if Emma was lying in a ditch by the side of the road. But no. Her car was still in the driveway. So what the hell?

Mandy did her best to distract him. She ordered pizza – in between frantically calling the school looking for information – and telling him not to worry about it. There was a reasonable explanation why someone would miss a therapist appointment and still not be home at 9 even when her job ended at 5. She put on a movie hoping to keep him distracted.

Fear was gripping ahold of him from the inside out. He was trying his best to restrain himself but his knees felt wobbly as he fell onto the sofa and his palms were sweating profusely. His heart beat had accelerated and he vaguely wondered if he was on the verge of a heart attack.

He wanted to run to the school and throughout it to get answers but Emma had made sure that
Mandy understood he was never allowed anywhere near the campus grounds. He wanted to cry and beg for his Mommy but he knew he was too old for that. So instead he continued to play make believe with the nanny as if they both weren't thinking the same scary thoughts.

They played a movie, picked at pizza, and both pretended to stare at the screen. But they weren't fooling one another. Both their ears and eyes were trained to the door. Waiting and hoping.

MF

The seconds felt like hours and the hours felt like days as Regina continued to pace back and forth around the small room. Though the layout was open she felt as if all the air and colors had been drained from her.

The emergency waiting room was nothing spectacular but it had been decorated to be as soothing as possible as people waited anxiously to hear about their loved ones. Cora sat nervously as she kept a watchful eye on her daughter while they both awaited news of the blonde.

Regina couldn't get the images of the blonde out of her mind. Her heart had nearly stopped as she watched Emma's body fly through the air then land with a sickening thud against the wall before sliding down in a dead slump. Somehow she'd still had presence of mind to get the fence closed behind her as the pony finally settled into the stall before running to the fallen Savior's side.

She hadn't even been aware that she was screaming but the panicked looks and running from the nearby staff told a different story. She fought and pushed the fools away from her who were trying to calm her down until she once more reached Emma's side. She fell to her knees and cradled her head in her hands. The ambulance was thankfully already on its way by the time she processed that they even needed one. The vet on duty thankfully did all she could to help with the situation.

Magic had of course been her first instinct. Seeing the normally active woman lying prone nearly broke her. She just needed her to be okay. She'd caught herself from reacting just in time. She'd hidden her hands beneath Emma's head as she sent a stream of healing purple magic into her. From the casual observers standing by it just looked as if she was cradling her head. The last thing she or the school needed was a widespread panic from rumors of witchcraft.

Regina's mind had gone blank as she watched the blonde loaded onto a stretcher. She'd prayed that the magic she'd done had been enough to see the blonde through.

She barely registered having jumped into the golf cart that Emma had driven over and blindly racing back to the school. By the time she burst through the doors of the main office she was already crying frantically. Zelena had thankfully been visiting that day. After she and her Mother had been able to piece together as much as they could through her strangled cries she'd assured her that the kids would fine with her as her Mother stepped up to drive her to the hospital.

The drive had been excruciating as from her position they were moving too slow. It was a miracle Cora, who hadn't been given the opportunity to drive much, had actually gotten them there in one piece given all the screaming Regina had done to drive faster repeatedly along the way.

Once they arrived at the emergency room, she'd nearly ripped the head off the young girl who dared to ask who she was as she was trying to get information on where and what was happening with the blonde. She was shocked at how strong her Mother was as she physically wrapped her arms around her and dragged her to a corner of the waiting room until she'd calmed down enough to be coherent.

When the doctors came into the waiting area to ask about next of kin her Mother had quickly recovered from the shock of hearing her tell them that she was it. She'd then continued to hold her
daughter and console her as best she could after hearing the extent of Emma's injuries. She'd presented with broken ribs, a broken arm, sprained wrist, and multiple bruises covering her body. Her broken ribs had unfortunately punctured one of her lungs. She would need surgery immediately. Her situation was dire.

Cora watched her daughter fold in on herself as she was asked to sign the consent forms. Her fingers had shaken and fumbled so much that she'd dropped the pen multiple times and Cora had to hold the clipboard steady so that she could sign her name.

After the agonizing 3 hours worth of waiting for her surgery to be completed the doctor, a portly man by the name of Papa Pope, had come out and explained that she had made it through. Her wounds had been tended to as well as modern medical science was capable and the rest was left in the hands of fate. But her status had been lifted from critical to stable.

It had taken another hour before Regina had been allowed to actually set eyes on the blonde. She'd had to prepay the costs of a private room with an en suite which she did immediately. Unfortunately the paperwork and waiting for the clearances to go through ended up making it more complicated than if she'd just been in a regular ward. Again were it not for Cora physically restraining her, the hospital would more than likely no longer be standing.

Her face was blotchy and streaked with tears, her eyes and nose were red, her hair was a mess from her gripping it with her tightened fists, and her nerves were completely shot by the time she made it into the room. But seeing green eyes blinking tiredly at her had her knees sagging in relief.

Emma was seated at the side of the bed when they came in. A nurse was standing over her helping her to try and stand while coaxing her over to the reclining chair just a couple of feet away.

Regina frowned as she took in the blonde's appearance. She was wearing the most garish pair of stockings on her feet and had monitors attached to her chest and sides. There was an IV in the one arm that was in a cast while bandages were wrapped around the sprained wrist of her other arm. The drains coming out of her side looked painful even from a distance and Regina had no idea why she was being forced to her feet at all in such a state. "Shouldn't she be lying down and resting? She looks like she's half dead," she practically yelled. From the corner of her eye she saw her Mother give her a stern warning look from the hallway but she ignored it and her.

Emma shot her a glare before her face twisted in obvious pain. Regina rushed forward to help but ended up stopping at the end of the bed. She pushed a button at her side that then expelled a long breath as the pain meds from the pump kicked in. The nurse continued with her ministrations.

The nurse smiled patiently at her. She was obviously used to dealing with irate family members. "It's actually for her own good. Getting the patient up and moving as soon as possible helps prevent clotting. She's been given pain meds already and I assure you we would do nothing to put the patient anymore at risk." She pointed to the pouch that hung across Emma's side, "she can administer pain meds at will. I promise you she'll be fine."

Regina remained skeptical as she watched the blonde be maneuvered over to the reclining chair near the bed. The nurse made sure she was as comfortable as possible with plenty of extra pillows and blankets before finally leaving the two of them alone. "I'll be back a little later to start your wife on her breathing exercises. But for now she's actually doing a great job."

Emma looked surprised at the wife comment. Regina covered the flush that spread across her cheeks by fussing over the pillows and blankets around her.

"How are you?" she asked after clearing her throat loudly. "I mean – beside the obvious," she
gestured in her overall direction.

"'s kay," Emma's voice came out in a choked whisper. She smiled a little at the wife thing but she was entirely too exhausted to get into it now. She had a breathing tube now as they had taken her oxygen tube out which she'd been told was a good sign as they explained her situation to her in the recovery room. "You did magic on me didn't you?"

Regina smiled tiredly and nodded, "How did you know?"

"Because my head is the only thing that doesn't hurt," she croaked as her eyes began to droop. Her eyes widened as she grabbed the towel the nurse had left at her side. She pressed it to her incision as she coughed.

Regina winced wishing she could spare her this pain. But anymore magic would set off suspicions in hospital staff around them. Plus they were being closely monitored. The front walls of the room were made of glass so that the nurses could keep a careful eye on the patient. She busied herself instead with pouring her a glass of water and helping her drink from the straw provided.

"Sorry I'm such an idiot," she croaked out through her sore throat. Breathing came with a burning sensation that she had been told was going to be her new normal for a while. She had really screwed herself up this time. She had no idea what she'd been thinking trying to push a horse.

Regina gave an exaggerated sigh, "since we both know it'll happen again I don't know what else to say." She dragged her hand through her tousled hair, "I'm just glad you're on the mend now."

Emma nodded knowing that once she was out of the woods the chastisement would really start. But she was glad to have the brunette by her side. Always.

"Thank – ful – ly," her words were coming out slower as her head lolled against the backrest and eyes continued to droop. "Blue's too li'l to know her Mom's an idiot. How'd Henry take it?" she asked as impending sleep came rushing at her.

Regina froze with a look of horror across her face, "Henry?"

Emma was almost asleep but she still managed to catch the surprise in Regina's voice. She used up every bit of her energy reserves as she looked up in shock, "you forgot Henry?"
CHAPTER 49

As soon as she’d been assured that the blonde was in a dead sleep, Regina rushed from the room to find her Mother.

Cora was on the phone updating the family on the situation when her daughter ran up to her frantically. She jumped in surprise as her daughter latched onto her for dear life, “Sweetheart - ?”

“I forgot Henry!” she practically screamed before the hysteria from before set in. She was on the verge of hyperventilating, “I just – I can’t – ,” she looked at her mother with tear drenched eyes. Her next words came out so broken that her Mother ended up dropping the call without a goodbye before scooping her up into her strong arms. “I forgot Henry.”

“It’s okay dear,” she shushed her. “It’s fine. We’ll go and tend to him now,” she stroked her daughter’s hair trying her best to calm her. She grabbed their belongings in one hand while maneuvering her toward the door with the other.

She hurried them to the car because she wanted to get there before Regina’s body gave out on her. She’d experienced multiple shocks today and the adrenaline holding her up would wear off eventually. Being an avid fan of torture - in the past that is – Cora was also an expert at the human mind and body and what it could and could not take before being broken.

She helped her into the passenger side seat before hurrying around to the driver’s side. She glanced at her daughter as she got into the car and nearly gave a start.

Her hair was wild about her head, her makeup had long since been cried away, her face was pale and drawn. Without her makeup she actually looked younger. She looked almost like the young girl who’d watched her lover fall at the hands of her Mother. Cora was still amazed at all she’d done during her darkest days. And even more so that her girls had chosen to forgive her and create their own happily ever after.

“How are you holding up?” she asked as she reached over and cranked up the heat. She made sure the vents were turned in her daughter’s direction before heading back toward the school. It was clear her girl was still in shock.

Regina sat staring out the window and only vaguely heard her Mother speaking to her. “I can’t believe I forgot him,” she whispered aloud to herself. It made her ashamed to say such a thing.

For 10 years she and Henry had lived a happy life. Then as usual Snow just couldn’t stop herself from ruining things. Or so she’d told herself at the time that a certain blonde showed up on her doorstep.

But if she were to be honest with herself, she hadn’t been completely happy. As close to it as one could be maybe. But there was always something more missing. During the time that she had him Henry had been enough. But not everything.

The bond she had with Fae and Blue was of a different yield than the one she had with Henry. With them there was no holding back. There were no secrets between them and the only thing they needed was for her to be their Mum.

But with Henry the curse had been active. And it had been like living a secret double life. There
was her old Evil Queen presence in the cloudy glaze of Storybrooke’s residents eyes but there was also her. Just Regina. A woman who loved her little boy more than even herself.

It wounded her deeply that her son was never able to see past his storybook. He sneered and jeered at her and acted as if the 10 years they’d spent being happy were nothing. She just couldn’t reconcile it.

If he were just angry for a bit that she could understand. But he was beyond that. He was enraged. She saw it in him everytime she tried reaching out after the curse broke. But she finally accepted it the day he raised his fists to her and almost used them against her.

She’d be lying if she said it didn’t scare her. She’d seen that face before. On her Mother before she’d gotten her heart back, on Leopold’s face when she didn’t respond to him the way a ‘real’ wife was supposed to, with Rumple when she didn’t pick up fast enough to satisfy him, and for a long time she’d seen it even in her own mirror. Henry had way too many negative traits vying for dominance inside him. No wonder he was messed up. With his genetics he really didn’t have much of a choice.

It was times like those that she was glad he had no magic. With all his anger and self-righteousness he would’ve been the king villain of all villains. She didn’t think even Rumplestiltskin could’ve held a candle against her boy if he had magic in the midst of his fits of anger.

He didn’t want her to just get some payback for her being the Evil Queen once upon a time long before he was even born. He wanted her to suffer. He wanted her pain. And he was only 10!

It’s why she’d stopped fighting for him and allowed him to go to Emma. Everyone kept telling her she was just filled with so much evil. And the Charmings were nothing but pure goodness. And Emma as the Savior was the purest of them all.

So she accepted her failure as a parent of him and let him go. She’d hoped that maybe some of Emma’s goodness would rub off onto him. And he would become a better person.

She’d been happy with the new life she’d created for herself and her kids. One of many mistakes she’d known she’d made with Henry was in encouraging his entitled behaviors. She’d thought giving him everything was the path to making him happy.

Instead Henry had taken it to extremes as he had a tendency to do with almost everything. There was never a middle ground with him. It was always intensity ratcheted up to the highest degree with him.

Recognizing that anger in him and being appalled by it was what made it easy to walk away from him. It was his best chance. For him to have a fresh start with someone who wasn’t as consumed with anger and hate as she once was.

Her kids were her center. And her family was her happy. There were some days she felt slightly guilty about how happy she’d become since letting go of him in order to live her best life. But she wouldn’t trade the joy and love she found when she looked at her kids for anything. Even for him.

The thought of him being back in her life filled her with dread. Last she’d seen of him, Henry was still bound and determined to stay mired in the past. He wanted everyone to stay there with him.

Even Emma was having a hard time with him. She knew from Karen that they were attending therapy and trying to do the best that they could. Still on some of the rare occasions she and Emma spent exchanging more than a few words and arguments she’d admitted that Henry hadn’t really
gotten any better over time.

She didn’t want to have to deal with him again. And yet she knew she had to. There was no one else.

“What the hell am I going to do with him?” she turned to her Mother looking lost and confused.

Cora glanced at her daughter before refocusing on the road ahead, “You’ll do whatever you have to dear.”

Regina looked at her Mother skeptically. This wasn’t something she wanted to do. Still she knew it had to be done.

The rest of the drive was made in silence. Both women stared straight ahead as they came closer and closer to their destination. The tension in the air was thick enough to cut.

Once they reached the house they both sat staring at it looming before them. Though the house was a nice little cottage, in this moment, it seemed like the Bate’s house.

Regina sat playing with her hands as dread pooled in her belly. Now that her adrenaline was wearing off she just found herself weary down to her bones. She wanted nothing more than to just sleep for the next ten years. But this was what the job of being a Mother was about. Carrying on when you want nothing more than to rest, “What am I going to say?”

Cora looked at her little girl. She had given up any claims to Mother her daughters years ago. But still they’d found it in their hearts to forgive her and let her back in. Now their hearts beating in her chest were the fuel and the anchor that allowed her to carry on.

“Look at me,” she commanded. When her daughter turned to her with eyes as large and wide as saucers she leaned forward and pinched her chin between her thumb and forefinger.

“When the time comes, the words will come to you. This I’m certain of. Because you already know what needs to be done. And it’s in your nature to get it done.”

Regina started to shake her head but her Mother held firm. “I know exactly who you are. And I always have.” She gestured toward the house, “that boy in there taught you how to love again despite all the odds stacked against you. And you’ve become all I ever could’ve imagined and more.”

Tears glistened in large russet colored eyes but she worked hard to blink them away. Though her Mother went out of her way to let her girls know they were appreciated and loved it was still always a treasured surprise when she allowed her emotions to flow. Regina reached up and grabbed ahold of her Mother’s hand and clutched it in hers.

“I have three beautiful grandchildren with one more on the way. But still there is one missing,” she looked at her daughter and nodded. “You know what you have to do.”

She nodded, “I know what I have to do. But I don’t really want to do it. Henry is just so - ,” she broke off unable to continue on about the hot mess that had become the relationship between her and the boy. There were no words to describe how complicated the situation with Henry was. Though they’d discussed it many times over the past year there was still never a resolution in sight.

“Henry may be lost,” Cora agreed. “But he is not lost to YOU yet.”

Regina nodded even though she was still unsure if she believed her Mother’s words. She took a
deep breath and looked back at the garden home. Then she opened the door, stepped out of the car, and walked into the house.

MF

The movie was already over and yet Mandy nor Henry moved. Their thoughts had been 1000 miles away the entire time it had played. They had no idea what they had even sat watching for the past couple of hours. Now they just sat idly staring at the end credits rolling.

If they spoke they’d have to speak aloud as to why. Why was Emma not yet home? Why hadn’t she called? Why was there no news of her?

None of the answers to the questions led them down a good path. There was just no reasonable explanation for her absence. Which left only painful ones. And they hadn’t yet reached the stage where they wanted to accept that.

So they sat still and stared at the end credits. And waited. But for what they had no idea.

When the door opened they both startled. Then they sat openly gaping at the visitors.

“Mom?” Henry croaked as his Mother walked into the room followed by her Mother. Mandy sat up and threw them all a confused look but he just continued to stare at the woman before him. He rose awkwardly and met her halfway across the room, “Hi Mom.”

For a moment Regina could do nothing but stare. Her little boy was no longer a boy. He had been a small scrawny thing last she remembered. He was now practically at her eye level and his body was filling out. His arms stuck out gangling from the pajamas that he wore. He was definitely coming into his own.

She couldn’t believe the many months that had passed since the last time she’d laid eyes on him. Again that flash of guilt and shame blew through her.

She wasn’t being neglectful. It was just that being around Henry was equivalent to reopening a wound that she was wanting desperately to heal. He only wanted to live in the past. He branded himself and his ‘real’ family heroes. She wanted a new future that wasn’t filled with pain. Yet she was the one called evil.

Mandy was the first to shake herself out of her stupor. “Can I help you?” she asked as she wondered what the hell was going on. She knew Emma had another child … there were plenty of pictures around of the baby not to mention the nursery. And Emma talked about her a lot. But she’d never met her. They apparently spent time together at the school. She’d never heard of Henry having another mother though.

Regina shook off her daze and reached a hand out toward her son. Or started to rather before she pulled it back just short of touching him. She took a breath and ran her hands through her disheveled hair instead. “Henry -,” she blinked and threw her head back as he stared at her with wide frightened eyes. He almost looked like the little boy who’d climbed into bed with her after a bad dream. She gave him a gentle smile and gestured to the sofa set again, “I’m going to need you to have a seat.”

Henry didn’t really like the sound of the request but his body had already responded before he could put up a fight. His mom was looking like death warmed over. He’d only ever seen her that upset in the hospital the night the curse broke. And there was no Emma along with her. He knew that meant something bad was coming. And the dread that had already been making a home in the pit of his stomach started to rise. He felt bile in the back of his throat and swallowed thickly to try and keep it
at bay as he dropped heavily onto the ottoman near the sofa.

Regina squatted down until she was at just below eye level with her son. She knew she had to do this quickly to put him out of the misery she saw he was in, “Emma is fine.”

Relief flooded Henry as his eyes darted around as if expecting her to walk in any minute now. He caught himself before he sagged down in his seat. “Where - ?”

Regina held up a hand to stop him before he finished the question, “she’s at the hospital. She had an accident and she’ll be there for a bit. But she is perfectly fine. And the doctors are sure she’s going to recover just fine.”

Henry’s heart was thumping so loud he thought it’d pound out of his chest as he became lost in his head. The hospital? Emma was in the hospital? But she was the Savior. Saviors don’t get hurt. His head snapped back as his Mom snapped her fingers in his face.

“Henry,” she held her fingers inches from his nose. She waited with a frown until his eyes once more focused on hers. “Now I need you to go upstairs and get dressed. Then grab whatever you’re going to need for a few days and put them in a bag.”

He wanted to protest and ask more questions. But they died before leaving his lips as his Mom helped him stand before pushing him towards the stairs.

Mandy stood and faced the brunette, “are you his Mom?” she asked incredulously.

Regina ignored the girl and instead turned to her Mother, “I’m going to run upstairs and grab a few things for Emma.” She turned and made her way up the stairs.

She passed by Henry’s room where he was distractedly putting things into a bag. She left him to it as she continued down the hall. As she walked past Blue’s room the splashes of color caught her eye. She peeked her head into the room and was amazed by all that Emma had done.

The room was made up of a combination of lavender and mint. The walls were painted mint and the furniture was all white with lavender accents all over the room. Murals were painted all along the walls. One in particular caught her eye. It was a castle sitting on a cloud. It shocked her that she and Emma had similar tastes when it came to their daughter. She herself had patterned her daughter’s room with a Princess in Fairytale land theme.

After giving an approving nod, she walked past the room and continued to the Master suite. The room had basically been untouched from the way she’d decorated it before Emma and Henry had moved in. Except of course for the unmade bed and clothes messily thrown about. She clucked her tongue as she moved around ignoring the untidiness. Emma had never been known for neatness.

She found a bag in the closet and began to fill it with different items she found lying around the room before heading to the bathroom and doing the same. Once she was sure she’d gathered as many items together that she would think the blonde would want or need she made her way back into the hallway and down to Henry’s room.

“Ready?” she called to the boy’s back.

Henry jumped slightly at hearing his Mom’s voice. “Su- sure,” he stammered nervously. He had no idea where they were going or what lay ahead of him but he knew he didn’t want to be left behind. Regina led the way back down the stairs and he followed close behind her. Once they made it downstairs he quickly put back on his shoes that were kept in the mud room.
Cora waited patiently by the door, “The girl asked if she should still pick Henry up tomorrow as usual. I told her until she hears from us that it was best to stay on their regular routine.”

Regina nodded as she looked around the room before turning to Henry, “well come along then,” she gestured toward the door. She made sure to remember to cut off all the lights before they left. She secured the security alarm and made sure the door was locked when they left.

The trio made their way out to the car. As they waited for the door to open on their side Henry turned to Regina, “can we go to see Emma?”

Having already known that it was going to come up she nodded as they opened their respective car doors. “I know you’ve been worried about her. It will only be for a minute or so though. She needs her rest.”

Henry stared into the car as he took that in gratefully. He really did want to see for himself that she was alright. The suspense of the past few hours had nearly killed him.

The sight of two car seats staring at him though made him pause before getting into the car. The sight of them together made it clear that the car was not set up with him in mind. He said nothing as he climbed over what was apparently Fae’s seat since it was a bit larger than the other. He tossed his bag on the floor as he wiggled to get comfortable in the small gap between the car seats.

“Seatbelts please,” Cora stared at him in the rearview mirror.

Her daughter turned to her with a small smile and nodded her approval. She knew that Cora’s acclimation to this land and its rules was a huge hurdle. At least she and the rest of Storybrooke had memories of this land built into their new lives. Cora had to learn to do everything on her own the hard way. She was quite proud of the progress that her Mother had made.

As they began the short drive back to the hospital Henry’s curiosity finally got the better of him. He piped up from the backseat, “what happened?”

Regina twisted in her seat and looked over her shoulder at the boy. She pinched her lips together as she weighed how she would tell him about Emma and her injuries. “You’re aware that she’s an idiot,” at the boy’s nod she continued. “Being an idiot she tried to move a horse. But instead the horse moved her.”

“She has a broken arm and a sprained wrist. There’s bruising over her body from the crash and it may be scary looking. But those will fade,” she bit her lip nervously while debating whether she should downplay the rest of Emma’s injuries or not. It had been awhile since she’d been around Henry but his terror was apparent. From the way his eyes appeared ready to pop out of their sockets and his harsh breathing it was clear that he was still visibly agitated.

She shook herself out of it. He was no longer a small child and he deserved to know. “She has a few broken ribs. They then punctured her lung and she needed surgery to repair it. The doctors have assured me it went well. Now all we have to do is wait for her to heal,” she finished with a soft smile hoping that the boy would soon settle himself.

Henry’s fingers were starting to hurt from him anxiously working at his hands. But he welcomed the pain as a distraction from his thoughts. He’d known that whatever had stopped Emma from coming home was really bad. She’d promised that it was the three of them from now on. Her, the baby and him. The three amigos. He and Karen had gone over his trust issues in therapy. She said it might be a long road but that they’d get there together. Again – trust was key.
Recovering his Mom had said. She was recovering. The doctor said she would be alright. She was going to be fine. And she would come back home. It was going to be alright he kept repeating to himself internally. She’s going to be fine. She will come home. She wasn’t gone.

He sat busy trying his best to keep himself calm. As the car took them closer to him being able to see for himself that the one person he had left wasn’t gone another thought occurred to him. “Am I going to be staying with you?”

Regina was a bit startled by the simple yet loaded question. She would’ve been more comfortable if he’d pointed a loaded gun at her. But this - .

The two of them had not spent any time together in well over a year and a half. And for the year before that Henry had insisted on making every interaction with him as miserable as humanly possible. Now she was stuck because there seemed to be only the one answer to his question.

She hated having choices taken away from her. But the nauseating feel in the pit of her belly made it clear that this was about so much more. Instead of answering she turned and stared out the window grateful when the hospital came into sight.

Cora waited in the car as Regina took Henry into the hospital to see Emma. The walk down the hall to Emma’s room was quiet. When they came to the Nurse’s station Regina walked up to the duty nurse.

She put on one of her award winning mayoral smiles, “Hi. I’m aware that it’s after visiting hours. But this is Emma Swan’s son,” she put her arm around Henry’s shoulders. The boy played the game well and put on his poutiest face. Which wasn’t hard to do considering the role was his current life. “He only just found out that his Mom was in the hospital. She’s a single parent and she’s all he has in the world. If it’s alright with you we’d just like to stick our heads in and out really fast just so that they can sleep tonight knowing that the other is fine.”

The nurse had a stern expression on her face and looked like she was about to say no. But a glance at Henry’s earnest brown eyes had her caving in. “Alright. But just for a minute. She’s had a sedative and she should be just about to sleep now,” she relented while still staring at the boy.

Regina gave her a real warm smile as she pushed Henry ahead of her and toward Emma’s door. Just before they walked in she turned to him again to try and alleviate his worries over what he saw. Henry had always been a highly sensitive child and she’d protected him from everything. That time was now over and he needed to learn to face things on his own terms. But she still wanted to be there to soften the blow as much as possible.

She took a deep breath before they continued, “I want you to know that what you see might be scary. She has a lot of bruising. And there are a lot of tubes and monitors attached to her. But it’s all completely necessary. And the doctor already assured me that she will be perfectly fine. OK?”

Henry took a breath and nodded. He understood that she was obviously banged up pretty badly. But he still needed to see her for himself.

Regina quietly opened the door and walked inside first. She was glad to see that Emma had been returned to her bed. She was half sitting up and her eyes were closed.

“Ma!” Henry cried out as he surged forward.

Regina wrapped her arms around him before he could reach out and do any damage. “Careful,” she warned.
Emma startled and her eyes opened wide in shock at the commotion. She blinked drowsily. “Hen-,” was the only thing she was able to wheeze out before she was gone again.

“Come on,” Regina patted Henry on his chest. “She needs her rest,” she said as she guided him back out the door.

Henry hesitated, “But how will she know that we were here?”

The brunette regarded him thoughtfully before nodding. “Go to the nurse’s station and ask for pen and paper. We can leave her a note for when she wakes up.”

The boy turned and did as told. When the nurse handed him over the items he’d asked for he stood for a moment debating what he wanted to say. Then he put pen to paper and wrote a quick note, “Ma,” he tried the new name out. He liked the sound of it. It seemed to fit Emma and the situation of having two Moms and two different lives at one point well. He wished he’d thought of it sooner as a way to differentiate the two. He continued on with his note, “we’ll be back to see you soon. Please get well and come home fast.”

At the door to Emma’s hospital room he faltered. Regina was cupping Emma’s cheek and looking down at her in a way he’d only ever remembered her doing with him. And if he wasn’t mistaken, Emma seemed to be smiling in her sleep and leaning into the touch. He cleared his throat awkwardly which had his Mom pulling back with a slightly guilty blush on her face. He pretended not to see it as he folded the note and placed it on Emma’s bedside tray.

He looked at his fallen savior and took inventory of their surroundings. She really was pretty banged up. There was a breathing machine and heart monitors attached to her. One arm was in a full cast while the other had a bandage wrapped around the wrist. He could see bruising on her arms and there were large dark circles under her eyes making her appear even paler than usual. He swallowed thickly and blinked back tears before Regina began to lead him out of the room.

The walk back to the car was quiet. So was the ride back home. Or rather to his Mom’s new home. The one he wasn’t invited to. He knew that the only reason he was there was because of Emma’s accident. And he’d probably never be invited here again after she was well. But for now there was no other choice.

When they got out of the car he asked a question that had been nagging at him since he’d realized his Mother was only a mile away from him, “does Emma know you live here?”

Regina pursed her lips before answering as her Mother opened the front door. “We’ve never had a need to speak about it. Emma and I work together. And I allow her visitation with Blue. But she is not a part of our lives. Our relationship doesn’t go beyond that of colleagues.”

Henry felt better that Emma hadn’t been lying to him about all of this. And he felt a deep pang in his heart at the obvious exclusion of himself from any relationship reference. He gripped the handles of his overnight bag as he pushed it away and ignored it.

He followed quietly along behind as they entered the house. This house, though still obviously a mansion, was significantly smaller than the other one they’d had Fae’s adoption party at. That one was sprawling with different wings. This one was closer to the house they’d shared in Storybrooke.

They took off their shoes in the coat room and stored them in cupboards made for such a thing. Then they walked into the foyer that opened onto the main living room. He stared in wonder at a huge streamer that was above their head saying Happy Birthday.
“What’s with that?” he pointed upward at it.

Regina followed his finger and gave a little laugh. “We were planning a surprise party for Emma on Saturday when she brought Blue back home. I was going to have her drop her off here. Now I guess we’re going to have to reschedule it for another time.”

Cora felt weary down to her bones and thought she’d earned herself a nice long rest. She was having trouble keeping her eyes opened at this point. But she needed to make sure her daughter was taken care of first. “I’m going to turn in now dear. If you’re sure you have everything covered from this end?” she asked her daughter as she studied her closely. Though she was pale and obviously exhausted from the long emotional day she seemed to be handling things just fine on the outside. On the inside she knew her little girl had to be raging. After receiving a tired smile and a small nod she gave her daughter a long hug and a kiss before making her way upstairs to her room. “Just shake me if you need me,” she called back over her shoulder as she departed.

Regina’s plan was to do the same once she’d gotten Henry settled and checked on her children. But once they were alone and she’d started to turn away she’d whipped back around to the boy as a new thought occurred to her, “are you hungry? I could whip you up something if you’d like?”

Henry shook his head in response, “we had pizza earlier.” Though he’d been too keyed up then to eat now he was too exhausted. It had been a long day for him and he just wanted a place to lay his head and grab himself a few hours of peaceful oblivion.

“Come along then,” Regina urged him up the stairs behind her. This house had only 8 bedrooms in it. There were 5 upstairs, one downstairs that she would leave for Emma since she was obviously not going to be able to be left alone to recover. And a 2 bedroom basement apartment. And most were already accounted for.

Abby and her family had one, Zelena and Hades had another, Cora had her own suite, and she had hers with the kids sharing the last one available. Or so that was the plan for right now at least.

She opened the door to what was supposed to be the kids’ room as quietly as possible. For now the room was technically Fae’s. She’d had it decorated just for him while Blue’s crib rested in a corner of her own bedroom.

The room was decorated much like the forest in Avatar. It was lit up with sconces that resembled the flowers in the movie. They lit up different colors and served as a nightlight throwing a soft glow around the room. Fae’s bed was a tree in the middle of the room. At the top was a full-sized bed hidden amongst the limbs of a weeping willow tree. And because she was afraid of him taking a tumble Fae slept in a small toddler bed that rested halfway in a hollow at the base of the tree.

There was a huge dragon in one corner and a huge horse just like from the movie in the other. There were ropes that hung down from the ceiling which had tree limb like walkways all around it. Henry jumped amazed as they passed by and the dragon moved. But it didn’t scare him. It was way cooler than his room had ever been.

“You’re going to be sharing with Fae while you’re here,” Regina turned and smiled at her little man. She went over to his bedside and righted his body before tucking him securely back in. Her boy was active during the day and while he slept.

Henry shifted uncomfortably as she gazed down at him lovingly. Then she swept a lock of hair off his forehead to kiss him.

“The bathroom’s through there,” she pointed out to him as she rose. “And my room is on the other
side in case there’s anything you need in the night.

Henry nodded and clutched his bag tighter. Emma came at night to his room and made sure that he had whatever he needed before bed. And that was nice. But it wasn’t the same as life had been with his Mom.

Regina felt awkward and unsure as she stood there. It had been forever since she’d interacted with the boy. She wasn’t certain how they were going to go about this. But due to the circumstances there was no other choice. She coughed and shifted ungracefully as the loaded silence stretched between them. “Well, goodnight,” she called as she took her leave.

Once he was alone, Henry entered the bathroom and went about his nightly routine. Then he changed back into his pajamas and hurried back out into the room. He climbed up the side of the tree to the bunk at the top.

He thought he’d lie awake forever given that he had so much to think about. But as he fell into what had to be the world’s most comfortable bed he felt his body become as heavy as his mind was. His Mother always bought the best of everything. As his head rested upon the pillow it was instantly fade to black.
Regina was aroused from sleep by the favorite way she’d become accustomed to over the past few months. The tv was turned up way too loud. And her children were squealing with peals of laughter.

Normally she was up with the sun. But now that Blue was sleeping throughout the night she was able to enjoy a more lax schedule.

She still woke up early as was her custom from the old Enchanted Forest days. Then she’d workout for an hour or so. It had at first been a chore that she’d adapted to help her battle her low energy from having an infant that needed to be fed every 3 to 4 hours. But now it had become a soothing self-care ritual that she’d come to love. She’d added Pilates to her Yoga routine and she had to say she loved the results she’d gotten. It made her feel stronger and more confident in herself. The compliments and stares at her body didn’t hurt either.

After that she’d jump into the shower and get herself cleaned up. By then the kids would be starting to stir and she’d normally find them camped out in her bed once she was out of the bathroom.

Once Blue was old enough to stand, Fae – being the perfect big brother that he was – had learned to help her out of the crib. It had terrified her the first time she’d witnessed her baby tumbling head first out of the crib. But Fae easily caught her and the two had giggled over their success. Though she’d told them both not to try it again, they’d gotten into the routine and so far everything had been working smoothly. That didn’t stop her from worrying about it though even after she’d placed a rubber mattress underneath the crib.

But it seemed today her internal clock hadn’t bothered to go off. She guessed her body had decided she needed some extra sleep this morning after last night’s emotional events. So she awoke this morning to find her two li’l ones laughing over the antics of the cartoons on the telly.

She could feel her babygirl pressed close against her back and it made her feel warm inside. In one fell swoop she rolled over and scooped her up. She pressed kisses into her neck as her son rolled over and tackled them both.

“Buenos dias mijitos,” she breathed out as soon as she could get a breath in between the laughing and play wrestling. She sat up cradling Blue in her arms and facing her son.

Fae made the sign for her to sing. She gave him a mock glare which sent him into a fit of giggles then he grabbed his toes and rocked back and forth as she began to sing Buenos Dias Canto Yo. Though she hated her singing voice the kids seemed to like it well enough. As she got to the last stanza both kids clapped. But only Fae was actually on beat.

She stuck out her tongue and pretended to pass out as she clutched Blue to her chest. They fell back onto the pillows and she lay there holding her daughter tight as she gripped her tightly around the neck and Fae stretched himself out beside them.

Fae made the sign for bed then boy while pointing toward his room.

“Yes,” she nodded. “Mummy was gone last night because Emma got hurt,” she pulled her mouth into an exaggerated pout.
Fae gasped and looked concerned as he scooted to his knees. He liked Emma. She would play with him and tickle him whenever she saw him. She always waved and was really friendly. And sometimes she would take him with her when she came to spend time with Blue.

Regina pantomimed for him to calm down. “The doctors said she had to stay in the hospital but she’ll be home soon. In the meantime, Henry needed someone to look after him. Is it okay for him to share your room for a little while?”

Fae’s long lashes fluttered as he closed his eyes once signaling yes.

She grinned at him as she pulled her son close to her. She then smothered both her kids with lots of love, cuddles, and kisses.

After the family finally got outta bed and completed their morning routine they made their way downstairs. The rest of the family was already sitting within the screened in porch off of the kitchen which was where they took most of their meals as long as the weather permitted.

Cora was putting together a proper breakfast while Zelena stood over her snacking at whatever was within reach. She was in that exhaustive fed up stage of her pregnancy. At this point she just wanted it all over and her kid to be here already. Instead she suffered through swollen legs, back pains, hot flashes, and even more severe mood swings than usual.

Abby sat breastfeeding Jr while Fred stared sleepily ahead of him. Fae went around giving everyone their morning hugs while Blue bounced happily on her Mum’s hip. Hades was obsessing over the newspaper’s financial section.

After a lot of trial and error he’d finally found a new passion. He’d become obsessed with creating wealth and he was extremely good at it. He’d managed to create a stunning portfolio and his investments had helped grow the school and the family’s personal wealth. For once his psychopathic tendencies had actually been funneled for good instead of evil.

From the glare that Zelena leveled her with as she walked into the kitchen she’d obviously already heard the news. Regina ignored her and poured herself a glass of orange juice as she waited for her to get whatever it was she had to say off her chest. Of course that didn’t take long.

Before she was even able to swallow her first sip her sister was already in battle mode, “why is that boy in my house?”

Regina sighed as she placed her glass down. She busied herself with putting Blue’s bib on securely before placing her in her high chair. She then helped Fae up on his booster seat before turning back to her sister, “this house doesn’t belong to you. It’s the family’s house. Not yours. And what exactly did you expect me to do? Leave him in a house alone until Emma’s able to barely manage to drag herself out of the hospital? She’s scarcely competent at 100%. I cringe to think what she’ll be like at 20.”

The redhead sneered before pointing toward the school, “there’s plenty of space for him right inside that school. What’s the point of building it for kids that no one wants like him if it’s not going to be used?”

Regina rolled her eyes and shook her head as she walked back into the kitchen and began to fill the kid’s sippy cups with juice. She looked around her, “Where is Henry anyway?”

Zelena grabbed the plate of rashers and flounced back out to the porch, “You let a rat into the house
Henry stopped short at the kitchen door with his mouth agape. He had been anxious enough when he’d woken up in an unfamiliar place. Then the events from the previous day came flooding back to him. He’d hurried through his morning routine and gone in search of his Mother. When he’d found her room empty, he’d come downstairs. Last night he’d immediately been ushered up to bed so he really had no idea where anything here was. It was his growling stomach and the promise of breakfast at the end of his nose that had led him to this room.

Now he stood unsure of himself as he awkwardly pulled on his clothes. He felt conspicuously out of place. He knew his Mom didn’t really want him anymore. And he’d never really talked to anyone from her family since they weren’t his real family. And none of them had ever bothered to reach out to him either.

He knew the redhead didn’t like him for some reason. Though he’d never been popular – outside of the handful of weeks after the curse had ended – he had been bullied before. But even then he never got the feeling that the kids actually hated him. They just – didn’t really like him much.

But staying in a house with people who didn’t seem to like him at all was something completely different. He had no idea what he was supposed to do when it felt like just existing was already the wrong thing.

Cora was the first to notice him as she brought the last serving plate to the table. She smiled at the boy as kindly as possible. “Henry. You have perfect timing. Sit down. Breakfast is ready.”

Henry thought about declining but his stomach growling was too much for him to ignore. He overlooked the glares and unfriendly gazes as he took a seat and stared ahead of him. He didn’t want to be accused of anything again. He was sitting patiently when a tap on his shoulder had him looking to his right to see his Mother’s new son grinning and waving at him.

“He’s saying good morning,” Regina supplied as she gazed lovingly at her boy. “Did you sleep well?” she asked as she picked up the nearest serving dish and began to serve the kids then herself.

Henry merely shrugged as he picked up the knife and fork his Mother supplied him with and began to dig into his eggs. He kept his head down and concentrated on eating his breakfast while ignoring the looks around him.

The redhead just continued to glare at him. Her husband grinned at him conspiratorially. Henry really didn’t feel comfortable around him. He remembered him saying that he was a villain. But that wasn’t true. Henry was a good guy and his whole family were heroes. It was the Evil Queen and her family that were all villains.

“Good morning Henry. It’s been a while since we’ve seen you,” Abby was the first to give him an open and friendly smile while her husband waved at him. She lifted her baby’s arm and waved it at him also. “Jr says good morning too,” she laughed.

Back home Abby had called Kathryn. She’d been his Mom’s best friend. And he remembered her husband from when he was the gym teacher back in Storybrooke. They both seemed like good people to him. He had no idea how or why they’d become family with the Evil Queen after all she’d done to them both but he knew it wasn’t his place to intervene. Not knowing what else to do or say so he just offered her a small smile in return and continued eating.

Blue had been busy eating and playing with her food at the same time. She threw the slice of tomato she’d been chewing on back down on her plate and threw her hands in the air. She yelled out,
“Beenz deez.” Henry’s head snapped up in surprise.

Regina grinned over at her baby as she used her bib to wipe at her hands and mouth, “she means Buenos dias,” she translated the baby talk for Henry.

“She can talk?” he asked still shocked. It had been a while since Henry had seen the baby. The last he remembered she was nothing but a poop and eating machine.

Now he sat shocked at the changes he saw in Emma’s baby. The girl was larger and her hair didn’t stick out at awkward angles anymore but instead hung down to her shoulders in two curly ponytails. The blonde part obviously came from Emma. So did the dimples. But it was his Mom’s eyes sparkling up at him. That and her pert little nose and beautiful red bowed lips made her the weirdest compilation of his two mothers he’d ever seen.

She seemed more present now and aware of herself and her surroundings. She was growing and becoming her little person. She grinned at him with a newly acquired gapped tooth smile. Again it had him wondering about how this little girl had come to be.

Regina scoffed, “Of course she can. She’s been talking for a few months now. She’s smart just like her Mum,” she tweaked her baby’s chubby cheek. “You remember Henry don’t you? Can you say hi to him?”

Blue moved her hand up and down at the wrist energetically in a waving motion, “Hi, hi,” she squealed repeatedly gleefully.

“It’s been a long time since I’ve seen her,” the boy remarked still amazed at the little girl. He gave her a small smile and waved back at her.

Regina turned back to her food. She was well aware that it had been a while since they’d seen one another. She’d designed it that way. The fear of Henry corrupting her babies was something that had taken root deep inside of her from the moment she was aware she was going to be a Mum again.

She knew on one level things would be fine. Her kids didn’t have Henry’s genetics or personal afflictions. But she’d also once trusted that Henry would be able to remember the love she’d raised him with over the years. He’d thrown that back in her face repeatedly and made her regret ever even adopting him in the first place. There had been many a day that had passed since the curse broke that she’d wished she’d listened to herself the first time she’d thought of returning him back to the adoption agency. Her heart just couldn’t take a repeat of that from her own children.

The rest of the meal passed with the family discussing their plans for the day. Regina turned to Henry again, “For the rest of your stay here, I’ll take you to school in the mornings. And your nanny will pick you up and take you over to the hospital to sit with Emma. I’ll be by to pick you up after I get off from work.”

Henry nodded his understanding before asking to be excused. Before he left the table his Mom reminded him that he had 15 minutes before they needed to head out the door.

Regina helped her Mum with the clean up after she’d taken care of the kid’s faces and hands. She made sure they had everything they would need as she packed their bags for the day. Then Cora volunteered to get them and Henry packed into the car while she ran out into the backyard for something.

When Regina returned to the garages where she kept her car the family was already snug inside and ready to go. She handed her Mother the basket of apples she carried with her freshly picked from
her own apple tree. “We just have one quick stop to make and then I’ll get you on to school,” she told everyone as she put the car into drive.

They drove down the drive leading to the home and across the road where she pulled up to one of the set of stables. She grabbed the basket of apples from her Mother before the two of them began to get the kids out of the car.

“What are we doing here?” Henry asked annoyed. He’d been told multiple times that he wasn’t welcome or allowed to trespass on school grounds. He saw no reason why that should change now.

“We’re going to stop and see the horse that kicked Emma. I want to make sure that she’s doing alright. She was pretty upset yesterday. It was a hard day for her as well as everyone else,” Regina explained as she motioned for Fae to get himself out his harness while she unclipped Blue from hers.

Henry was appalled, “What?!?!?!” The horse had hurt his Mom. “It’s a stupid horse! It needs to be put down!” He crossed his arms over his chest and glared ahead of him.

Regina and Cora both openly gaped at the boy. To say they were shook was an understatement. They both turned to look at one another still in shock before they shook it off. Cora took Fae’s hand and helped him from the car as Regina placed Blue on her hip.

Regina cleared her throat loudly as she ducked her head back into the open door, “I don’t know if you’re the way you are because you’re the Dark One’s grandson or your ties to Snow White and Leopold. I don’t think I ever want to know. But I left you with Emma hoping that some of this ‘goodness’ that you seemed convinced could only come from your ‘real’ family would rub off onto you. I’m sad to see that it hasn’t worked.”

She shut the door and took up Fae’s free hand as she walked her family into the barn. She wanted to introduce the kids to the newest resident and see for herself that the sweet girl was alright. And hopefully shake off the current situation with Henry.

Henry’s eyes watered as he watched his Mom walk away from him and disappear into the stable. “You’re the one who was the Evil Queen!” he yelled in the empty car. He kicked the seat in front of him and willed his tears not to fall.

***For inspiration for this part of the chapter you can listen to Lonely Day by System of a Down like I did.***

**CF**

Henry watched Jewel climb onto the bus that would take the kids from the home back there as he waited for his own ride to come and pick him up. Not for the first time he felt envy for the kids well up inside him. He really wished he was one of them. It seemed they were free in a way that he wasn’t.

After his Mom dropped him off to school his day had continued to stay crappy. He’d spent the entire day in an ill temper. His Mom’s words continued to play in his head on repeat and he was unable to concentrate on anything.

He’d felt anxious and overwhelmed with his current circumstances. He wanted to just curl up in a corner and cry. But he wasn’t a baby and he was way too old for that. Anyway it’s not like anyone would come for him even if he did have a meltdown.

Again the loneliness that plagued him most of his life threatened to suffocate him. Most times he
could throw himself into some activity that would help alleviate it. But days like this only made him yearn for more.

The only bright spot in his day had been when he’d been assigned to do a science project with Jewel. She had asked him for his phone. After he handed it to her she’d put her number into it so that they could discuss things later. She’d even used it to snap a picture of herself and thumbnail it to her contact info. Henry had dropped his head in his book and tried to avoid all eye contact with her so that she wouldn’t see how flushed his face had become.

He used to think of Emma as one of his best friends. But the bridge between the two of them had turned into an ocean. He guessed it was ridiculous to think of his Mom as his friend anyway.

The honking of a horn broke him from his daze. He hurried over to Mandy’s car eager to set eyes on Emma again. It was abundantly clear to him that she was all he had. Maybe even all he’d ever have again. And he needed her to be okay.

He led the way to her room once he and Mandy arrived at the hospital. He heaved a deep sigh of relief when he saw Emma sitting up in bed dozing. He wanted to fling himself at her but he refrained not wanting to hurt her. His savior looked so fragile hooked up to numerous machines that made loud noises. But she still managed to give him a tired smile when she opened her eyes after sensing commotion in the room anyway.

“Hi Ma,” he whispered as he walked over to the bed. He poked his fingers in the mattress and his eyes widened as he looked closely at her trying to see any signs of anything. For obvious reasons she looked tired and pale. Her eyes were drooping and he knew she was fighting sleep. But at least she didn’t appear to be in any pain. He was glad about that.

Emma held her hand out to him and he quickly grabbed it while smiling shyly at her. “Hey kid,” she wheezed. “How are you?”

He shrugged trying to be nonchalant. He really had no answer for her. Especially since he had none for himself.

Mandy wanted to stick around at the hospital for a little bit. Emma waved her away assuring her that Regina would be by soon and they’d be fine until she got there.

She tried to stay awake to ask Henry about his day and all. But the pain meds were having none of it. She kept dozing off only to realize later that time had passed.

Henry sat himself in a corner of the room and finished his homework while she slept. It was a little funny how’d she’d doze for a while then wake up as if nothing had happened and try to talk to him before falling asleep all over again.

He had finished his homework and was channel surfing when he got a text, “so when should I be over at your house?”

Henry’s ears and face burned as he gawked dumbfounded at the text. He had thought they’d meet up in the library or something. But she wanted to spend time with him? He became so nervous his hands clamped up and he had to wipe them on the sides of his jeans.

He was still staring at the text unsure how to answer it when his Mom walked in with her kids.

“Mama!” Blue screeched while leaning out of Regina’s arms to her Mom. Emma’s eyes instantly flew open. Henry noticed a brighter smile than the one she gave him crossed her face.
Regina winced at the scream while trying desperately to hold onto her daughter so that she didn’t jump onto Emma and hurt her. “Mummy told you that Mommy’s hurt. You can’t jump on her.”

Blue sat back in her Mum’s arms chastised as her head swung back and forth between the two women in confusion. She turned back toward Emma with a hurt expression, “Mama?”

Emma’s heart swelled. She grinned at her babygirl, “I’m so sorry baby but Mama’s not feeling well. But I would still love some kisses and loves,” she pouted.

Regina held Blue down for a kiss and light hug. Emma turned to the little man and gave him a high five, “Hey buddy! How’s my little dude?”

Those large gleaming eyes and the deep dimples were enough to get the point across. She grinned at the kid as Regina helped him sit at the foot of her bed. She already had a soft spot for him.

Regina’s hand reached out to cup Emma’s cheek almost of its own accord. The blonde leaned into it with something between a purr and a wheeze.

“How’re you?” Regina asked Emma softly. Her eyes were narrowed taking in everything around the blonde and her room. She’d already spoken to the nurse’s out front and they’d assured her that Emma was doing fine but she still wasn’t sure if she was content with that answer. She needed to hear and see some recovery for herself.

She was still pale but seemed to have a little more color than before. She was still wheezing and breathing heavily but she was down a lung so she figured that was to be expected. Still, she knew she wouldn’t be fully satisfied until the blonde was back on her own two feet.

Henry sat watching the two women interact with a frown on his face. They looked like a couple. And with his Mom’s two kids that would make them a family. Not for the first time that feeling of being a stranger in his own family gripped him. He had been lost so deep in his thoughts that when his phone dinged in his hand again he almost dropped it from surprise.

“Someone’s Mr. Popular,” Emma wheezed.

Henry shrugged it off and busied himself getting his books back into his backpack so they couldn’t see his cheeks blushed. “It’s just for school. I have to do a science project with someone.” He locked eyes with Regina, “she wants to know when she can come over?” He wasn’t sure how she would feel about such a thing so he left it as an open question for them both.

Regina was surprised. Normally Henry made a big show out of telling her that no one wanted to be around the Evil Queen. Once he’d moved to the Charmings he’d taken great joy to tell her that she was the reason he had no friends. But now that he was one of the good guys everyone wanted to be his friend.

She hoisted Blue higher on her hip as she shrugged not wanting to make a big deal out of the question. “We were having a late brunch tomorrow anyway. Whoever ‘she’ is can come over then. That’ll leave the two of you the rest of the day to do whatever,” she flicked her wrist through the air in an offhanded manner.

Henry bent over his phone as the two women went back to chatting. He texted Jewel back. Brunch at 10:30? That way we can spend the day working.

*Hafta walk Khali over for her playdate with the Head Miss’s son. I’ll walk over to ur house after that.*
Even though he felt uneasy, he replied back with: *Sounds good*

For some reason he was starting to break out in nearly a cold sweat. While Regina and Emma visited with one another he continued to sit pondering the implications over in his head.

He’d been told to never tell anyone that Regina was his Mom. Now it seemed like the cat was almost out of the bag. How was he going to explain any of this to anyone? Even Karen looked at him like he was a little nuts when he tried to explain the situation to her.

He was glad everything was going to be out in the open. He didn’t like lying anyway. But he still worried about how the situation would look to an outsider.

Again Emma tried and failed to stay awake to visit with her family. But her head was flopping around so. If the worries over her and her injuries weren’t real it would’ve been comical.

After a few minutes, Regina announced that they needed to pack things up and get home. Henry jumped up and slung his backpack over his arm while she helped Fae and Blue kiss and hug Emma goodbye without hurting her. She made sure there was nothing she needed for the night before saying her goodnights. Though she knew she had to she still didn’t like leaving the blonde overnight. She’d feel better when they were finally able to take her home.

As they left, Henry gave his Ma a kiss and a hug. She pulled him closer to her and whispered in his ear, “You make sure and be good. Don’t cause any problems with your Mom Henry.”

Henry scowled and pulled away. He hadn’t even done anything and he was being accused of all kinds of things from everyone today. He huffed and followed the family out to the car.

As they drove home, Henry received another text that almost sent him into a cardiac.

*I guess that’s a date. Cheers.*

Henry was still plagued with worries and doubt on what to do and say when Jewel came over and found out he was the head Miss’s son also. It followed him all through dinner, his shower, and up in the top of the bunk as Fae snored lightly down below.

By the time the darkness came for him, he still had no answer. He just hoped that whatever he did manage to come up with wouldn’t make her hate him. He had almost no one left as it was. He didn’t want to end up all alone. Or else he’d be the one needing to live in his Mom’s school.

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