I can't make you Love me, if you don't.

by HideawayB3

Summary

A/U. NO magic. Based off of the original piece 'I can't make you love me' by Bonnie Raitt, though I've gotten more urge to write it from Adele's cover of the song. Emma and Regina both grow up in different states, where they meet by chance on summer holidays at the time both girls are four. They grow into friendship and something akin to a relationship. At least that's what Regina's hoping it is, but Emma's never clear with her on anything. They go through ups and downs, moving to yet another state, new schools, new friends, new interests and then off to college where it really hits a new level of angst.

It's the coming of age story that doesn't dabble too deeply into usual teenage recklessness, but the questions is.. Will they fall in love or not?

There's angst, there's tears and there's let downs as well as pick ups, but there's also pictorial boards to help you get a better view of it.

Do keep in mind that there are multiple things about the characters that I have changed, though not drastically, it just ranges from hair colour to birthdays in essence.
Open the Book and tell me what you see....
I see a story bred from the fingertips of one person's imagination. Sadistic, emotion inducing, confusing as it may be, it's beautifully portrayed in the hearts of many. With open eyes and ears shut tight, my visual focus comes from the words and the magnitude in which they speak to me, the magnitude in which the sounds of them reverberated within my head and create the imagery of another's mind.

See the end of the work for more notes.


Chapter 1

When life is created, it is also a given that any and all things, care and concern wise must be taken very seriously. It’s also a lesson in itself on how to take care of another, whether they be an infant, a child, a teenager, adult or senior citizen. The whole idea behind life is to exist, be taken care of, take care of and survive.

Life was given four times over the course of four years. Three little girls existed just as one little boy existed. Auburn red, brunette and blonde is how they all came. From oldest to youngest, 1990, 1992 and then again in ‘93. The first little girl came unexpectedly to the newly married and still very young adults- Cora and Henry Mills. June 12th, 1990 was the day that Zelena Cordelia Mills came into the world wailing and shrieking at just about any and everybody who held her, inclusive of her parents. Her massively wide blue eyes that held so much hues of ocean in them, slicked down copper-auburn hair that just magnified them even more and her tiny palms that flailed only served to make her parents cry with joy at her features. She was a healthy weight for such a tiny looking screamer and when her grandparents held her shortly after she’d come out it was blatantly obvious that Zelena’s features came from Cora, but her hair came from the man’s great grandmother... and though the pair had been on the receiving end of the doctor’s terrible attempt at a joke relating her hair colour to that of Hades… even though his was blue, they managed to ignore it and continuously coo at their darling baby girl. He then further dug himself a grave by stating that she’ll be a hard woman to please and it took just about all of Henry’s control not to throttle the man. Still, his daughter was now here and they were nowhere near prepared in the givings of life on ways to deal with her considering both of them grew up as only children. They’d been assigned a nurse who would help them through the first month and then they were on their own after that and it was funny considering Henry was quite nearly done with his degree in Pediatrician and yet still, he panicked over the care of his own child. His father had told him once before, ‘It doesn’t matter what profession you have to help another, even if children are included, when your own family and children are concerned, you lose all of that knowledge in less that half a second.. Your mother was the same with me when I was sick…’ Oh how true were his father’s words right now as he and Cora battled to be off the two hour shift of feeding and burping and wailing and poop. They’d managed to figure out that Zelena could sleep longer if they fed her at a certain time and that she didn’t necessarily eat much, she was just constantly hungry because she screamed so much. She pooped on cue which was no surprise, but other than that, she was a predominantly happy baby, so by the time the nurse left, they’d gotten the hang of it and had even managed to time her new behaviours in record time in order to change with her moods.

As much as the man and woman claimed to never do it again.. they did the do again and found themselves on the way to becoming parents to another infant.. again. It was in essence, very very unplanned, not that Zelena was planned, but this second one was not planned in the slightest even though they did the do with no condoms. He’d shook his head and scolded himself because ‘I just had to say I wanted to feel without the damn thing, huh!’ and that just made Cora about buckle over with laughter. He’d soon found himself laughing as well because why wouldn’t you when commons
sense served its purpose and neither adhered to it. Zelena was barely past a year and seven months
when they found out Cora would be bearing another Mills seed, but she would have been lying if
she said she wasn’t happy about this one too because in all honesty, she’d hoped for another girl to
come out of it and to be close in age...which was probably why she agreed to their ‘no condom’ rule
within that moment. Between his final few classes, his already growing baby, another on the way
and Cora constantly and consistently working for the realtors, Henry found himself overwhelmed but
happy at what his life was shaping up to be and by the time he and his wife were once again in the
birthing room with Cora crying more than she was screaming, he was ready to meet the newest
member of his family. Of course they had another girl, and of course he cooed at her just as much as
he did Zelena, but this little baby, oh goodness did she ever look like both their mothers combined.
She came out with a wild tuft of dark brown hair on her head that was quite obviously from his
hispanic side, but then it wasn’t completely ringlets as the ends were straight, identifying Cora’s
Italian heritage. Her skin was dipped darker than Zelena’s that was paler in comparison and her eyes
were dipped in a night sky kind of dark chocolate.

By now Zelena was two and some and completely confused as to what was happening. She knew
she was getting a sibling, she just didn’t know how and much like her father did, she would lay on
her mother’s stomach and rub it in hopes of having her little sibling kick like her mother told her they
would. Much like their parents were available for Zelena’s birth, they were there, happily and
anxiously waiting on the news on this baby’s gender. When Henry tearily announced another little
princess and told the women that she looked more like them than either him or Cora, there were tears
and pushing to just view this little bundle of joy..who, mind you was still screaming.

This one, was definitely not a quiet baby and they realised she wasn’t because she was colicky..very
colicky. She wasn’t early, and she wasn’t late, she was completely on time, she was just colicky and
by now Henry had more than enough knowledge to deal with this baby better than he did with
Zelena. They let their parents name her and the name they settled on was Regina Ariana Mills.. And
they had settled on that rather quickly, almost as if it were planned. Henry laughed it off because
knowing their parents, it probably was...so, they took the little infant home after two days and Zelena
looked at her with confusion before tilting her head and putting a hand over her baby sister’s mouth.
Instantly the infant had stopped and her parents were confused, rightly so, that was until they realized
the baby was basically just sucking on her sister’s finger. This also proved to make them realize their
baby was ever rarely hungry.

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Just shy of over a month later came another birth.. and boy was this one complicated as hell. Green
eyed and wispy ash blonde hair set this baby apart from her mother’s raven hair and her father’s
sandy blonde one. This baby wasn’t late, but she wasn’t early, she just wouldn’t fucking come out of
the womb and had somehow managed to turn over and had to come out feet first instead of the initial
grip to head and slip out the biscuit first format. All through Mary Margaret Nolan’s pregnancy,
Emma Amelia Swan had been a difficult baby. Everything from sleeping arrangements to the ever
changing battle she endured where food was concerned to morning sickness still plaguing her by the
seventh month, Mary Margaret had simply just threw her hands up and ‘thrown in the towel’ so to
speak. It didn’t help that David had to work a lot and work a lot of those weird nightly shifts as well
which induced her pregnant worry even more. It also didn’t help that she was a terribly emotional
female on a regular day but this damn pregnancy just made her even worse.She was screaming more
often than not, whether she was happy or sad or simply aroused, she was yelling...thank god they
lived further out from the usual suburban area. And then the day.. Or night, she couldn’t remember-
came and then Emma popped out, mute as ever and Mary Margaret had to keep from screaming that all that time, she was an emotional wreck and her baby comes out quiet as hell. She soon learned that where her daughter lacked noise, she made up for in being hungry, every hour on the hour and they were concerned because. She pooped much less than she ate. Emma was so quiet, they forgot she was there sometimes and had scolded themselves for forgetting that their whole child existed.

The birth of these three little girls has gone so quickly that their parents weren’t aware of how fast and year or two had and was passing. Regina came out, she was colicky, Emma came out and she was quiet. Regina came out and she was barely eating, Emma came out greedier than her father. Anyone ever rarely holds Regina in her infant stage because either they frightened the poor baby or she simply just didn’t like them. Emma. well Emma would go to whoever wanted to hold her because everything around her was always shiny and there was always something she could pull on when it came to anyone who held her. Emma is christened a handful of months later and the priest damn near baptises Regina when she’s a handful of months old. Of course the little brunette hollers loud enough that her shriek rattles through the chapel, but Emma merely giggles as their priest sprinkles water on her forehead. One family is Catholic, one family is Anglican, but both babies are girls and unaware of religion. And then the year is just barely over when Auggie pops out on November 8th all blonde hair and green eyed like his sister and is he screaming. Yes. Is he a greedy baby? somewhat- but did he make his mother a mess of emotions, not even close. Auggie is the c-section baby because he wouldn’t dilate, which didn’t surprise his parents considering his sister flipped herself around and decided to bust through with her tiny feet. When he comes out, everything settles because her mother passes out and her father puts this tiny human in a one year old’s lap. Didn’t end well because Emma looked at Auggie and started crying. She didn’t know why and neither did her father, but she was crying and she didn’t stop until her dad moved him. August James Nolan, soon to be the loving bane of her existence...and then they go home after a good handful of days in the hospital. Auggie isn’t any easier to deal with because he actually vocalizes his issues and when he’s teething the same way much like Emma had, it was his mother’s poor left breast that took the brunt on his kneading. Still, the parents were happy, their children were healthy and their babies were advancing.

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Zelena and Regina’s parents devote time and everything they have to their little girls and that comes with both girls sleeping in the same room to make it easier for them if one were to get up, they could just check on the other as well. It also proved dumb considering if one woke crying, the other would as well. They went through that little phase of no, where Zelena was concerned because by the time she was two and her sister was out, she’d merely poked the infant in the skull which in turn made Regina wail like someone was murdering her, but her skull was still squishy so granted, her two year old sister prodding her in her soft noggin didn’t help her development. Her father had held her sister before her at one point because she’d distanced herself from the crying infant after a while and he’d asked,

“Zelena, don’t you want to see and hold your little sister?” but she’d just shook her head and quite simply said,

“No.”

Her parents don’t understand why she does it and they don’t try to find out why she does it because it’s..confusing to say the least and Auggie isn’t any better where Emma is concerned because he was..
literally beginning his baning of existence by cracking his sister in the head with his rattle and that did not end well. Somehow, that tiny human managed to hit her so hard that she bruised and whilst she cried and her mother cooed over her and her father took their son away along with that offending beast of plastic, Auggie giggled like it was planned even though he wasn’t even aware that he’d just nearly dented his sister’s skull. The words, “He didn’t mean it, baby,” come from one of her parents but it hurts so bad and thumps so hard that she just cries more.

Still, both of the girls are quickly to advance one way or the other, Emma takes walking where Regina takes talking, but both excel in potty training. Though they excel, Regina proves difficult because she’s the type of baby who refuses to sleep in any bed or crib unless Zelena is present. Their parents only realize this after one night when they find that Zelena’s managed to toddle out of her bed, take her pacifier out of her mother and made her way over to Regina’s crib. She somehow shooshes her little sister until she calms down and then sticks her pacifier through the crib for the baby to take. By this time, Regina’s a good ten months and some and Zelena’s barely taller than a table, but she’s got the baby laughing and giggling and drooling and just all the forms of cute. Once her parents come to the room, she points to her little sister and says ‘sleepy.’ It either meant Regina was sleepy, or she was sleepy or both and then her husband is over and picking up their little girl—about to place her into her bed with the protective bars. Cora walks over and takes Zelena from him and catches how Regina is looking, tilting her head at them, this time with the pacifier that belonged to her sister, in her mouth. Cora tells Henry to, “Make them both a bottle, I have a feeling I know just why she was crying this time,”

“Are you sure?”

“I believe so, but we’ll see after we feed them both.” And so the man does as he’s told and when they feed both their girls and rock them back to sleep, he places Regina in the crib and Cora places Zelena in directly next to her. Both the girls wake with the sudden loss of parental contact but soon find comfort in one another as Zelena rolls over and hugs her little sister and drifts to sleep. Regina follows soon after, the pacifier long forgotten.

“Well, I’ll be damned,” the man whispered a laugh and Cora smirked. “That’s all they needed all this time?” he questions and she nods.

“Seems so,” she answers through a light yawn and he rubs her lower back.

“Come on love, let’s go to bed,” he tells her and she happily agrees.

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Emma is much the same in the sense that she can’t sleep without a specific someone, but that someone is her father and his bare naked and hairless chest. Somehow that developed when she was an infant and David was up in the wee hours of the morning with her after his late night shifts. He would feed her, tell her about his day and he’d learned that for babies, sleeping on bare skin puts them at ease much quicker, so that became his practice and that practice proved good because Emma sleep soundly once she was against her father’s chest. Granted, the times she wasn’t also proved to
be a pain in the ass, but she was a baby, what could you do? Mary Margaret was more concerned about him rolling over and suffocating their child but once Emma was born, he slept more controlled and more aware, almost as if he felt her against his chest each evening. Auggie is a different case, he can’t sleep in his parent’s bed, like he was a loner for an infant already, but it was probably for the best because if he cried, Emma cried and if Emma cried then they were more than likely to cry. So, August is put in his crib that he clearly enjoys.

By first birthdays two things happen, Regina’s family sings to her, but instead of blowing out the candle like she’s supposed to, she puts her little finger over that flame and well…. You get the rest. Cold water, kisses and bandages later, she was okay, but scowling at her cake now. Something so pretty was so dangerous, or as it calculated in her little mind, BAD! Emma’s first birthday comes with her shoving her hand in the cake before they even finish the damn song and of course pictures of that was taken because both she and Auggie had managed to do that. Both the girls are enrolled in preschool and Emma is in quicker than Regina because she’s fussy, still against people holding her and still frightened of large people who make her wet herself on a given day. Regina’s pulled from preschool because it’s blatantly clear that she dislikes all of the caregivers at that particular school, and then she’s being kept at home by her mother who can thankfully deal with real estate from home as well. Emma’s preschool gets shut down for some reason and she’s then moved to another as Regina’s parents make a decision to just homeschool the little dumpling. This goes on for a year and by second birthdays, Regina is baptised yet again and yes, she still wails like it’s murder and Emma and Auggie are taken to Rapids water park in Florida.

The parents realize that they’ve bit off more than they can chew on homeschooling because Zelena is sat before her little sister and is scribbling all over her face with paint and the little girl is just sitting there, giggling and rubbing it all over her skin and clothes. Their parents don’t scold Zelena when they realize how much fun their children are having and instead they take photos. Emma’s parents on the other hand, do not take photos but her father does laugh hysterically and so does her mother.

Mary Margaret had somewhere to be and David just happened to be off the exact same day, so they decided she would run her errand and he would watch their kids. He was in the nursery and on the floor playing with Emma and Auggie when he randomly drifted off. Bad Idea, considering Mary Margaret forgot the one thing she needed to get the errand done, so she turned around and headed back home only to find that her family weren’t answering when she called for them. She heads upstairs and sees that her two year old was squeezing out something as well as shaking it and the closer she got the quicker she realized what it is. Every ounce of powder was being dumped onto Auggie’s lower half and Emma seemed adamant about using the whole thing as she stuck her little tongue out, Picasso like form taking over.

“Emma!” she shrieks and that brings pause to the child, and action to her husband waking. Mary Margaret rushes over and takes the bottle away as well as Auggie’s powder clad behind. She lays him on top of the changing table and turns to Emma who has her face scrunched up. Her father begins to grin when she says,

“Stinky,” and points to Auggie and Mary Margaret can’t even be mad. She was trying to change him. She sighs and quickly deals with Auggie all before asking her daughter where she put the diaper. Emma just points and her mother follows the gaze to the top of the child’s father’s head. Mary Margaret loses it then and David is confused.

“What’s so funny?”

“You!!!!” she giggles. He scrunches up his face and just when he reaches up to scratch his head his
hand touches something wet and squishy. David freezes and nearly stops breathing as he tries to just inhale and exhale gently over what could possibly be atop his head. His faith in humanity is dashed when he does confirm that it’s Auggie’s dirty diaper on his head and that’s when his wife loses it laughing and soon directly Emma is giggling as well. He only scowls and goes to wash his hair out. But, when he comes back he hoists her up and kisses her face and says,

“Good work, monkey.”

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When the following year comes and Zelena’s still four and Regina’s still two, their parents hit a snag and a massive one at that. They begin fighting and the fighting starts in hushed whispers of anger that Zelena can still pick up on until it evolves into full out yelling and screaming back and forth. They fight about everything and nothing which only made their four year old cover her ears and cry and scream when it happened. She would lock the doors and hope they would stop because she loved them both and they weren’t supposed to fight. They never were supposed to fight, but by four, she noticed they were evolving from just yelling to Cora throwing dishes and Henry putting his fists through walls. Granted, they never hit one another which was why their dinnerware and housing took bigger hits than anything else. Living in the small suburban area in Maine meant that neighbours were nosey, the police would be called, their parents would find out in a handful of minutes and then everything after that was downhill from there. On few accounts their parents had come to get the girls just to take them away and Regina was never aware of what was happening because Zelena would distract her, but this time.. this time it was so bad that she couldn’t even if she wanted to.

This particular night the fighting had gone on for hours and by hours, it was literal hours. The argument started in the car when they were coming home from dinner and Zelena was too busy playing with her sister to know that they had started, but by the time they were home, Cora was yelling after Henry who was settling the girls into their crib and bed. Regina had pulled her pacifier out and thrown it in the process and began to giggle which managed to upset her father slightly, but he picked it up washed it off and gave it back to her. He kissed both their heads the same way Cora did and they began to argue as far away as possible because Zelena was watching them. Things are broken beyond measure and walls are repeatedly hit over and over and over again. All she can hear is the roar of her father and shriek of her mother and it gets to the four year old who is crying so much that all she can think to do is get to her little sister. She gets the bar down on Regina’s crib and the little girl toddles out of it. Zelena holds onto her tightly and hides them under her bed. She pulls a cool and fluffy blanket over their heads and holds her breath until she hears the room door open and her father is calling for them.

“Zelena… Regina?” he calls but no answer and it takes him all of three minutes to see the blanket poking out from under the bed. He kneels down and lightly lifts it before he talks to her.

“Zelena baby, what are you doing under here, sweetie?” he questions but she shakes her head and he thinks he knows why. Even he would be scared just hearing his parents argue. She’s sniffling and whimpering now and he can see blatant fear in one of his child’s eyes. “Come here sweetie, daddy’s not gonna hurt you,” he tells her and she responds,

“D-daddy?” almost as if she isn’t sure and he nods.

“It’s daddy, baby girl, come out of there,” he tells her but she shuts her eyes and begins to wail.
“D-dadd-yyyyyyy!” and he wastes no time in pulling her from under the bed and pulling her in for a hug.

“Daddy’s got you, little red,” he tells her and she sniffs against his shoulder. Two year old Regina clambers from under the bed and toddles over to her sister before she puts a hand to her mouth and mumbles,

“no cwy,” but Zelena can’t help it because..because.

“D-daddyyyyyyyy!”

Cora emerges into the room a good bit later after she’s cooled down and sees Henry dressing the girls. She doesn’t even stop him when he tells her,

“I’m taking them out of here for a ride, they’re scared and this isn’t what I wanted for my children. I’ll call you when they’re asleep.” Her jaw is set but she agrees with the man there on the safety of their girls.

Emma’s parents hit a snag later in the year and it comes in the form of assumed infidelity on David’s behalf. David begins to spend nights out and away from his family and claims it to all be him hanging out with his friends, which is predominantly true. However, it isn’t until he comes home one night, smelling of perfume that clearly wasn’t his wife’s and a lipstick stain on his collar that she questions his whereabouts. He’s completely sober and he tells her the truth. He was out with friends and makeup just happened to get on him, so she lets it go the first time, but when it happens a second and a third time and David comes home considerably drunk one evening after a friend took the liberty to be designated driver, the same lipstick stain and the same perfume scent is on him and his shirt shithits the fan.

They don’t even argue, instead when he gets home he sees threes bags are packed and he’s wondering what’s happening and it isn’t until she throws his shirt at him and tells him until he gets his shit together and puts his family first he’s not going to see them anytime soon, that something goes off into David’s mind.

“I’m going to my parents, you disappointed me,” she tells him and he has a constipated and confused look on his face… but she rambles on and on.. “I thought you’d be different David. We have a family for Christ’s sake!” she belts and boy is he ever still confused.

“What?” he asks and she scoffs at him. “What did I do now.. Is it because I’m out with my friends? I’m an adult I can do that, you know!”

“Oh! I know, I just don’t know how you’re so stupidly bold in keeping evidence on you after doing what you did!” she spits and he’s still lost.

“Seriously? Me smelling like alcohol is an issue to you! Fine! I’ll go shower,” he tells her but she shakes her head.

“God are you an idiot!” she belts and their kids are thankfully distracted by television.”I’m not explaining it to you considering you should know,” she tells him and he simmers because she’s stubborn as shit and he doesn’t know what the heck she’s on about. He sighs and relents.

“Fine, just.. Let me kiss my kids goodnight, but this isn’t over,”

“Damn right it isn’t.” she tells him and he rolls his eyes.
“Hey Emma, Auggie, your mommy told me you guys are gonna stay with your grandparents for a little bit, don’t you think that’s fun?” he questions and Emma looks so lost she just nods and Auggie’s... Auggie. He kisses them and lifts them up before he talks to them all the way to the car. He tells them how much he loves them and that he’ll come see them tomorrow. Unsure still, Emma nods at her father. “That’s my girl. Auggie my man, keep these ladies safe,” he tells his son before ruffling his hair. Auggie grins and so does Emma before their mother comes over and closes the door to the car. “Call me when you reach,” he says and she scowls.

“How should I?”

“Because you’re my wife and you have my kids and I love you all,” he tells her honestly and she rolls her eyes.

“Fine,” she tells him and he sighs in relief. He leans in to kiss her but she leans away and he sighs once more before he backs away and taps the glass. He waves to his kids who wave back and then he goes upstairs and into the house. He goes out on the drive to her parents’ home literally the next morning because he just can’t sleep without his wife and children at home. When he gets there, her parents let him in and tell him she’s been crying the entire night which he can believe and of course she doesn’t want to see him, they argue, she accuses him of cheating, he’s confused so she tells him about the shirt and he begins to laugh which aggravates her and then he explains. He explains the one thing he’d hoped to have more time with.

“A sister?” she questions albeit a bit dumbly and he nods.

“Yeah.. seems my dad had her a few years after me and James.. That’s kind of why they’re getting a divorce now,” he explains as he scratches the back of his head.

“They’re what?!” she questions loudly and he nods.

“Yeah.. mom filed for divorce. She said it hurt more to know that he just didn’t tell her considering our sister grew up in the system... but she’s good now,” he makes sure to clarify.

“I’m sorry,” she’d told him but she shrugs it off.

“It’s okay.. Just know I wasn’t cheating, she’s just that short that when I hug her that’s where it falls every time.”

“Okay.. I’m sorry,” she repeats and David shakes his head.

“Stop that,” he tells her and then he’s holding her and running his fingers through her hair. “We’re fine. You’re fine. My parents however, they are not fine...but that comes with the territory.”

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By the time Emma turns three, they pull her from preschool because the little girl somehow managed to acquire chickenpox. Even though she’s told not to scratch, she scratches the hell out of them and hse scars. Auggie’s a lucky little boy because he doesn’t get it and neither do his parents who have both already had it. For Christmas, her grandparents buy her a little yellow child-sized bug and she’s glued to that thing like a bee to honey. She plays taxi and driving school with Auggie who just goes along with it because it was fun to ride a little bug around on that 9.1 acre farmland her folks had in Tennessee.
By three, Regina and Cora get into an accident on the way to the hospital- oh the irony! Henry was to work and Regina had somehow developed a small fever and Cora being Cora didn’t think it made sense to keep her home when her daughter’s father was a pediatrician. Still, the accident they get into puts a halt to that for a bit as they are forced to deal with every single bit of it for at least an hour and Henry couldn’t come out right then and there and there was no one to get Zelena and God damn it why was her boss calling?! The police took forever to come to one conclusion that they let the insurance department deal with it and Cora nearly rips one of them to shreds because her daughter has a fever and her five year old is in school probably wondering where she was and if no one loved her and her husband wouldn’t pick up his god damn phone! Somehow, the miniature accident makes Henry decide to teach his daughters how to ride their bikes that he hadn’t even bought them yet. Long story short, they fall a lot, but Zelena learns quicker than Regina which is no surprise considering she’s three at that point in time. Zelena also shows interest in other things like ice skating, but she soon finds she’s really good at soccer and prefers to play that instead, which begins Cora’ run as a soccer mom.

First Family Vacation

By age four, both families plan a vacation in Sunny WeHo.. or West Hollywood as most people know it. It comes as no surprise to families around them that Emma’s parents are in ownership of a summer beach house located just an hour shy of the Santa Monica Pier. It was in essence a gift from MM’s parents to the wedded couple, but they’d later bought the beach house just because it made more sense. It was rented out year round, but at this point in time, they wanted to use it for themselves and their children. David’s twin brother James also lives in WeHo and that’s because James is the more flamboyant of the two. Simply put, James is the cute gay twin with an ass out of this world and David’s the pretty boy, dad. The decision was made for them to fly because Lord knows neither actually wanted to drive there with two very young children with short attention spans and an inability to hold in their pee. Three hours and forty minutes was sounding a hell of a lot better than nearly thirty six hours. Still, Auggie is a congested little bundle of muff and shaggy blonde hair and it takes a humidifier that thankfully is small enough to fit in his mother’s pocket, for the little boy not to cry the entire plane ride. He’s miserable but it’s not so bad after a while when he gets food and watches whatever tv channel the plane offers. It settles on animals. Lions and Cheetahs.. It was National Geographic, that much could be concluded. He conks out less than an hours after that and he doesn’t wake for a good while later. Emma manages to stay awake the entire plane ride and her father colours with her in a ninja turtle and Franklin colouring book. She’s taken a weird liking to turtles in the past month and the confusion is not lost on that one. It isn’t until the plane lands and they get settled in that Emma succumbs to sleep very easily. She doesn’t even have time to be in awe of the house because she’s drooling on her father’s shoulder and dreaming of puppies.

The Mills family makes the decision to go to West Hollywood after they celebrate Zelena’s birthday in June. The little girl is still in school at this time, but they don’t skimp on the massive party they have for her and her class, followed by a more intimate one with her family later that night. It consists of their grandparents, all four still alive and kicking, her father’s sister Eleanor and their cousin Melanie who’s pretty much the same age as Regina.. If you blinked of course… Then there’s his brother’s kids Chloe and Lincoln, all younger than Regina but like it’s said, blink and they all look the same age. And because Cora is a real estate agent, it comes as no surprise that her boss would want her to attend multiple seminars and snuff out the competition when she should be on her well deserved vacation. She agrees to it only because it’ll get the bastard off her back, but she plans around her vacation with her daughter’s because her initial point to be in WeHo, isn’t for fucking real
estate agents with their heads up their asses and seminars where even she would claw her eyes out. They decide to drive the near fifty hour ride to WeHo and find that their daughters are more quiet than they expected. There’s the occasional,

“I gotta potty,” but other than that, they eat their snacks cleanly, play games with each other, sleep more often than not and call out grazing animals in the roads and what they see along some very unnerving highways. When they reach, they check in to the hotel and Cora books a hotel because she’s not stupid and neither is her husband. Why rent a house for nearly a million in the space of three months when they still had their own home back in Maine to worry about? Yes- they made a decent amount of money yearly-hell, monthly, but still, they had daughters who they needed to teach values to and bills they didn’t want to be under anytime soon.

The house they stay in is massive. There’s a personal pool and tennis court, five rooms and four baths. Neither husband or wife had really looked at the house much when they got the keys for it because they were more concerned about the honeymoon than the gifts they received. David is only slightly surprised that James hasn’t come over yet until he remembers he didn’t even tell his brother he was there. He thumps himself on the forehead because of course he’d forget that part and he rolls his eyes as he dials his brother’s number. When James comes over, so does Nelson, his son from a previous relationship. Granted, James may party, but he puts his son first and by putting Nelson first, the little boy is enrolled in the best school, given the best his father can afford via food and community and he’s not short on teaching the little boy manners as well as appreciation and hard work.

Over the course of two to nearly three days, David takes Emma and Auggie to hang out with their uncle and cousin. He takes them around the congested streets of WeHo where all the action happens and of course Nelson smiles as his cousins ooh and ahh at everything they see that’s a far cry from their simple farm life. They go into GAP and James buys them new outfits to go with their new summer WeHo style. He then takes them to a movie and James laughs as his brother nearly chokes on the prices for just the tickets because,

“Who in the hell pays twenty dollars for some crap seats?” and of course James just laughs at him.

When Henry decides to take his daughters out because Cora’s exhausted from driving the majority of the way, they get lost to say the least and in them getting lost, they.. well, their father bumps into James who rightfully hits on the handsome man but the kids aren’t even paying attention. Emma and Auggie are with their uncle on this day as well because their parents wanted to have lunch together and James is off so..he takes his niece and nephew out. Henry takes it in stride and actually blushes slightly at the compliment he receives, but his girls are too busy doodling to care why they’re in a bakery with everything that smelt sooooo good. The adults get lost in conversation which is enough time for the three blonde children to get themselves into a shit ton of mess and then they’re being put out of the bakery because Auggie turned something over and Emma and Nelson kept jumping in it. He’d scold his son if he didn’t realize that Nelson was much more comfortable around his cousins than any other child he’d seen the boy interact with. Victor Bene’s is now no longer a go in but a walk straight pass kind of place at this point. James and Henry talk for a little more until he is giving the man directions to get where he had initially intended to go.

“You can really tell the tourists from the locals,” he had joked and Henry smirked.

“I suppose you can, though, I’m used to small towns, not massive cities,” Henry explained and James nodded.
“I get that. Just be safe and always keep a map. Or a GPS. It works magic,” he tells the man who thanks him profusely for his help and when the man leaves with his daughters, James turns to the children and shakes his head at them. They’re still a bit damp from whatever they jumped in and he begins to laugh. “Come on kids, let’s get you guys cleaned up.”

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When the families finally clash, it comes almost a week later at the Santa Monica Pier. Zelena and Regina along with their parents had found themselves at the Pier two and a half hours after leaving the hotel and it wasn’t for lack of trying or getting lost, it’s simply because SM Pier is the closest beach in WeHo. The Nolan’s get there in the initial hour because their home is closer to it than the hotel. At least thirty feet from one another, the girls were playing with Zelena’s soccer ball and Zelena was teaching her four year old sister how to dribble the ball correctly. She’d passed it to Regina who managed to get in time from going into the water. When Regina kicked it back with her little foot, Zelena caught it with ease and soon she was showing her little sister how far she could kick which just happened to be right over where Emma and August were building castles. The ball landed in their mote and Emma picked it up before she began to play with it.

“Come on Auggie, we got a ball!” she cheers and the three year old gets up and follows his sister. The ball is about as big as his torso and when she throws it to him and he fumbles to catch it, he falls on top of it and giggles when he rolls over and the ball is still on his tummy. “Auggggiieee!” his sister laughs and August giggles more.

“Play, ma!” he manages to say and he’s wiggling on the sand and is flailing with the ball. Emma runs over to her little brother and they get distracted with the ball, meanwhile, four year old Regina is huffing and pointing.

“Lena, the ball!” and her sister feels she needs to go and get it because it’s their ball. She walks over to where Emma is with Auggie and the little boy is watching her but now his attention is also back to his sandcastles.

“Hey, you took our ball,” Zelena tells Emma who shrugs.

“So, I’m playing wif it now,” the little blonde informs her.

“You have to give it back,” the older girl tells her and Emma shakes her head.

“No I don’t,”

“You do, because my name’s on it,”

“So,” Emma responds and that’s it for Zelena. She quickly swipes the ball from Emma’s feet which in turn causes the child to stumble and fall over and Zelena dribbles to ball back over to her little sister. “I’m telling!” Emma shouts and Zelena shrugs at her.

“Good, you shouldn’t have stolen our ball,” she says very maturely and Emma huffs and stomps her way over to her mother. She pouts as she complains to her parents about a girl being mean to her and her father takes his sunglasses off long enough to tell her to ignore them, but when the blonde girl tells them that the girl had tripped her down and taken the soccer ball, that’s when her mother sees a bit of red. She drops the book she’s reading and turns her attention to her daughter. Emma shows the minute scratch she has from falling in the sand and her mother questions the whereabouts of the
girl. Emma guides her parents past August who’s so out of it that he’d more focused on his castles than anything else, but his father hoists him up and puts him on his shoulder and the little boy laughs.

“Up, daddy! Up!”

Zelena and Regina are well within the sights of their parents who are having a random chat until they see a woman approach them with a scowling little blonde girl. Then they see a man and a little boy and Cora’s confused why they’re talking to their children. The little girls were playing with the soccer ball until the adults and Emma approached them and then they stopped. Cora doesn’t even think twice about it and both she and her husband are up and out of their positions and over to their children. She catches the ass end of it.

“-what you did wasn’t really nice,” Mary Margaret says and Cora’s eyebrows raise.

“And what exactly is it that you’re accusing my children of?” she questions the woman who pauses and looks up at her.

“Mama,” Regina calls before she walks over to her mother and Cora buries her face in her stomach.

“It’s okay, sweetheart,” her father says as he rubs the top of her head and she nods.

“We were merely telling the girls that it wasn’t very nice of them to be mean to our children,” MM informs and Cora’s eyebrow is sharp now.

“Mean, how?” she queries.

“She’d tripped our daughter over-,”

“BUT SHE STOLE OUR SOCCER BALL!” Zelena belts and her mother holds up a hand.

“Zelena, sweetheart, quiet for a moment please,” Cora says and the girl huffs but nods. She walks towards her father who hoists her up and then she rests her head on his shoulder. Mary Margaret seems shocked by this new bit of information. She turns to her daughter.

“Emma, did you take their ball? You failed to mention that part, young lady?” her mother asks knowingly and the little girl doesn’t answer.

“Emma,” her father scolds and that snaps her from her defiance as she huffs and answers.

“Yes, but only cus they kicked it all the way over where me and Auggie were making castles!” she says petulantly and her mother sighs.

“Sweetheart, that doesn’t mean that it’s now your ball and now, you need to apologise to the girls for taking it in the first place. Stealing isn’t nice and I’m sure she didn’t mean to do it, right?” she questions as she looks at Zelena who shook her head.

“Nope. I play soccer and my coach says I’m really good and that I can be in the league,” the girl says proudly and eyebrows rise.

“Wow, that is pretty good little one,” David says.

“Uhuh,” Zelena says before her father clears his throat,

“Zeezee,” he says and she blushes.

“I’m sorry. Yes sir,” she corrects and her parents smirk. Henry then lets his daughter down and she
walks over to Emma.

“Sorry I made you fall over,” she apologised to the little girl and Emma scowled harder at her.

“Emma,” that one was her mother. She better listen to her mother.

“I’m sorry I took your ball,” she huffed out an apology to Zelena and the older girl smiled but Emma scowled again. The parents call that little tiff that.

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“Again, I’m sorry I assumed your daughters did anything to her. I just see red when it comes to my children,” she explains and Cora hums.

“It’s quite alright, I’d do the same if my daughters were in the same place. It’s how we must be as their parents…. Now, that’s all water under the bridge and I’m aware of the likelihood my daughters have to injuring other children I do believe an introduction is in order..Cora. Cora Mills,” she says with an outstretched hand and MM shakes it.” Real Estate agent out on business and family vacation. Glorified soccer mom and financial badass as my husband describes me,”

“Sounds about right,” Mary Margaret laughs and Cora smiles.

“Henry Mills, pediatrician, devoted father and gassy on a good day,” she continues to joke, pointing at her husband and Mary Margaret cracks up on that.

“Mary Margaret Nolan. Daughter of Leopold White- owner of WhiteTop Hotels and personal financial consultant and PR agent for said company…. Though, I’d have rather much preferred teaching. My husband, David is a police officer, just not very decorated considering where we live has literally no crime,” she explains. “We own a beach house out this way so we’re on vacation as well,” she says and Cora can taste the hint of country in her voice.

“My.. if you don’t mind me asking, where are you all from?”

“Tennessee,” she says with a smile and Cora puts the southern bell look together. “We’ve got a farm back there but it’s in a suburban area as well,”

“We are much the same,” Cora says and the woman looks intrigued. “Though, we’re from Maine, we live in a suburban area as well and we’ve been told we own.. A mansion style townhouse, whatever the hell that may be,”

“Shouldn’t you know that considering you work in real estate?”

“You’d think so, but when people make up pairings that don’t necessarily go together, you sound idiotic repeating it,” she tells her and the woman nods.

“Would it be too much and jumping to fast to suggest we let the kids play together so that they can get along?” she queries and Cora looks over at the children who are with their fathers, seemingly more cooperative.

“I think our husbands have that under control,” Cora says and MM makes a sound of agreement.
“Okay, what did I do? You’ve been staring at me for the past ten minutes,” David says and Henry squints slightly.

“I’d have thought you would have remembered me from a little over a week ago when we met in the bakery,” he says and the man looks so confused.

“We met? At a bakery?” Henry nods.

“I needed directions and you gave them to me.. After hitting on me of course, and then your son and niece and nephew got you kicked out because of that little fiasco,” he informs the man who looks confused still for about half a second until realization hits and he begins to laugh. “What?”

“That- was my brother, James.. My twin brother. It’s really hard to tell us apart on a good day so I’m not surprised you took him for me and I’m married, remember. I wouldn’t be that insane to hit on you and in the front of my kids no less,” David clarifies and Henry smirks.

“No, I suppose not,” head amits.

“You’re kicking it wrong,” Zelena says and Emma huffs.

“How do you know?”

“I play soccer,” Zelena tells her. “Here, watch me,” she then says before she takes the ball and effortlessly dribbles it from foot to foot. Emma watches in awe the way the two little girls go back and forth with the ball and then Zelena kicks it over to her little sister who copies her.

“Like this, Lena?” she asks and Zelena claps and cheers.

“Yeah!” she praises. “Okay, now kick it over to her,” she tells her little sister who follows her order. Emma fumbles to get the ball but when she does, she kicks it to Auggie and the four children go back and forth and back and forth with the one soccer ball. When Zelena gets the ball again, she pauses and picks it up before she asks aloud.

“What’s your name?”

“Me?” Emma questions and Zelena nods.

“Emma,” she says and Zelena smiles.

“I’m Zelena. That’s my little sister Regina,” she says before pointing to the clearly shy little girl.

“That’s my little brother August, but we just call him Auggie,” Emma says and Zelena waves.

“Hi Auggie,” to the little boy who just waves back happily.

“Your name’s weird..and long,” Emma tells the two girls and Zelena scrunches up her face.
“It’s not weird,”

“It’s to me,” Emma shrugs and Zelena leaves that be.”Uh-Gina,” Emma calls and Zelena laughs.

“Her name’s Regina,” Zelena corrects and Emma shrugs again.

“Still too long,” she tells the girl again. They get back to playing until Emma is in need of juice and finds herself running over to her mother and collapsing in her lap.

“Mommy, they have weird names,” Emma informs and the two women laugh.

“Who baby?”

“Lena and uh-gina?” she questions because she still doesn’t bloody know.

“Zelena and Regina, darling,” Cora corrects and Emma blushes.

“Mommy, I’m thirsty,” she informs and her mother laughs.

“I can see that, sweetie,”

“Can I have some juice please?”

“Only if you carry one for your brother too, okay,”

“Yes ma’am,” she nods eagerly and her mother pulls one and then another out. Emma’s about to run off with them until her mother causes her to pause.

“Oh, Emma! Wait,” she says and her daughter halts. “Here, carry one for the girls as well,” she tells her and Cora interrupts.

“Oh no, that won’t be necessary,” she begins but MM shakes her head.

“Nonsense, they’ve been playing for a good while, they could use it,” she says and the woman sags but nods.

“Very well, but no apple juice for Regina, she’s allergic to them,” Cora informs.

“Did you hear that, Emma. No what?”

“No apple juice,” Emma repeats and she’s determined to remember that.. That is until she forgets about halfway through. The, it just so happens that Regina does end up with an apple juicebox, well, in technicality, the fruit punch mix has it in there and it’s blatantly clear she gets it when she goes into anaphylactic shock and starts to seize up. Panic breaks out from the children and the adults around, except for Henry and Cora who’ve had to deal with it before a handful of times. She watches as her husband bites the top off of Regina’s EpiPen and then lodges it into the little girl’s thigh with enough force that her tiny frame rattles. She comes down and in that second, she’s crying and whimpering and wailing from the pain. Her throat hurts and her eyes can’t focus and her body feels weak because of it. Her lungs burn because she tries breathing normally and nothing’s working which causes the little girl to panic. Her father picks her up quickly and then he’s rocking her, not even giving a damn to check her pulse and breathing properly, he’s too worried about her not calming down enough to just let her medicine work.

“I’m sorry!” Emma squeaks out in fear. “I forgot. Please don’t be mad at me!” she begs and Cora finds herself shushing the child and putting her at ease.
“Sweetheart, she’ll be okay. It’s alright, it’s happened before, but she’ll be okay,”

“But-,”

“-Emma.. It’s alright. It’s not your fault,” Cora cuts off and the girl nods with dejectedness in her eyes. “She just needs to rest now, that’s all,” Cora says as she watches her youngest hiccup against her father’s chest. Cora looks at her watch and then she’s sighing.

“Is something wrong?” Mary Margaret questions and she speaks.

“We need to get Regina inside to lie down and rest, but the drive out is about two and a half hours from here,”

“Then you should come with us, we’re only about an hour out,” she says but Cora shakes her head.

“Oh no, we couldn’t impose on you-,”

“- You wouldn’t be, just please allow us to help. It’s the least we could do,” Mary Margaret tells her and Cora sighs before agreeing. “Good, it’s only about an hour’s drive and she can rest as long as you need her to,” the woman says to Cora who nods.

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Upon arrival to the house, the only people left to be in Awe are Zelena and her father. Since Cora is in Real estate, nothing peaks her interest anymore, but Zelena, having been from a small town is awestruck by the massive house that is if her squealing,

“Daddy, there’s a tennis court!” is anything to go by. Henry still didn’t care though, even if he did nod and smile and say,

“That’s wonderful, sweetheart,” because in all honesty, all he wanted was to get his youngest in a bed and covered up. Once he was directed to a room, he’d disappeared, staying glued at Regina’s side until he drifted off to sleep.

“Zelena, darling why don’t you go and play with August and Emma,” her mother suggest and she nods, but she only finds Auggie which is fine by her because she goes to draw with the three year old who’s awfully quiet. Usually Zelena’s been one who would cry when Regina had an allergic reaction, but she’s slowly become desensitized to it to the degree that she can have the same face her mother has when her father gives her a dose of epinephrine. Emma wanders off in search of Regina and Henry and finds them in one of the rooms asleep. She climbs into the bed and whispers,

“I’m sorry I gave you apple juice,” and though the other girl doesn’t respond, Emma thinks she wouldn’t mind if she stayed there, slowly, she finds herself drifting off as well.

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When dinnertime rolls around, the three people are woken up, but Regina’s refusal to eat influences Emma’s refusal to eat as well. She doesn’t know why she’s doing it, but if it’s for the other little girl
that she wouldn’t mind being friends with then why not. Zelena and Auggie hug Regina who hugs them back but she’s just strangely mute at this point and no one really knows why but her father and mother and sister kind of explain that she just falls silent after her episodes. It takes Cora convincing them to eat a little and Emma only does when Regina does. Her father is just happy to know she’s okay, if she didn’t want to eat, he wasn’t forcing her to, but her lack of appetite comes from the pain before which he knows is something she’s going to have to manage with.

An extension for them to sleepover is given, but Cora has to reject because she has a meeting rather early in the morning and after a talk with Henry about moving Regina right away, they agree that he and the girls will stay, if only because their youngest isn’t her best. She kisses her babies double because it’s rare that they ever sleep apart from one another and then she’s out the door and kissing her husband once more, telling him she’ll call him when she reaches. They put Regina first and that means that she’s not to be moved. By the time the kids are all asleep, all of them basically sharing the one room, the adults lose themselves in conversation until James comes over with a sleeping Nelson in his arms. He puts his son in their room and by the time he showers and throws on something comfortable, only Henry is awake. The two men go off into conversation and have a short form heart to heart about their histories.

His phone rings and rings and rings at some ungodly hour in the morning until he realizes it’s his wife and then he’s wide awake and answering the phone. Of course she’d call and the first thing on her mind would be her babies, that’s not surprising in the slightest. Then there are little feet shuffling out and walking over before clambering into his lap and hugging him.

“Mija, mama’s on the phone,” he whispers to his little girl before kissing the top of her head. She nods sleepily and he lets her talk to her mother and it’s cute because Regina’s cute. She sleepily talks with her mother and nods on some moments where she should probably speak, but her mother merely continues their conversation and then she whispers.

“I love you too, mommy,” before passing the phone back. Henry rises with her still in his arms and makes his way to the room. He sets Regina down and gently nudges Zelena awake. She rouses a bit huffy, but once she hears it’s her mother she’s greedily reaching for the phone.

“Hi momma,” she says happily and Henry can hear the joy in Cora’s tone as she talks to her oldest. They go off into conversation for nearly an hour which is enough time that James and David are now awake, so the three men set out to make breakfast which includes use of all the eggs, all the bread and all the damn sausage they have, still it is a lot of them there so it only seemed fitting, but had they known that most of the children just wanted cereal, they wouldn’t have made so much. That was until they took the food up and realized that four adults could definitely eat all of that without feeling like fatasses. Auggie is once again stuck to Zelena by the time they’re all fully awake and Henry talks to his wife for a while until she truly has to go and she sends kisses for her daughters through the phone. James suggests they take all the kids to the Pier and no one objects to that, but Henry firstly takes his girls back to the hotel, they take their bath and then he lets them pick whatever they want to wear for the day. They, and by they, Zelena picked out both their clothes and dressed Regina in some jean shorts and a t-shirt with sneakers and she wore much the same. She brushed her little sister’s hair and put it in a low braid before she pulled hers in one. He packs them a bag of important things and distractions in case the Pier makes them bored or they become in need of medical
attention. Henry puts sunblock on both his babies and then they meet the others at the Pier. It turns into Emma and Regina watching everyone else do things as they stood there and shook their heads at the massive rides before them. Regina simply asks,

“Wanna play on my DS,” and Emma agrees quickly. Nelson follows his father and Auggie stays glued to Zelena who helps him through his snack that they’d gotten at one of the stalls. Cora meets up with them much later after the meeting and is more than happy to see her little ones because she hugs them so tight they giggle and have to tell her to let go. She praises Zelena for picking out their outfits and doing her sister’s hair because lord knows, let four year old Regina do it and she’d have come out like a rainbow and her massive curls all over the place.

“She popped my scrunchie,” her daughter told her and she laughed.

“That’s because your sister has thicker hair than you...and your hair is changing colour as well.. It’s gotten darker from when you were born,” she tells her before kissing her head and Zelena leans into her mother.

“Gina’s too quiet, mommy,” she announces and Cora sighs.

“She’s just in a bit of pain still, baby, that’s all. She’ll be okay soon,” Cora tries to reassure but Zelena shakes her head.

“Okay,” she says but her head shake doesn’t agree.

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It’s now Cora who suggests a dinner night outside of the house and no one objects to that. The place is one of many that’s expensive to say the least. They go to the WeHo Bistro and the children are awestruck by everything before them. Even Regina’s muteness is long gone as she takes in the scenery of the massive building. Since there are no kiddie menus, the kids eat what the adults eat and in short form, that’s a never again kind of thing because all they were used to were chicken nuggets and french fries. Thankfully, they hadn’t ordered for the children yet as Henry had a smart idea to let them try their parents’ food first beforehand. All the children vocally say their piece about their displeasure, but Regina’s is hilarious as the four year old just sits there with her face scrunched up and distaste coating her mouth. She’d held on to whatever the heck it was she got off her father’s plate and wanted to throw it and throw up. Her mother had told her to spit it out...and she does, just that she does so in Emma’s hand. Wasn’t her fault Emma offered to be the trashcan in that moment. So that happens and Mary Margaret takes the girls to wash up. James puts in an order for spaghetti for them and that seems to work because they swallow it whole and they drink water like it’s never existed. No one except Nelson asks for juice which was common for Jame’s son. The suggestion to stay the night at the house is never mentioned.

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It’s two weeks later when the group bump again and of course it comes with their parents deciding to spend dinner together once again. Zelena is informed by David about how much August has been asking for her and she ignores the adults after that because Auggie’s her new friend. Emma and
Regina wave at each other shyly and all Emma remembers is saying, “your hair’s really pretty,” in a whisper. This was the night that Regina’s mother just could not comb through her baby’s hair and she just let the wild mane of hair out. Regina’s curls practically covered her face and Cora groaned just at the sight of what she’d have to do just to get it in one. Regina responds in kind about Emma shoes and then the little blonde girl is taking them off without a second thought and Regina’s trying them on right in the restaurant... in the middle of the room. Emma’s shoes are a little big, but still, Regina now looks even cuter considering she had on a short navy blue dress with thin straps and little cowgirl boots. Emma looked like a real Tennessee girl with her traditional plaid shirt and short jean shorts, but then Emma decides to stay barefoot for the rest of the evening because Regina’s shoes are way too girly for her to wear. Her scowl tells it all. Regina’s little feet swing back and forth as the faux spurs spin on the boots and clank against the chair and the two little girls giggle over nonsense and the DS that Regina always seems to have. The night is amazing for the adults and very fun for the children who are growing closer and closer with each meeting which is why the parents later agree to allow them to spend the days together more often whilst they have it.

For three days, James handles all the kids to give all the other adults time to themselves or time for work. Henry has an impromptu pediatric seminar to attend right there in WeHo and Cora is in and out of meetings and seminars as well. Mary Margaret has to meet with the staff of one of the hotels her parents own and then she and Davis spend time together before he gets called away by the station and has to walk them through the filing process for ‘thievery’. James doesn’t mind at all because Nelson has more children to play with and they’re all very well behaved which is why he could pretty much take them anywhere and do anything.

At some point in time the adamantly need and want for pizza even if they were making their own, comes out of nowhere and still, all the kids wanna do it. It was between that and sushi, which is something only Zelena was really sure of trying. So they have a pizza night where the kids make their own and on suggestion, they go to Ajisai…. It does not end well. Auggie flat out wails when he watches them butcher the fish before him and the kids can’t stand the smell so their parents leave and they get fast food from InandOut. Zelena is also into a teaching like mentality because she’s been teaching Auggie new words and sentences and phrases that the little boy has begun to use consistently. He and Emma then stay the night with the Mills folks and in the morning, Emma grins stupidly because as she states, “They can’t tell me how many pancakes to eat,” which is true considering it’s endless. Auggie settles for French toast and Regina eats oatmeal as her sister eats cereal and Nelson has french toast and eggs. Emma dumps the entire container of syrup on her pancakes and ends up with a stomach ache because she insisted on eating all the pancakes and licking the syrup from the plate. Auggie scrunches up his face at his sister because that’s just gross and Nelson tries not to watch. Zelena just flat out says ewww and Regina remains quiet as she finishes her breakfast.

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Between so many get togethers and nights out and dinner reservations, the three families decide that maybe letting the children spend the rest of the summer together wouldn’t be so bad... and it isn’t.
They continue to see all of the SM Pier and that includes Bubba Gumps, Soda Jerks, the arcade and trapeze and all of that other good stuff. They also frequent every busy and high priced venue around Melrose and Sunset Blvd. From La Cienega to Palms Ave and so on.. And then, like all it took was a blink of an eye, it all came to an end shortly after they put together a small party for the girls’ birthdays.

Now, they were in the airport, the kids hugging one another goodbye and their mother’s off into the corner having conversation.

“We should do this again,” MM suggest and Cora hums,

“We should.”

“Next Year?”

“Why not.. the children are rather fond of one another;”

“That they are..soooo, next year?” she questions and Cora laughs.

“Yes, next year...girls..come along,” she say and they do.

“Wait!” That was Emma.

“Yes dear?” That was Cora. Emma fidgets.

“Could Gina write to me, please?” she queries and many eyes fall on the other four year old as Cora wiggles her daughter’s arm so that she had her attentions.

“I don’t know.. Would you like to write to Emma, Regina?” she questions and for a moment, Regina says nothing, she does nothing, until she’s smiling and nodding. Emma begins to grin widely and then Zelena interrupts with.

“Then that means I get to write to Auggie, right, momma?”

“Of course, sweetie,” she says and Henry mock glares.

“Dear God in heaven she’s dating already… August am I gonna have to get my shotgun for you, little man?” he questions and Auggie just grins like the little cutie he is. The adults laugh and continue to say goodbye to one another. Once Emma and her folks are on the plane, the Mills clan climb back into their travel car and make the distance back home. The first thing Regina does when she gets home is begin writing her letter in as best penmanship as she can manage. She’d really only gotten as far as,

Hi Emma.
Emma darts out of the airport and toward the shuttle bus area the moment she’s sure they’re back in Tennessee.

“Emma,” her mother calls after her and she halts near the curb, almost stumbling over. “Slow down, baby, we’re almost home,” her mother coos and she nods quickly. She blushes a bit red because she knows she should have waited but she was so excited to be back home that nothing actually mattered...granted they were just in Weho less than four hours ago, but to any child her age it would feel like a lifetime with the plane ride. August is once again asleep, his father holding his small frame in one arm as the little boy lay draped over him and Auggie’s stroller in the other along with one of their carry on bags. Mary Margaret had been pushing the flatbed trolley that held the rest of their luggage, which wasn’t much and Emma had her backpack with all of the things she’d gotten from West Hollywood. Her father puts a hand to the back of her head and that’s indication that they continue moving. They all walk the remaining distance to the shuttle bus area and get in before they’re dropped off to the other part of the terminal that held all the parked cars.

After setting a still sleeping August in his seat and strapping him in, David packs up the truck and the family exits the airport area and makes the drive home. Sunset is streaming through the clear glass of Emma’s father’s truck and the little girl finds herself smiling at the setting orb by tracing as best she could, the image before her, on the glass. She looks out and can already see that they’re getting closer and closer to home, the vast farmland giving away to their close proximation. Her smile widens even more and though her brother is still sleeping and her parents are in a comfortable silence, Emma perks up.

“We’re home,” she grins and her mother and father turn back to smile at her.

“That we are, pumpkin,” her father answers and now she’s practically vibrating in her chair with excitement. Her father parks the truck and firstly takes out all of their bags as her mother gets her little brother. The little blonde fights to free herself from her seatbelt and succeeds rather quickly before she’s yanking open the door of her father’s truck and hopping down. She grabs her backpack and kicks up the dust that’s settled on the ground in a joyous manner that gives away her newfound energy. She breaks off into a sprint towards the stables, but is halted by her mother’s words.

“Emma, we have to put the bags away first,” she tells her and the little girl hits her forehead.
“Coming momma!” she answers happily but is still rushing because she just wants to get back to the animals. Once the bags are put away and August is put into his bed and the rails are pulled up so that he doesn’t roll off, Emma and her parents head back outside and the pair watch as she is once again heading towards the stalls that usually held a few horses and other livestock that her parents were never keen on butchering when it came to eating. She’s stopped once more as she see that their neighbours are coming over with their horse trailers on the back of a pickup truck and a few more latched on to the original one. Emma watches in confusion for a moment until they drive past her and straight up to the stalls. All she feels is her father picking her up and hoisting her onto his neck as he now walks towards the stalls with her in tow. Her mother isn’t far behind with that signature dimpled chin smile on her face. The truck stops and out comes Jeremiah and his kids, who Emma hasn’t really played with much until recently.

“Hey family!” he greets with a grin and David smiles back at him. Emma waves.

“Jerry!” David laughs and they shake hands with enough force that it could rattle a wall.

“Hi Mister Jeremiah,” Emma greets him and he looks up.

“Well, hey there princess, how’s the weather up there?” he jokes and she blushes. He sees Mary Margaret come over and nods politely at her.

“Ma’am,”

“Jeremiah,” she answers and then they both grin.

“How was the vacation time?” he then questions and she smiles in content.

“Wonderful,” Mary Margaret answered. “We brought you back a few things,” she continues and his eyebrows rise.

“Oh?” he questions and she nods.

“Later, for dinner.. You are coming to dinner, right Jerry?” David said more so than asked and the man grinned.

“Of course we’re coming, but first… Emma, I think a special someone missed you,” the man informed and Emma looked thoroughly confused. Her father let her down and held out his hand for which she took without question. They stood there as she watched Jeremiah open up the first trailer and then Emma’s eyes went wider than wide.

“ASTON!” she yelled happily and heard the horse let out a whinny. “Daddy, momma! Aston!” she points and her parents along with Jeremiah smile.

“Go say hi, Em,” he tells her and she doesn’t need to be told twice before she’s off in a sprint and buckling against the horse, hugging her and petting her muscular frame. Aston bent her head and nudged the little girl who giggled and kissed her nose. Aston was Emma’s horse. The horse she’d gotten since she was born which was a present to her from her grandparents on David’s side of the family. Auggie also had one, but since his horse still didn’t have a name because he wouldn’t name him, it tended to roam freely amongst all the other farm animals. Emma goes off with Aston as her parents and Jeremiah unload the rest of the animals and lead them to their respective stalls. Jeremiah’s kids Nicholas and Brittany- Emma hated that name -followed behind her and her horse and they just looked like the epitome of blonde haired blue eyed genes from a small countryside farm...then again, the majority of those from that area, except for Emma’s family, tended to look that way.

“Hi Emma,” Nicholas greeted and Emma gave a pinched smile.
“Hi Nick,” she answered and the boy continued the conversation.

“Poppa told us you went to Hollywood...was it fun?” he asked. Nicholas was seven, which meant he rarely had anything in common with anyone around him considering all the kids were either way too young or much too old.

“WeHoo..” she corrected a little jaggedly because her uncle had just short-formed it for her to remember in case she couldn’t...which, she really couldn’t...but her words trailed off and he nodded. “It was cool,” she shrugged, not really giving much away and he nodded again. “Momma and daddy brought you guys stuff, but it’s in the house,”

“Okay.. daddy let us play with Aston sometimes.. She’s really really fast,” he tells her and she smiles a bit.

“Did you get to ride her?”

“No, cus daddy said she’s your horse and that we should ask you to ride her,”

“Do you wanna?”

“Can we?”

“Uuhh.. I’ll just ask my daddy to help ,” Emma told him. Brittany had disappeared for some reason, probably because she was a bit more reserved than most ten year olds. The little boy followed behind Emma and watched her and her father exchange words. Her father then looked at Nicholas, smiled and nodded before turning to the boy’s father and relaying the information. He watched his father nod and it was sealed. David got the saddle and strapped it onto Aston before hoisting Nicholas up without warning and setting him on top. He didn’t give him any reigns because Aston wasn’t much of a race horse. She usually trotted lightly, but more often than not, would walk to wherever she wanted to go. Aston trotted around the soft terrain with the little boy on her back and Nicholas grinned widely as he felt the wind she’d managed to create from just the slight bit of speed she put into her trot. He was on her for another ten minutes as Emma went off to look for Brittany. She found her playing with the little baby chickens and bit the inside of her cheek.

“I made a new friend,” Emma said and that got the girl’s attention.

“Cool,” she answered as she dusted her fingers and sat on a hay bale.

“Her name’s funny.. and long,” Emma then said and Brittany nodded and kicked up some dirt. “Are you sad?” Emma then asks and the girl before her shrugs. “Kay,” she answers immediately.

“Did you have fun, pumpkin?” he questions and he’s only referring to one thing. She nods, but there’s a look on her face that just sings a bit of difference. “Emma, what’s wrong?” he questions and she answers immediately.

“She hates me.” Her father is lost because he thinks she means Jeremiah’s daughter when she doesn’t.
“Sweetie, Brittany doesn’t hate you-,”

“-Not Brittany,” she corrects and now he’s even more lost.

“Aston?” he questions and she shakes her head this time. “Then who, baby girl?”

“Gina,” she whispers and her father looks hurt for her.

“Baby, Regina doesn’t hate you,” he tries to tell her but she’s stubborn much like both her parents.

“She does..she’s not my friend,”

“Of course she’s your friend, why would you say that?”

“Because….” she trails off with no real answer but something is making her feel that way.

“Because?” her father prompts.

“Cus, she didn’t wanna talk to me all summer.”

“Emma-,”

“-Nuhuh. Lena and Auggie are friends and they talked a lot, but Gina just wanted to plan on the
stupid DS all the time,”

“But she played it with you, sweetie...doesn’t that make her your friend?” Emma shook her head.

“No, cus she just sat there. She said ‘Wanna play on my DS?’ Like a million-billion times and thas all… she don’t like me.. She don’t wanna be my friend neither,” the child huffed and her father takes her off of Aston and kisses her forehead.

“Sweetie, if you feel like you and Regina aren’t friends then maybe when you two start writing to
each other you will be,” he trails off and his five year old is tearing up. “Don’t get upset sweetheart, I’m sure Regina’s just a really quiet little girl, you know how Auggie’s quiet?”

“Yeah,” she sighs. “But...but,” he smiles and rubs the top of her head.

“You’ll be best friends soon enough,” he tells her and she huffs but nods. “Come on..let’s go get
dinner,” he tells her and her little mind starts working. Usually when they have people over that
meant only one kind of meal for dinner.

“Barbecue?” she questions and he nods happily.

“Barbecue.”

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“She’s what?” comes the question from the usually nonchalant mother of two. Dinner was in full
swing as Jeremiah brought over his wife and kids. His wife, Ashley, another name that Emma
despised, along with their kids had greeted the family with the usual hospitality one met in a southern
home. Nicholas and Brittany went off to play with Emma and Auggie as their parents all sat around
the back deck and talked for a while.
“Upset that Regina didn’t talk to her the way Auggie and Zelena did with each other,” David sighs lightly. His wife runs her fingers through his locks of hair as they lounge on the patio chairs and watch their children. It’s clear that Emma isn’t as bubbly as she’d usually be but it’s obvious she’s trying her hardest to just have fun even if she thinks she’s not really friends with Regina.

“Not to interrupt,” Ashley says, “but it sounds like Regina’s just a quiet child.. They are the same age aren’t they?” she questions and David and MM nod. Jeremiah nods as well.

“Ash is right, I don’t think there’s anything for your little one to worry about, it’s just their personalities forming themselves,”

“I’ve tried explaining that to her, but I don’t think she really understands that every child is different. She knows how August is, but doesn’t think the same should be for Regina because of the way she’s seen her interact before. Her reasoning is because Regina only really talked to her when the Nintendo was involved.” There’s a soft oh that comes from someone in the group and David bites the inside of his cheek before he’s up and walking over to the grill, calling out for his little helper. “Emma!” he belts a little and her head snaps up. “We’ve got ribs to dress!” he yells over the field in a controlled tone and Emma immediately leaves the other children to their own devices. She rolls down the little rise that considered itself a hill and then she was scooting the rest of the way before running up the steps of the deck and clambering up and onto the stool her father had set next to the grill. Auggie and the other’s were a little ways behind but wanted to watch so they followed along. Her father hands her the barbecue brush and they dress the ribs in a quiet companionship. As they dress the ribs, the others watch in awe and help set the backyard table. A little longer and the ribs are done, the table is set and both families are sat at the table, giving thanks to their individual religions before digging in and eating. They talk about the summer that they are still quite literally in and Emma’s face seems to be almost stoic but pained in the same instance.

“Emma sweetie, is everything alright?” her mother asks and she nods but still looks pained. “You sure, baby?” Emma nods again. Her mother bites the inside of her cheek but leaves it be.

“Can I go now?” she asks as politely as she can manage.

“But you’ve barely eaten-,” her mother comments but David puts a hands up and she stops talking.

“You can go, sweetie,” he tells her and she doesn’t need to be told twice before she’s up and out of sight.

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“She’s thinking,” he says after Emma is out of earshot. His wife sighs. After Auggie and the others were done with their dinner, the parents let them go to run off the extra steam.

“And I have no idea how to help our child,” she comments and he nods.

“I know, but I don’t think forcing her to sit at the table and eat food she clearly doesn’t want right now is the best option. Trying to pry answers out of her when she’s like this, isn’t our best decision… All we do know is that she doesn’t believe she’s good enough to be friends with Regina,”

“But that’s just because-”
Regina’s a quiet and introverted child,’ Cora whispered to the couple one evening as they watched their children play together. MM and David had wondered why the child seemed so... withdrawn and that was due in part because- ‘She’s been homeschooled for the past four years...she wasn’t very receptive to anyone holding her or touching her for that matter.. Emma’s made more progress with her in the shortest space of four hours than anyone has for a while...’

‘Seems the only people she trusts are her family’ David comments.

‘Just barely,’ Henry says. ‘She’s been fussy with all of us except for Zelena when she was a baby, even though Zelena was the one who poked her in the head when she was a baby,’ he grinned at the memory. ‘I’m almost positive Zelena hated her but just didn’t know the word to describe how she felt when she first met her,’

‘Yes,’ Cora agrees. ‘Children are peculiar in that way..or at least ours tend to be.’

“Emma,” Mary Margaret called as she knocked lightly on the bathroom door where her daughter had managed to end up. David was off dealing with Auggie and cleaning up the remnants of dinner. Emma pauses on brushing her teeth to talk to her mother.

“Yes momma?”

“Hi sweetie,” she smiles a bit and Emma responds in kind.

“hi, momma.” Mary Margaret walks into the bathroom and sits atop the closed toilet seat.

“Did you have fun with Regina and Zelena?” Emma nods. “And you know you can write to her too, right?” Emma nods again. “And that she’s coming back?” Another nod. “So that means she’s your friend,” her mother concludes but she shakes her head. Emma puts her toothbrush down and shakes her head.

“She not,” the child says flatly and her mother’s face pinches.

“Why would you say that?”

“Cus...Gina doesn’t like me,” Emma shrugs and moves to get off the stool. Her mother follows behind her into her room and just watches her child.

“Is it because she didn’t talk much?”

“uhuh,” the child whispers. Her mother sits next to her on the bed.

“Sweetie, Regina wasn’t quiet because she didn’t like you-,”

“-then why, momma?” Her mother sighs.

“Well-,”

‘Regina never went to preschool-,’ Cora reminded ‘-she was a baby that refused to be held by certain people... she was homeschooled, so in essence, her only friends were her sister and cousins. Meeting Emma and spending time with her served to help her get used to different people and make new friends, even if their first meeting wasn’t the best. She likes her, she just doesn’t know how to show it yet, and that’s due in part to her knowing once we go back home, she won’t see her for a
very long time. She’ll be back in a ‘shell’ so to speak.’

‘Emma helped her come out of that shell,’ Henry had then said and the parents looked at him in shock.

“I helped Gina be brave?” she questions and her mother nods and smiles. Of course she’d given her the child-like version of explanation so that Emma understood it better, which was clear she did.

“Yes, you helped Regina be brave, baby,”

“Momma?”

“Yes sweetie?”

“Is Gina my friend?”

“Do you want her to be?” her mother questioned and she nods.

“Uhuh,”

“Are you going to write to her when she writes to you?”

“Yes ma’am,” Emma says.

“Then I’ll tell you a little something,” her mother begins after brushing her daughter’s hair from her face.. “She already is.

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She’d fallen asleep on the car ride back and that’s because tired is as tired does. It sleeps. They’d just walked through the doors of their home forty hours later and the only thing on Regina’s mind was ‘write to Emma’. It comes as a chant over and repeatedly and that’s how and why she was sat, head tilting with sleep at the little desk in her mother’s office that was usually only used when she and her sister needed to do homework and other activities. She only got as far as carrying her backpack and the large white bear she’d gotten as a gift from James, inside the house before making a mad dash for the office. She’d grabbed some paper from the printer and a pencil from the many that sat in the cup and hurriedly sat before scribbling onto the paper ‘hi Emma’ on it. Then, that was it. She sat and stared at the offending white piece of stationery, lost on what exactly it is she should write. And so she sat and scowled at it, until tiredness won over and she falls asleep. That was how her mother found her and woke her up for dinner , not neglecting to notice the already started letter in Regina’s lightly printed scrawl.

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She’s sighed for the eighth time since dinner and that’s finally it.
“Regina, what’s the matter?” her father questions and she huffs.

“I dunno,” she admits, but there’s more to it- even if she herself didn’t know what it was. Her mother tries.

“Are you sure sweetie?”

“I dunno,” she says.

“You don’t know if you’re sure or if something’s wrong?” she questions and the girl looks so conflicted and confused.

“Seh can’t figure out what to write for Emma,” Zelena says and the little girl scowls at her. Her parents don’t miss the deadly change in her eyes. “Mines easy cus Auggie’s only three,” she continues and Regina snaps at her.

“Shut up Lena!” she says with a raised tone and her mother scolds her. She simpers at that.

“Regina, is this true?” her father queries and she huffs again before nodding. “Mija, it’s nothing to be upset over-,”

“But, I can’t write and I can’t be friends with Emma cus I can’t write!” she belts and that’s it, she’s lost her appetite to eat the rest of the chicken and rice before her. Regina pushes her plate away from her.

“Regina, you need to eat, sweetheart, you’ve barely eaten today,” her father informs and she responds in spanish.

“No hambre, papi,” she mutters and her father sighs but lets it be.

“Sorry Lena,” she finally apologises to her sister after a beat of silence but Zelena shakes her head.

“It’s okay, Gina..maybe I can help you write to Emma,” she suggests but her little sister shakes her head.

“Uh-uh,” she starts. “I wanna do it myself,” she explains and then her mother is calling her over. She abandons her chair and food and then she’s being lifted onto the woman’s lap. They’re whispering back and forth and Henry and Zelena just watch them. Then, Zelena gets an idea after looking at them for a while.

“Gina!” she says happily and that gathers everyone’s attention. “Momma, what if Gina draws pictures?!” she suggests and her mother begins to laugh.

“Zelena I swear you must be a fly on the wall,” she tells her and her daughter is so confused by that term. “Your sister and I were just talking about that… but she thinks it’s best if she takes photos instead of drawing pictures-,”

“-cus, I stink at it!” Regina laughs.

“Yes, that’s precisely why. She’s a stinker when it comes to drawing,” their mother plays along and they giggle.

“Can I help?” the little redhead then asks and Regina nods eagerly at that.

“Do you wanna?” Regina questions happily and her sister’s eyes go wide.
“Uhuh!” Zelena tells her and the girls beg their mother with puppy dog eyes in place.

“Can she momma?—”

“-Yeah! Can I, momma?”

“Please!—”

“Pleeeeeaaaaasssee!” they beg in unison and their father snickers.

“Papi, can Lena help me, pleeease?!” Regina begs and her father now and their mother is the one to laugh.

“Come on papi,” Zelena repeats. “Can I?” she questions and her father tilts his head to the side before looking at their mother and both smile.

“Sure, little red,” he tells her and Zelena whoops and cheers just as Regina grins and claps.

“Now, will you finish eating, little ones?” he questions more so to his youngest and she nods.

“Good, now your mother or I, will buy you a camera that’s going to help but we’ll get the pictures developed for you whenever you think you’re done.. Understand?” and of course she shakes her head and giggle. He rolls his eyes lovingly at her.

“No sir,” she answers and he laughs. He supposes it is a rather complicated way to explain it to her, considering she’s all of five years old.

“You’ll learn,” is what he simply settles for telling her..

Regina sleeps that night and the few nights that follow after that. Her partially started letter is still sitting atop the small desk where she did her activities. It’s not being neglected, quite the opposite in fact. The opposite being the child finding a different way to articulate to her new friend just how she feels. It’s just after her father buys her the disposable camera to use, that all the help the little girl begins to document their adventures. One adventure included another attempt to get the little girl enrolled into school. First grade to be precise. The now five year old was now more open to the possibility of going to school all because she met Emma. So, after her parents went through every possible choice for a school for both her and Zelena to attend together, they found it easier to just enroll her in the one Zelena was already attending. St John’s Catholic school sat not too far away from their home and their grandparents’ homes. So, if the girls ever needed to be taken home early or one of their parents couldn’t make it for them in time, their grandparents would be able to gather them. Melanie also went to St John’s because once again, it was close to where she too lived. She was the one cousin that Regina truly looked too much alike sometimes. Then again, her father’s genes tended to be stronger than her mother’s. She psses the entrance exam and that's no surprise at all, but what’s a surprise, granted they should have seen this coming is Regina’s instant fussiness that she has to wear a uniform for days out of the week. technically the P.E uniform they fit her for doesn’t make her any happier because she’s used to wearing whatever she’s allowed to pull from her closet. Or sometimes just her underwear and a singlet. Her parents had no clue where she developed that from, but Regina’s half naked behind was a common thing. Getting her school uniform is a pain in the ass but Regina’s parents take it with a grain of salt and trudge on. They take pictures of her when she isn’t looking or too difficult. They take pictures of her sitting and waiting to take her
exams, pictures of her during the exam where she’s concentrating on her paper and then others of her
modelling the new school uniform she’s going to be wearing...and then there’s the favourite of her
stood in the front of her new school that just says, ‘LOOK EMMA!’ in her own print.

Their parents call the number that Mary Margaret had given them in order for the girls to have direct
and immediate contact. It’s placed on speaker phone and after the parents talk for a bit and Zelena
and Auggie yammer for time’s sake, it’s the girls’ turn.

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“hi, Gina,” Emma whispers.
“hi, Emma,” Regina whispers back.
“Are you my friend?” she questions seriously and straight to the point. Regina nods.
“uh-course..Gina?”
“Yeah?”
“You gonna write to me...right?” There’s a beat of silence.
“No,” she says and Emma’s hurt.
“Why?”
“Cus, I dunno how to write,” she admits.
“Well, mommy said I helped… so you hafta write to me,”
“But, why?”
“Cus, I helped Gina be brave,” she told the girl.
“I don’t wanna be brave..it’s scary,” she tells her friend.
“Thas why you have me, Gina. I’m gonna help,”
“How?”
“ Gonna show you how to be a braver Gina and then you can write to me, right?” she questions
again and this time Regina smiles. The little brunette looks at her mother and smiles.
“Yeah… and I’m gonna send pictures too,” she answers with the same dumb confidence as Emma.
“Good,” Emma grins cheekily. “I like pictures. Am I gonna see cool stuff?”
“Uhuh..and mommy and daddy and Lena,”
“And you?”

“Uh-course, silly.”

“Cool, then I’m gonna draw pictures for you,”

“Can you draw monkeys?” she asks with a giggle and Emma snickers.

“Nooooo, but I can draw the sun,”

“But, it’s just a big circle with lots of lines on it,” Regina days and Emma laughs again.

“Nuhuh, you gots to draw the eyes and the nose and the mouf so it’s a smiley sun,”

“But den it’s not a smiley sun.. it’s a smiley face,” Regina points out and Emma pauses.

“Oh,” the little girl said before they both start laughing. “I gotta surprise Gina. Mommy!” Emma announces loudly and because Regina hears it, she’s giggling at her friend. “I’m gonna surprise Gina!” she says happily and the laugh on the other side of the phone comes from the child’s mother.

“I don’t think you’re suppose to say it where she can hear you, Em,” her mother tells her and Emma blushes. The parents let their children talk for centuries until Cora says,

“Little darlings, it’s time to sleep. Say good morning to August and Emma.

“Bye-Emma, Bye-Auggie!” Zelena says happily

“bye-bye, Lena,” Auggie says in a raspy little tone. “bye-bye, Gina,” he then says.

“No bedbugs for Auggie!” Zelena announces and he laughs.

“Nope. None of da beddybugs,” he agrees. “No beddybugsfor Emma neither,” he reminds them and Regina is now agreeing.

“Yeah, no beddybugs for Emma..g’morning Auggie and Emma,”


“G’mornin, Gina,” Emma says and the kids hang up the phones themselves.

“Well, that was eventful,” Henry says.

“They are,” Cora corrected and her husband laughed before kissing the top of his wife’s head. They then got the girls bathed and in bed all tucked in and kissed on their foreheads before settling themselves downstairs.

“Never thought I’d see 30 with two little girls and the most stable relationships and marriage,” he admits as her collapses onto the couch with a thud and a smile. He looks at his wife who sits beside him and he gently prods her with his foot.

“What?” She questions?

“Nothing,” he smiles.

“No. Not nothing...you though I did,” she says and he laughs and shakes his head.
No-,

"Yes you did!" she laughs before swatting his arm.

"Ow-OW! Woman, this is domestic abuse!" he claims and she rolls her eyes before swatting him again. "Okay-okay, fine… maybe a little," he smirks before leaning in to kiss her.

By the next day, Regina’s sat at the little table with glitter and glue and stickers. Coloured pens and crayon pencils along with markers and other craft supplies surround her. She’s concentrating, quite possibly too hard on the ‘task’ at hand. It takes Zelena’s consistent badgering for her to go play, but it’s clear she can’t concentrate. Zelena calls her no fun because technically Regina is being no fun. She sits back at the table and pretty much scraps the first letter. She rubs the glue stick on all across the paper in a frenzy before slapping the glitter and stickers on and when she looks at it, her face scrunches up for a moment until she smiles and then the child is grinning with a gleam that most never get to see. Whatever Picasso looking masterpiece it was she made, she was damn proud of it.

3 days later

“Momma! It’s here! It’s here!” little Emma shrieked with glee and her mother was seriously beginning to wonder where her child picked that up from. Still, she also wondered what the little girl was on about at that time of day. Mary Margaret had taken Emma with her to the office, granted, it was all of ten miles out considering where they lived, but that was one of Emma’s favourite places and going there with her mother was never a problem. Their mail was something that almost always ended up being dropped to the office as well and that was because the couple had decided to combine both bills. It made it simpler to calculate once that was done.

“What’s here, sweetie?” she manages to ask before her daughter is flat out squealing again. Mary Margaret rolls her eyes and smiles because it’s no use asking when Emma’s a bundled mess of happiness.

“It’s heeeeere!” she announces again and her mother has to keep from snickering at her.

“Emma!” she calls loudly enough that her daughter pauses for a split second and then she’s just jumping again. “What’s here baby?” she continues and Emma stops again before shoving the thing into her mother’s face.

“My thingy!” Thingy? What thingy?

“thingy?” she repeats because she still can’t quite see what it is her daughter is holding in her hands.

“This, momma,” she shows her. “My letter from Gina! I just gots a lettah! I just gots a lettah! I just gots a lettah- a lettah from Gina!” she sings and if her mother’s correct, that’s a blues clues reference. Still, MM claps because it’s a joyous moment and then Emma is finding herself a seat that she’s
pushed closely to her mother’s side. Emma rips into the shimmering package with enough gusto to garner her mother’s shock. She’s then trying her best not to rip at the actual letter inside of the packaging that encased it. Emma slowly peels the rest of it back before tugging the letter free and immediately things begin to fall and clatter all around her. They’re pictures. So many than she has to bend at least three times to pick them all up. These pictures are the ones from the beginning of their time together in West Hollywood straight up until most recently. Emma greedily sifts through them all and smiles at each one as she does so but it’s the last one that was probably the first one that really stops her and makes her smile brighter.

“Mom-my,” MM hears her daughter call and she notices the small teardrops that fall onto the photos.

“Yes sweetheart?”

“I miss Gina already,” she admits and her mother hurts for her.

“She misses you too, Sweetie,” her mother tells her and she nods but it’s not making it any better.

“I’m gonna draw Aston and show Gina,” she says with determination and her mother runs her fingers though soft blond curls.

“Are you going to draw the farm too?”

“Uhuh, but I gotta draw Aston first. Gina’s gonna love Aston. And den I’m gonna get Auggie to draw for Gina and Lena too cus they like Auggie,”

“That’s nice of you, Emma,” her mother tells her and she smile just a little bit more.

Another 3 days later.

“Regina, sweetie, could you come here please,” Cora had questioned from the top level of their home. Her daughter’s were just one room away doing God knows what but soon directly, Cora hears the light thump of little feet tearing down to find her location.

“Yes mommy?” her little girl questioned and she looked over at her momentarily.

“Sientarse para mi, anela,” she says and her daughter does so. Cora then turns directly to Regina and holds out a paper towards her. Her glasses have slipped down the expanse of her nose and her forehead seemed creased. Regina follows suit with her own creased forehead.

“Mama, ques es esto?”

“Es una carta mija,” she responds and her daughter nods. Regina looks for a bit more before she’s actually reading the words or rather.. The drawings she sees.

*To Gina and Lena*
Love Emma and Auggie.

Are the only words she sees besides the mailing address. She smiles like most little girls do when things are content. The drawings are... child-like in nature, but they convey pure intent.

“Sweetheart,” Cora calls and Regina looks at her.

“Yes mommy?” she answers and her mother smiles.

“Is it a letter from Emma?” she questions knowingly and watches as Regina’s face lights up even more. She blushes but shakes her head.

“No mommy... it’s pictures,” she clarified.

“Pictures?

“Yes ma’am. Emma and Auggie drew me and Lena pictures... but,” she says before pulling two of them apart, “...this one’s Lena’s,” she clarifies as she holds it out.

“How do you know that, anela?”

“Cus her name’s on it,” she points out and her mother looks closer. Zelena’s name is quite clearly on it, just short-formed to ‘Lena’. Cora had to give it to the little children for trying to spell Zelena’s name but it was... well... Eccentric at best. “Lena!” Regina yelled. “Leeeeennnnaaaaaa!” she yelled again and in came her sister with a scowl on her face.

“Gina, I was drawing!” she yells back and Cora all but rolls her eyes at the pair of them.

“But it’s from Auggie!” her little sister whines. Zelena pretty much ignores everything else after that.

“What’s it say?! What’s it say?!” she questions excitedly.

“I dunno,” Regina giggles and Zelena stops.

“Awwww nuts,” she huffs before her sister hands her the paper and then she’s ripping into it in a frenzy. Plastered to Zelena’s is a two dimensional little duck sticker that’s more so velcro backed than tacky glue. Below it says, ‘I named a duck after you,’ and it’s clear Auggie had help writing that because it it was left up to him, he’d have just scribbled, ‘Lena dukke’.

“Mama, I have a duck! Auggie named a duck after me!” she squealed in delight.

“That’s good, sweetheart,” Cora smiled. “May I see it?”

“Sure mama.. It’s really cool,” Zelena says with a grin. She shows her mother her 2D duck and Regina’s gone off somewhere with her own thing from Emma. She lets her tiny fingers trace the images before her, all in different colours and strokes. Then she stops, spotting a heart quite clearly drawn away from the rest. In Emma’s rather neat print are their initials. E+R. Regina smiles widely before she’s tucking that particular piece beneath the pillow in her room. She lets the remnants of them ripping at their letters which she thinks Emma might appreciate...Regina then decides to go back to her room and take a picture from the window seat in her room. It had rained earlier that day but other than that, it was warm and beautiful. Even more beautiful to just take a photo.
“I heard you and Zelena got your letters today,” comes the voice of her father from the door.

“Papi!” she says happily before dropping the camera onto the window seat and running towards him. She’s caught mid flight and hugged tightly.

“Hi daddy,” she says after he kisses her head. He grins.

“Sweet girl,” he says to her. “Are you going to show me the letter?” he asks and she nods before wiggling free and retrieving it. She shows him and of course he’s happy for her and she goes on and on about how Lena got a duck and she got a heart and he takes her back to the top level so that he can look at both their letters and both his little girls are sat in his lap and yammering on in the best way possible and nothing else matters. His wife takes a picture of them. This was a good one for their family scrapbook.. Or Christmas cards. He’s then asking them each in secret what they want for dinner and both girls tell him the exact same thing and he thinks his daughters couldn’t be any more alike.

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3 days and three days and three days and 3 days more later and it was the start of a new school year for all for the children. Emma and Auggie end up starting two days prior to Regina and Zelena and in all fairness, their parents nearly didn’t send them to school because that was pretty much the week being over there, but Zelena begged them to go and Regina seemed okay enough to actually want to go..so they took them. On Regina’s first day, her parents take pictures of both her and her sister in their separate habitats and how their little bodies adjust to this once again. From the moment they wake up until it’s time to pick them up, photos are taken and it’s clear Zelena’s completely cool because when she’s in the car and being asked about how she liked her first day, the little girl doesn’t stop yammering about Ms. Noonan.. Or noodle, Regina isn’t sure because when it’s her turn she flat out tells her parents she doesn’t like it very much.. Or at all and they figured that was going to be a thing so to say they weren’t surprised would be right. It makes for a good letter though, even if the only sentence she manages to write is ‘I don’t like my school’ and that’s literally it. Emma of course feels bad because she’s supposed to be helping Regina be braver but then again, Regina just didn’t like her school so in retrospect Emma actually couldn’t help her change her mind on that especially since she has never been to that school either. She does smile when she sees all the pictures though. And is laughing at Regina when one in particular of the little girl whose curls are so insanely unruly just shroud her face when she wakes up on her first day… Since Emma enjoys her school day, she draws about it and whatever else she can think of because her fun revolves mostly around the farm animals and sometimes their neighbours kids.

Months and months and exams and more months and back and forth letters between all the kids and only two things have changed, Regina and Emma’s letters are now solely between them… and slowly they’re went from just pictures and drawings to a few words here and there that they’d opted not to get help with writing. Regina still dislikes school and Emma’s still hesitant about Nicholas and Brittany. Emma also continues to talk about Aston and how much she misses Regina and Regina tells her that She’s going to send Emm and giant glitter heart, which she ends up doing after begging her parents to buy it from the hallmark store. Emma ends up getting this very huge heart come Valentine’s Day and her teacher says nothing because.. Well, the little girl was loved by someone. Regina’s present doesn’t arrive until the day after because something happened at the post office and hers isn’t the exact same thing, though it comes very close. Inside is a blown up picture of their first
summer together where Uncle James had taken the kids out by himself at one point and they were both laying in the sand with oversized sunglasses on and wiggling their feet.

By the time this second summer comes, Emma a jittery mess of happiness. She has to be told to keep still multiple times in the airport terminal because this time, both families decided to fly to West Hollywood, but once she sees Regina, that’s it. All of her control is gone and she tears down in a mad dash for the brunette girl. She screams out across the terminal and her voice isn’t heard until she’s about fifteen feet away from the family. Her own have to follow behind her quickly because if they don’t then Emma will be lost in a sea of people.

“GINA!” she yells and Regina spins around just in time to be tackled with a hug. They fall over and Emma won’t let go which in turn kicks in Regina’s panic until she hears the voice again. “I misched you,” she can tell it’s Emma now passed the muffled tone and she hugs her back. They have no idea who picks them up and allows them to hug each other better, but they’re up and that isn’t as important as them hugging one another right now.

It’s no surprise they’re attached at the hip the entire summer and both girls come to be very intrigued by fruits, but Emma does an amazing job in making sure that none of it has apple so that Regina can eat it and the adults have to give it to the little blonde, that’s the sweetest thing they’ve seen her do thus far. Throughout the course of their summer, they make friendship bracelets and hit the beach and of course hang with uncle James and Emma’s cousin Nelson. The girls get matching Henna tattoos as well and make build a bears for one another. All four birthdays are celebrated at the same time though Zelena’s always tends to fall just shy of them leaving for West Hollywood. It isn’t until the ending of that particular summer for the year that Regina asks the adults if it’s okay if they camp out on the tennis court that no one uses and no one sees an issue with it, so they take an assload of sheet amongst other things and make makeshift tents and light candles and whatnot. The nights are cool and almost cold enough that it doesn’t make them miss their own winters back home. The tennis court becomes their place of venue for the remainder. All four of them gathering out there and running themselves tired before going back inside to eat and heading back out and sleeping under the stars.

By their second summer together, They end up going a little further out because they’re now older. 9, 7 and 6. The girls get their hair done by professionals and one of the hairdressers makes Regina cry because she ends up cutting her hair instead of clipping it and Zelena gets hers highlighted under the guise of her mother. Emma also gets some highlights, but they don’t really change her face much because her hair had always been multiple shades of blonde. Regina’s hair story is the most upsetting because the hairdresser cuts her near butt length hair all the way up to her shoulders and that just about annoys the hell out of Henry more than it does Cora. They have to take her for ice cream after and convince her it will grow back, which it will, if given about a year to do so. She claims to dislike hairdressers and no one can really blame her attempt to convince her otherwise. Had the woman just listened, they wouldn’t have a crying seven year old on their hands. The summers they spend together help both girls evolve in good ways. Regina becomes braver, just like Emma had initially promised to help make her and that it turn has made her try harder to make other friends outside of their usual circle of people. It’s hard but she manages to do so somehow and Emma is proud of her
for it. They call each other on the holidays and talk until their parents tell them they have to sleep, but Emma also manages to be a little bit more open herself where Brittany and Nicholas are involved. She’d told Regina at one point that Brittany didn’t like her or maybe she didn’t like Brittany and Regina had told her she had to be brave just like she made her and Emma looked at her for a moment with a scowl, but Regina just laughed and told her she had to do it.

Emma finds out once they’re back in school that Regina has to write to another person and that’s too far ahead on Regina’s bravery scale. She hates it but Cora has explained that it’s school appointed and there’s nothing they can really do to change it after Emma suggest making her the penpal that Regina should write to. Regina does cry about it because she doesn’t want Emma to think that she’s not her favourite person to write to and Emma gets upset because Regina’s upset about it and thinks that writing an angry enough letter to Gina’s school will solve the issue, but she’s not very sure how to go about writing past’ You made Gina upset cus she doesn’t wanna write to anyone but me’. Granted, it could be a strong enough point, but Emma wasn’t so sure she had enough luck in that department. Mary Margaret has a conversation with her and reminds her she’s supposed to be helping Reina be brave and Emma groans but her mother is right, so she attempts to convince her friend who is just about as hardheaded as she is, to try. Regina agrees only if Emma keeps writing to her and Emma promises without a second to spare.

The first thing they meet when they reach back home, is a letter that’s tucked between the door and the jam. Henry tugs it from the post and looks at it before handing it to his wife and sighing. He can tell by the outer appearance it meant something that would change everything because it’d done that before and they adjusted, but this time, he wasn’t so sure they could adjust to whatever change was coming their way. Cora looks at it as they all enter the house, the girls significantly tanner and happier than when they left Maine. She slices through the sealed envelope and realizes it’s been dated from at least a month back. It’s indication that she’s not only been promoted which she knew was coming, but that they also have to move… and they only had less than a week to get it done considering when the letter was sent and the time her boss had told her they were expected to begin packing. They had to leave Maine… They had to leave their parents and family and friends behind and travel all the way to…

“Florida,” she whispered and Henry took the paper from her before looking it over and shaking his head.

“Key West,” he said in defeated correction before dropping the letter on the table and putting their bags away. The girls were oblivious to it and continued to play as Cora sat with no more energy to think about it… They had to pack and they had to move all because her job was transferring her location for better marketing research on the sales in real estate.

It becomes the hardest thing in the world to explain to the girls because, Regina’s not a child that adjusts to new things very easily unless she’s sure that someone’s going to be there to help her through it and Zelena’s made friends that they really wouldn’t want to take her away from.. Amongst that is the simple fact that the children have never been more than a drive away from their grandparents and that’s just grating on Cora’s nerves, which in turn makes her overly anxious
because she doesn’t just have to tell them, she has to tell their parents and their cousins and the
school and Henry -Henry can only calm her down so much unless she has an anxiety attack over it
and says she can’t do it, but the letter is clearly telling her it’s a mandatory move and they have to do
it and in less than a week no less. So, she hesitates for the first three, tells everyone by the fourth and
her parents are already rallying around them all to help with the move because they’re positive she’s
having a mental breakdown during the whole thing. Henry’s parents also help, but since everything
is rushed, movers are called on short notice, storage lockers are booked to hold most of what they
can’t take with them and insurance companies are called with file transfers as well as schools being
contacted to print off originals to all the girls’ documents. Within the last two days, Henry’s applied
to multiple hospitals in Key West and the girls are told and Zelena’s a little bit mute about it but
Regina flat out throws a tantrum and cries because she doesn’t want to move to place where she once
again knows no one and can’t make friends or is leaving family and the few friends she has, behind.
It’s understandable especially for her, because it felt as if they made her get used to doing something
new only to take it away from her. The families have a collective final dinner and the grandparents
kiss their little ones and Regina hasn’t stopped crying since the news. Her parents don’t even try to
stop her because truth be told, they cried as well and Zelena still seems a bit indifferent, but she was
probably still shocked. Something also goes wrong within the final few hours of them moving and
that comes in the form of things they wanted to carry with them being mixed up with the things that
were intended to be in storage. It’s not noticed until it’s way too late.

Amongst the things that are left is Regina’s massive white bear from her first summer with Emma
and all the letters she’s sent back and forth with the little girl. Basically all the things she actually
cared about were left. Her mother’s important files and papers and financial reports and so long are
left. Her father’s synapsis lectures are left behind as well as his research projects for the pediatric field
are also left behind. Zelena’s letters from Auggie are left behind as well as important school
documents for them both. Everything that was supposed to meet them in Key west ends up being
switched with what was supposed to be in storage. It’s because of that whirlwind that they never did
get to write to Emma and Auggie, but Emma’s unaware of this because when she gets back home,
there’s two letters there for her and she thinks that these are letters that are just sent when they were
sent before the girls left to fly out to west Hollywood. She finds it strange when three days come and
go and there’s no letter, but her mother says that maybe something went wrong at the post office and
they check, but there’s nothing… and then those three days turn into five and then nine and then
Emma’s a little upset by that time. They haven’t called, but then again, neither has she, so she picks
up the phone and dials the number she thinks is there’s but it’s not that one, so she tries more and
more but they aren’t right.

The last thing Regina was able to do...was write a letter. She wrote one line and left teardrops that
soaked through the sensitive paper as she folded it and shoved it into the envelope. She stuck it in the
mailbox and closed it before breaking down in tears. This was the day they were leaving and on this
particular day, her letter had no mailing address, neither did it have a return address, all that was
scrawled on the front with a stamp glued to it was,

‘Emma’.

Inside it read
‘We’re moving’.

“Regina..let’s go,mija,” her father whispered with a hand to the back of her head and she shook hers before she ran up and back into their now empty and hollow home.

“I don’t wanna gooooooo!” she cried and her father broke right there with her.

“I know baby, I don’t either,”

“Then don’t!” she belts and he wishes with all of him that he just could, but they can’t.

“We can’t, mija.. Mommy’s job wants her to move,”

“But whyyyy?!”

“Because it’s a special chance for mommy to show everyone how good she is at her job,”

“But-but.. I hate it!”

“I know, she does too,”

“No she doesn’t.. She’s making us move!”

“Baby she isn’t making us move, her job is,”

“It’s not fair,” she mutters and her father picks her up. She doesn’t fight him on that.

“I know it’s not, but maybe you’ll make more friends where we’re going,”

“I don’t wanna.. I just want Emma,” she says and he nods.

“I know.. But could you try, for papa?” she shakes her head but soon directly buries it in his neck and wails. He coos her but he manages to get her out of the house, locks it and makes his way down the pathway. Henry looks back one more time and sighs so heavily that his heart breaks all over again before he swallows and turns back. He buckles Regina into her carseat and she rubs at her red eyes. Her father starts up the car as her mother looks at her sadly and they begin the drive out of Maine and towards The Florida Keys.

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Regina’s letter ends up staying in the mailbox for days and even months, the same days and months that Emma cries about not having her friend and Regina leaving her for the other friend she’s been writing to. They try calling but the number is no longer in service and they try emailing but nothing goes through. Emma doesn’t give up on writing letters either, even if they’re just piling up at the post office. Her parents don’t take it away from her because there’s something giving her hope and making her believe otherwise on what happened with Regina. She knows it isn’t school because it hasn’t started just yet, but she has no other clue what it could be. Her parents can conclude that they no longer are able to send to that particular address for whatever reason, but never assume it’s
because the family moved because they felt they’d have been told if it were that reasoning. Everything’s changed on the Mills’ side of the water and there’s no way at all that they can contact the Nolan’s because if they could, they would have and if the shortest week to pack and move wasn’t so hectic, they’d have been able to tell them. But, the letter is there and it’s there until the new family moves into the house, claiming the new mailing address, making it active again, which in turn begins a flood of letters Emma’s been sending in hopes to get a response. It’s on the family’s first day living there that the mailman shoves all the letters that have piled up into the mailbox. He’s new, because if it was Steve the older mailman, he’d have held on to them and taken them to Cora’s parents...or at least just kept them at the post office. Finally the father of the family notifies the post office that that isn’t their mail and sends it back. It starts to pile up more until one of the regular workers is back off vacation and looks at the stack strangely. She doesn’t even need to look through all of them because she gathers that these were the letters she’d overseen every time they came in for Regina.. She’s then calling Cora’s mother and the woman comes in to pick them up, noticing the first one on the top, clearly from her granddaughter...

“I didn’t know if I should mail it or leave it.. It came from the mailbox, the dad said it’s been sitting there since they moved in,”

“Then why wouldn’t they say something,” she seethes because this.. This right here before her looks very saddening and it’s aggravating her that the final letter Regina had hoped to send off, just didn’t make it. It was damaged from the rain and tears and molding slightly, but she dare not take it out of the envelope. She saw that Regina had dated it but that’s about it. No postal address or return address, almost as if it were to travel on a prayer. She looked at Emma’s letters all sealed and packed up because in Maine, no one was allowed to actually open another’s mail regardless of if they were family… she’s the looking back at Regina’s before she pulled out a pen and quickly filled it in with her own address. She put another stamp over the now faded one and paid the fee for transportation. Knowing she wasn’t allowed to ask for the postal address she’d gotten Marie to check the log and at least get the one closest to Emma’s jotted onto the letter. “It’s going to make it this time,” she whispers as she watches the woman put it in the inbox for processing. Rose then took all the letters Emma had sent and packed them into her car before driving home..she needed to call her daughter.

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It’s well into their move and over the course of the weeks of back and forth with their parents and correcting the mistakes of the move, Regina crying once again because the least she could get were her things for having to move, but even that was rough on her because she now had to wait for that entire month until they could correctly bring everything her parents had initially signed for in the first place, granted, now nothing was in storage because it didn’t make sense sending it back when they could have just used them all, which they did. It was never quite home ever again, but it was something, even if it was hot as hell that way and the crime wasn’t the best. Regina barely talked to anyone, inclusive of her sister and she barely ate anything which in turn made her smaller as the months went on. What sealed it was the fact that she was slowly beginning to forget Emma because she was forgetting everything good in her life and she fought with herself to remember. She threw tantrums when she couldn’t and cried into her pillow when she did. She didn’t have her letters to remind her, she didn’t have pictures of Aston or the pictures of her and Emma or her big white fluffy bear or the build a bear Emma made her. The only thing she had left was the friendship bracelet that ended up snapping by accident one day when her wrist got caught in a wire and that broke everything in her. Nothing was going right and nothing could go right, she’d thought... and then one night, a call came through and she answered the phone because she was old enough to do that now.
“Mills home,” she said a bit disgruntled.

“Well, that’s no way to greet your nana, now is it little star,” Rose said to her and with a child, you’d hope they perks up, but she didn’t. She was miserable and her sister just seemed indifferent to it all. She could still remember August, so why couldn’t Regina remember Emma the same way.

“Regina?” her grandmother called and her eyes glazed over. “Regina…” this time her names was being called from another direction and it was possibly her mother who asked, “Who is that on the phone, sweetie?” She just handed it off and left to go sit out on the porch in their ‘backyard’ if you could call it that. These suburban areas were more crammed than sardine cans. Cora looks back at her daughter momentarily before she answers the phone properly.

“Mills residence,” she sighs and her mother sighs.

“I take it she’s still not adjusted as yet?”

“No, she isn’t. Mother I don’t know what to do,” Cora expresses and her mother sighs again.

“Did you know about the letters?” she questions changing the subject.

“What letters?”

“The ones from Emma?”

“Well, yes we did. They’ve been sending them back and forth up until we moved, why?”

“Because, I got a call from the post office today, informing me that letters were piling up… did you know Regina wrote a letter the day you left. She put a stamp on it and dated it, but didn’t put a mailing address or the return and it just said ‘Emma’ on it… she wanted her letter to get to her…and it didn’t. Emma’s been sending letters up until just two days ago… She’s been hoping the same thing and all the letters have managed to do was pile up in the post office.. I have them here with me now, but you need to get them to Regina and she needs to write to her,”

“I know… I know… did you mail it?”

“Of course I mailed it. She hoped the letter would make it.. Now it will. I’m sending all of these when the movers carry the correct packaged down to you in Key West..whenever that may be,”

“They told us it could take a month,”

“And if it takes more?”

“I have no idea what I’ll do. I’ll have to start from scratch.. We all will. Those were specifics I’d intended to have brought here but somehow.. They-,”

“-just didn’t make it,” her mother finishes for her. Mother and daughter talk for a while longer until she’s asking for Henry and Zelena and Regina, but Regina barely says anything and only drinks juice before going to bed without so much as a morsel in her system.

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School’s been started by the time Regina blinks at the moving vans that are coming to bring more of their things for them and by school’s been started.. It’s already coming to an end for summer. She
doesn’t remember the school year and she doesn’t want to try because she’s gone the whole time without anything from Emma and even though her grandmother tried so hard to find a way to get the postal address for them, she couldn’t. Cora couldn’t either because it no longer belonged to them and that would count as intrusion if they were to do so. Now was the time she really wished she hadn’t applied for postal change so early on.

And to top that off, it’s already been a thing planned by Cora’s boss that she’s not travelling to West Hollywood anymore to scope out competition that way. Now that she’s stationed in the Keys, she has to scope out Real estate competition..in the keys. When she tells them they won’t be travelling this summer, it’s not even a surprise to Regina who’s been floating through the past year like death practically knocked her out, but Zelena’s upset and wants to travel. The most they do is make the four hour drive into Florida and drive around Miami and go to Rapid’s. Regina hates Rapid’s because she remembers that Emma and Auggie went there once. If it’s anything she can remember, it’s how much she’s really hating that state right now because that’s one memory it won’t let her forget and it’s kicking her in the head how upsetting it really is…

They’re close to attending a funeral for one of their grandparents and it’s Henry’s mother who dies in her sleep. The doctor is told by another doctor, that his mother who was a doctor, died of natural causes, which means she just slipped away. Her body was fine, but it wasn’t fine. How could you tell someone the body was fine when she clearly died and that wasn’t fine. He takes grievance time from work and Cora does the same because Henry begins snapping at everyone for everything. Zelena’s the most affected by it because somehow the little girl’s happy bubble has protected her thus far. Regina’s stoic and unaffected because the child’s been swallowed by her own depression, something her father had explained to her mother would become a thing and is a very common thing in children her age. If pain registered anymore in Regina’s mind than it needed to, she’d be worse off than necessary. Their grandfather is an absolute wreck throughout the whole planning process and his heart slowly begins to fail… he knows he’s about to drift away as well but Henry is cursing at him and calling him a coward and begging him to stay, but all he can do is smile and wipe the tears from his children’s eyes as he and his sister and brother hold on to the last of their father. Charles succumbs two weeks later just shy of his wife’s funeral and when the double coffin funeral is held. No one holds it together, especially not Henry. The roses are placed atop the coffins, Regina’s are blacker than night and she rests one atop each coffin before walking away. She sits on the pew in the front row where the family is supposed to be and when the priest begins to speak, she starts muttering ‘stop’. It gets louder and louder until she’s screaming at the priest to shut up and stop it. Then she’s running up the steps and pushing and shoving and beating at the man’s stomach for him to go away but he tries to hold the child and she fights back. She stronger than she looks, but because of her lack of food consumption, she passed out and she’s rushed to the hospital…. She’s the only one fo the three who comes back, but it takes her body three days. Three whole days and when she dreams for the first time.. All that comes to mind.. Is Emma.

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To say she had hope, would be the epitome of dumb positivity, but to say she had faith and hope and a smile.. That would just make you sad for the young girl…. She really hoped that this summer would make up for all the missed letter, but on the day they sat waiting in the airport..the only question that came from Emma in that moment was.
“Where are they?”

And that carried over into the next year, which is the exact year, Emma stopped trying. It was also the year her parents decided it was time to move, and by the time they got back home to begin planning. One more new addition was added to both households.

Nouget and Daxter
After the vacation to West Hollywood had ended and Emma had said goodbye to her cousin and her uncle at the airport, she and Auggie distracted themselves on the plane ride back by watching the cartoons the plane allowed them. To say there was any hope left in Emma’s eyes for Regina’s return, would be a lie. After this trip being the one that truly proved to her that Regina pretty much fell off the face of the earth, she quit trying to think about it and at this age, it was easier for her to do and say than if she were older, but that didn’t mean she wasn’t upset about it or even still internally hurting over it. They get back to Tennessee around the final two weeks of the month of August and when they get back it’s once again, the back to school shopping thing she’d genuinely come to like if for only one reason. She got to pick what she wore and she almost always got a new pair of boots for every year. She’d get shirts with graphics on them and her little overalls or jean shorts. Emma was never much for dresses but the few she did find to be intriguing, she wore them confidently when she tried them on. That was the one thing about Emma most envied. She was a confident little girl when it counted, but shy when it mattered and controlled when needed. She was very very aware and that was due to Regina making her that way. She’d adopted some habits from the little girl who had also adopted some of Emma’s habits as well, but Emma hadn’t seen her in so long, she doesn’t even remember how Regina is anymore. She’s not sure if Regina’s still scared or if Regina has a lot of friends or if she’s playing on her DS. Emma doesn’t know very much about what it is Regina’s personality could have come to and it saddens her because all she hopes is that Regina’s still brave. If nothing else, she just hopes the girl she considered her friend, is still brave like she promised she’d help her be.

They aren’t even in school for a week yet and already their parents want to have a talk with them. It’s the talk that has Emma confused and scrunching up her face and she’s lost.

“Moving?” she questions and her father nods.

“Moving?” Auggie repeats the question and their mother nods.

“Why?” comes from both children and the parents stutter a bit.

“Because we were getting a little tired of just staying in such a quiet place and we thought that moving would make it better,” their mother says and Emma isn’t convinced.

“But I’m still waiting on Gina’s letter,” Emma uses as ammo and both of her parents know that as much as they would have believed that about … a handful of months ago, they don’t now. No one answers that and Emma falls quiet.

“Sweetheart, this will be something that’s good for all of us because we’re going to another state and to a new house-,”
“-but I don’t want a new house. My letter from Gina isn’t here yet,” she repeats and for a split second there, her parents believe she’s still holding on. “Auggie doesn’t want a new house either, right Auggie?” she questions and her little brother shakes his head.

“Uuhh,” he agrees. “No new house. Cus I can’t carry my duckies n stuff,” he tells them and that’s a pretty good argument for his age. His mother sighs and his father scratches the back of his head.

“Yeah, and I can’t carry Aston,” Emma adds on and her parents falter even more because they didn’t expect their kids to be this argumentative on moving to a new place. They figured most children liked moving to new places but where they didn’t realize that they amongst other parents tend to screw up is solely where they just tell their child or children they’re moving and it’s for the best, not taking into consideration the long process of adjustment the child goes through. They also failed to realized that it creates unsteady relationships in the child’s life who never fully ends up understanding exactly what a relationship is supposed to be like for them. “I don’t wanna leave Aston. I don’t wanna leave Aston or my friends, or the ducks or my letter from Gina.. you can’t make me go!” she belts and it’s no surprise she’s this angry.

“Emma...” her father tries but she shuts her eyes and turns her head. “Emma,” he says much stronger, but if his daughter is anything like him, she’s stubborn as hell.

“You can’t make us go!” she belts as loud as her little voice can go, which isn’t much.

“We are going and that’s it. End of Story,” her father says.

“Beginning of Book,” Emma bites back and for a moment her father is so lost that she just screwed his brain up with some words, that he can’t even respond to that. He sighs and tries to change his tactic.

“Sweetie, why don’t you and Auggie want to move?”

“Because, I have to get my letter from Gina,” she repeats and it takes the third time of Emma saying it for it to actually be true to both her and her parents. It takes her voice cracking just lightly over the mention of it for them to understand that there is still, somewhere deep deep down in her soul, a smidgen of hope that she will get a letter from Regina. There’s still hope, even if it’s so small it can’t be seen. Something is still there, and Emma’s holding on to it like it’s a lifeline. “I can’t leave Aston, cus Aston’s gonna get sad and there’s no one to ride her or tell her she looks pretty or play with her. Auggie likes his ducks and they’re still babies and kinda blind cus they keep walking into stuff,” she informs her parents who both smile a bit weakly at her. “And I have friends... I don’t have Gina anymore, but I have other friends and I don’t wanna have to make new ones. I don’t wanna go. Auggie doesn’t neither and I don’t wanna leave all the good stuff behind,” she tells them and even though they hear her and hear every word she says, it’s her mother’s words that basically put the little girl into a shell.

“We have to move, Emma and we’re moving soon. I know you don’t want to, but there are better things out there in other states that Tennessee just doesn’t have to offer. Better schools, new friends, new adventures.. There’s a lot we want you and August to see and a lot we want you to experience, we can’t keep you on a farm forever, honey,” is what she says, but all Emma gets it’s. We’re still moving, and what you told me wasn’t enough to convince me that we should stay. Emma’s reaction is her getting up and running away and before her mother can call after her, her father stops her.

“Let her come around when she comes around,” he says.

“But what if she never comes around,”
“Then we just have to be prepared to make it up to her,” he responds and she huffs.

“She’s a child, David-,”

“-Yeah, but that doesn’t make her feelings any less valid. Sometimes we have to not make those selfish decisions all because we want better for them. Sometimes we just have to let them be and exist because not every environment that is constantly moving and whatever else, is a good one and it’s clear that even though she doesn’t want to go, she’s already accepted that she has to.. She’s upset, let her be upset because what you basically just told our nine year old is that it doesn’t matter what she says, she still has to leave happiness behind all to put a quarter on the possibility that she might get a dollar in return.”

“When are we leaving?” comes the question and it’s from August. His father turns to look at him before putting him in his lap.

“In a couple of months buddy.. Maybe by november..”

“For my birthday?” he questions confused and David shakes his head.

“It might be after your birthday, bud,” his father informs him and he nods before wriggling free and going to find his sister. When he does, she’s sniffling and rubbing at her eyes because she hates it all right that second.

“Emma?” he calls but she just sniffs even more. “Poppa said we’re leaving in a couple months,” he tells her and she mutters a

“shut up, Auggie” to him that he can’t hear. “In n’vember,” he remembers and Emma mutters again.

“Shut up, Auggie,” a little louder.

“But after my birthday-,”

“Shut up, Auggie! Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!” she spits angrily before pushing her hands out so hard that it’s crushing against her little brother’s chest and pushing him back until he stumbles and falls to the hardwood flooring of Emma’s room, with an angry thud. Auggie’s face contorts into the most painful grimace and then he’s crying and he’s not just crying, he’s hiccupsing and holding his chest and he’s coughing. Emma panics and quickly scrambles to her brother’s side and tries to rub away the pain but that doesn’t help him at all and now he’s wailing because he can’t stop crying and because he can’t stop crying it hurts his already red chest, even more. Their parents are in the room quicker than usual and her father’s skidding to a halt as her mother rushes in and hoists the crying child up and onto her hip. He’s in tears and trying to wipe away at them with the back of his hand but they just keep falling.

“Emma! What happened?”

“I didn’t mean to!” she says honestly but her mother’s not hearing that.

“What did you do to him?!”

“I- I.. didn’t mean to momma, honest,” she says and Mary Margaret is too busy rocking her wailing son to think straight. Her father comes to her and turns her around and she so afraid he might spank her or something even though he never has, she flinches.
“Baby girl, daddy’s not going to hurt you, it’s okay. I won’t get mad and I’m not going to spank you, it’s okay,” she says and Emma nods. “Now, can you tell daddy what happened?” she nods. “Good,” he coos and she hicups and sniffles before she tries to talk. Meanwhile, her mother is in the back walking around with her son and trying to no avail to get him to quiet down.

“H-he,” she tries but her breathing is staccato like. Her father rubs her sides and she continues. “He kept telling me when we were moving and I told him to shut up but, he wouldn’t and-and.. Then I got really mad and I pushed him and I hurt him and...I’m sorry daddy,” she tells her father but he shakes his head.

“It’s not me you have to apologise to, pumpkin.. Honey, bring him here for a minute,” he tells his wife and she does so. She hands their son off and David does some weird 45 degree angle rock and Auggie stops instantly. Who knew it still worked with kids his age. “Heeeey buddy,” he whispers to his son who is still hiccuping a breath but other than that he’s okay. “Emma didn’t mean it buddy.. She didn’t mean it, she was just upset,” he tells him and the little boy nods. “Does it hurt, buddy?” Another nod. “Where?” he questions and Auggie weakly points. “I think we may have to take you to the Doctor, bud.. You okay with that?” Auggie nods again and his father nods back. “Before we go.. I think Emma has something she wants to say.. Are you going to listen to her?” Another nod. Emma walks towards her brother and hugs him. He hugs her back and she cries a little.

“I’m sorry I told you to shut up, Auggie and I’m sorry I pushed you.. Did I hurt you?” Auggie nods. “Wanna push me back?” He shakes his head. “Are you still my friend?”

“yeah,” he manages weakly and Emma tries to smile. They take him to the doctor a good while later and in short form, the Doctor explains that Emma somehow managed to activate a rather bad jolt of spasms in the boy’s chest and that’s why he had the hardest time coming down.

“They’re seizure like,” he tells them and David isn’t too happy about the reference.

“That’s not sounding good at all,” he tells the Doctor who tilts his head and shrugs slightly.

“There’s technically nothing we can do to stop it, she just has to be careful when she.. plays with him or is angry at him.”

After that, Emma went straight to bed when they got home and there began the silence that befell the little girl for months.

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Throughout the few weeks between September and October, Emma barely talks to her parents, and her brother. She doesn’t really talk to her friends. She stops going outside to play both at school and at home and instead is glued to Aston more often than not. She barely participates in class and does her homework on her own. She doesn’t ask for help and she doesn’t go to them when she doesn’t understand a problem. Of course that means she gets a few red marks here and there, but for the most part, Emma is still much above water. Her parents already told them they were moving.
She hates it.

Auggie hates it.

So what’s the point. She hears Auggie and her father talking one night and Auggie is the one making the decision on where the animals are going to go. Every suggestion their parents make, the little boy shoots it down because of one reason or another. And it’s when they realize Emma isn’t there that they call and ask her for a suggestion. She just shrugs very uninterested and says “Jeremiah,” before walking away. That’s how it comes to their parents talking with the other farmer and wholeheartedly agreeing to it and that’s how Emma found the deadline for them leaving coming closer and closer without her even realizing it.

“Promise you’ll ride her everyday,” she had said to Nicholas who nods eagerly and smiles.

“I promise I’ll ride her everyday and you can call if you want and talk to her,” he offers and Emma nods.

“And you gotta brush her coat everyday,”

“Okay,” Nicholas agrees.

“And you gotta tell her she’s pretty and she’s awesome. Cus she likes hearing that,” Emma says to him and he nods again.

“Kay!” he says to Emma and then she nods before walking away from Nicholas and going to look for Aston who was already being taken to her new stall. It was the day they were saying goodbye to their animals even though they still had about three weeks left. Emma walks over to the stall and pretty much rambles on with Aston who clearly looks as though she understands nothing at all and Emma sighs because she swears Aston does and the horse proves this by finally nudging the child and basically huffing against her, causing Emma to hug her muzzle tighter and tighter. Aston then rests her chin on top of Emma’s head in a show of ruffling the child’s hair and Emma laughs. It’s the first time she’s laughed since they got back, and no one was there to witness it. Her smile fades from her face when she sees Brittany walk in. She no longer hates the name that much anymore. She and the girl end up talking and Brittany hugs the little girl and tells her that she was sorry for being so weird and strange to Emma and Emma’s face scrunches up because she can’t even remember what Brittany is on about but it doesn’t matter because the girl just hugs her again and laughs.

“Our dog had puppies... and I think you should have one,” Brittany then tells her and Emma looks so confused. She just had to give up her horse, all to get a puppy?! Still, she nods and Brittany nods. She takes the nine year old to the sectioned off piece that has the puppies and picks up one. He’s a husky, pure bred and fluffy as shit. He just looks like a ball of fur and still pink skin.

“What are you gonna name him?”

“Daxter,” Emma says distracted and Brittany nods.
The next three weeks feel like a mad dash in the eyes of her parents but in Emma’s eyes, it’s the longest three weeks of her life. The anticipation for her to hear, ‘It’s time to go’ was really wearing on her and it was apparent because she’s falling asleep in class since she can’t sleep, constantly thinking about the move and then with her puppy. She doesn’t know what’s going to happen because she and Auggie sleep with him in their beds and he’s the sweetest thing because he’s quiet and well behaved and you wouldn’t even know he was there, honestly. But then Emma thinks they’ll tell her she has to give him up to and that’s making her not sleep even more. There’s a crap ton of meetings with random people who come in and out of their home and her father has applied out of state since they had made the decision. And that was before they went on summer vacation. He hasn’t gotten word back and stresses only so much until he thinks of a plan to sustain them until he gets a job, even though they have more money than someone can blink at. When your wife and kids are trust fund babies and your own family owns a line of natural products, then yeah, money isn’t an issue. They celebrate Auggie’s birthday and David’s plan to turn their house into a rental home comes at perfect timing as he and Mary Margaret write up papers with their lawyer and put out flyers. It gets massive hits because the ranch is beautiful. It seemed that everything was falling into place perfectly and Emma hated that. It was like some fairy godmother granted her mother’s wish and ignored Emma’s. Still, Emma stuck to herself and it didn’t even look like it phased her mother or her father and she didn’t know if she should feel bad that they didn’t care or bad that she wanted them to care about how upset she was. Dinners and dinners and many going away parties within a week and Emma’s sat in her room, laying down on her bed. She pulled out some yellow paper and a pencil and began scribbling.

Hi Regina,

You may not remember, but I was your friend when we were four.. you missed when I turned eight and when I turned nine, too., but that okay cus I know you didn’t mean it. We’re moving, but momma won’t tell me where. She says it’s gonna be warm and kinda like Wahoo-Ooh! And my uncle James asked for you and Z’lena… I don’t think I spelled that right, but Auggie still talks about her and I stopped writing you letters cus I never got one back, but I wanted to write this one so if you do wanna be my friend again, you’re gonna have to write to the new one, but I dunno what it is yet.. So I’ll just keep writing so I can tell you…

I miss you, Gina :(. Please write back

Love, Emma.

Mary Margaret passes by Emma’s open door as she’s writing but doesn’t ask her what she’s doing or
why she’s crying- and that’s because she can’t even see that her nine year old is crying to begin with. She doesn’t know whether to go in or not and it’s been a good bit since she’s even tried to sit with her daughter and talk to her about the move. Daxter comes yipping into the child’s room and Emma’s focus is now on the little pup. She plays with him, but her usual genuine smile is lacking and Mary Margaret is still battling with whether or not she should intervene and try to communicate with her child. Her fear wins out and she turns and walks away.

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It’s the final week in November and it’s also the week in which they are moving. Since she’s barely talking to her mother, Emma asks her father if he can take her to the post office and without questions he agrees. Since he’s been out of work and staying home with them, he dresses her and Auggie and they head out and towards the post office. When they get there, Emma walks straight up to the counter and is stopped by their usual mail woman.

“I am so glad I caught you,” she drawls in her accent and David is just looking a bit confused.

“Ever since your wife put in for the postal address transfer we haven’t been able to get anyone to figure out how to get your mail to you and it’s been pilin’ up in the corner there,” she points behind herself. Old sourpuss has been on us about it too cus he doesn’t want none of that in here, but it’s a maildrop office and a post office, what’s he expectin’ clean walls and no files?” she shakes her head and David laughs.

“I’m sorry, Clarice-,”

“-Nonsense! It’s a doggone postal office, that’s what it’s for,”

“Thank you, then?” he tries and she shoos him.

“That’s not a problem at all, sweetheart,” she says to David before taking notice of the two little blonde children.

“Why hello there, Emma.. August, you are growing into such a handsome little thing,” she says to him and he cuts up before hiding behind his father’s legs. “How are you, Emma?”

“Good Miss Clarice. Miss Clarice?”

“Yes darlin’?”

“Can you send this to my friend please?” she questions and the old woman bends to her height before taking the letter from her.

“I most certainly can, honey. Where’s this one goin’?”

“Maine,” Emma says confidently and Clarice looks at David who isn’t the least bit surprised by it. Since Emma had given up on the whole frequent trips to the post office to send letter to Maine, thing.. No one expected her to randomly comeback one day and ask to mail just one letter to this exact same place.

“You wanna pick the stamp, sweetie?”

“No ma’am, can you just make sure she gets it, please?”

“I definitely will, sweetheart… now, how’s that precious little pup of yours?”
“He’s gettin’ real big,” she tells her.

“Clumsy too,” David says. He’s now Holding August in his arms and the boy is still cutting up and hiding.

“Yeah, Daddy and momma say he’s just like me sometimes,”

“Well, if that’s the case then he’ll be brave and smart and a lot of trouble for the girls out there,” she tells Emma who smiles softly. “Now, David you wait here and Emma, why don’t you take your brother with you to get a hot chocolate,” she says and the kids obey. David sets August down and he runs off with his sister. Clarice puts the letter in the drop box and then looks at David after bringing out their mail. “There’s a letter in there, for her.. One in particular I don’t think you should give to her until the day you’re leavin’,”

“Why?”

“Because,” she says before pulling it out and placing it atop the table. “She’s gonna need hope.” Clarice slides the letter over and David looks down at it. Before reality strikes. He nods and tucks it into his jacket pocket before thanking Clarice and taking his kids back home after they have their hot cocoas.

“Daddy?”

“Yes, sweetheart.

“Do you think, Gina’s gonna respond to this letter?” she asks and that throws him for a loop because he honestly does not know. They’re driving down the long dirt road back to their farm and David’s brain short circuits on the question.

“What do you think, sweetie?” he asks her instead and she answers quickly.

“No,” she says honestly.

“Then why write a letter, sweetie?”

“Because.. I gotta have hope.. My teacher said so. She told us what hope means and said if we want something good to happen really bad, we gotta believe and have hope that it will..even if it’s late,” Emma tells him and he nods.

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By the time the day comes for them to move, Daxter’s about a month old and he has to travel with David by plane, who has already gone ahead to meet the movers and begin setting up furniture. Emma’s not so happy about it because when she’s tired of her little tv with cartoons, she wants to snuggle her pup and now she can’t do that, and the ride is going to be so annoying because they then have to wait in the Airport for the flight and then fly over. After they say final final goodbyes, Emma’s mother tells her that her father left something under her bed for her and that she has to make sure not to leave it. She doesn’t know what it is and when she climbs under her bed and pulls it out..
It’s her name written on it, but it’s not daddy’s handwriting because she knows his handwriting. She also sees that the address says Maine and immediately her eyes go wide. When her mother yells for her to come down so they can get going, she shoves it into her pocket and runs down the stairs and into the car. She quickly straps herself in and stays silent. Once August is also strapped in and her mother starts up the car, Emma opens the envelope and looks at the handwriting. It’s definitely without a shadow of a doubt, Regina’s handwriting. Even though all it says is we’re moving.. And Emma can clearly see the date was years ago, she now knows that Regina did write to her and that the reason she couldn’t anymore was because she was moving too.. Well, she’d already moved, but still. It gave Emma hope. It gave her a bit of happiness. It gave her something because that means someone who cared enough.. mailed Regina’s letter. She says nothing to her mother about it and she doesn’t even tell Auggie, but she damn sure gonna hug her father because of it as well.

Her father loves the house, her mother… not so much. Since they hadn’t actually seen it til they arrived, it seemed so much different than the photos online, though MM supposes it really isn’t that bad when you think about it. Nothing needed renovation or fixing up or anything like that. Adding a bit of life to the walls and putting furniture in aside.. The house itself was actually rather beautiful and close to the ocean. They let their children decorate their rooms and it proves how vastly different they both are. Auggie’s room is a collection of Aqua, orange and yellow. Everything from the paintings on the walls to his sheets that had the same three colour pallette tone to most of his stuffies and his little table and bookshelf. His room was heavily carpeted and his windows were from the ceiling to the floor. Emma’s room, in that structure- was much the same but her colour choice was mauve and a dark red. Her room may have sounded disjointed but the colours matched beyond measure. A mix of the two with contrasting white sheer curtains on her tall windows with some gold roping on it made her room feel warm but still calming in its appearance. They’re out of school for one more week and only have three left until their first set of exams. Which is not surprising in the least.

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Living in Key West is beginning to feel more like a priority than a choice in the brown eyes of a little girl. At this point, it felt that anything Regina did, she did for everyone else because it made them smile and made them happy. She hated that she seemed to be the only one affected by it. She hated that her parents were okay with it and Zelena just seemed completely fine about being uprooted from their original home.

They adopt a puppy as per her sister’s request and it’s all because Zelena wants one and surprisingly, Regina does as well even though she’s very reluctant to admit it. So, they adopt one from the pound and Regina gets to name him since Zelena picked him. He’s just a regular golden retriever but he’s purebred and he fat as hell.. Not so fluffy, just chunky as crap. She names him Nougat and when her parents as her why, she simply says.
“Daddy always says awww nougat, when something bad happens.”

Her parents look at one another and then back at her and then to.. Nougat.

Oh boy.

Her father blushes as her mother holds her head. Technically Regina just named her dog every swear word her father tries not to say in the front of his girls.. Now anytime she or Zelena called the pup…. They were cursing. It’s funny every single time because Henry’s just shy of reprimanding them on swearing when Cora is on his ass about the word and he shakes his head at himself.

“No one told you to take an innocent word and turn it into a swear word,” his wife had scolded and he laughed because, his babies were cursing, but they just kept calling their puppy Fuck. Legitimately his new name would be Fuck, every single time they called him. And don’t let them say “awwww Nougat because it was game over.

Their parents also take notice that Zelena isn’t playing with Nougat that much or at all for that matter and when they ask her why. It’s pretty clear. Her little sister becomes very attached to him and bathes him every two days, she brushes him and feeds him and plays in the backyard with him.. She actually laughs when she’s with the pup and Zelena just says. “Nougat makes Regina happy and I don’t want her to be sad anymore because she still misses Emma. I’m gonna let her keep him, come Christmas.” Her maturity level stuns them into speechlessness.

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When Regina thinks all is starting to get better for her, it gets worse for her sister and that comes in the form of a breakdown.. During a baking session with their mother. In that family, they baked a certain way and when they backed, they baked with their grandmother’s. One is dead and the other is a handful of states away. It’s not the same and that’s what Zelena belts to her mother. That it really and truly is “-NOT THE SAME!” and no one can blame her.. Her bubble finally popped.

“I wanna go home!” she cries and it takes her mother’s arms around her and Nougat trying to lick her face for her to stop. What truly stops the little redhead from losing it is when Regina does something she hasn’t done since she was two. She stretches out her hand and puts it to her sister’s lips and says.

“No cry.” It does the job because Zelena begins laughing and then she’s hugging Regina and Nougat’s licking her face again and Cora doesn’t understand but she’s happy her girls know how to calm one another down.

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Since they’re in school, it only seemed fitting that Exams were a thing for them and it was the final set for the year because - who the heck always started a new school year in September anyway? Everywhere apparently. Zelena and Regina realize that their father’s colleague lives about ten minutes away if they drove by car and that his two children attended their school. Only thing is, neither she or Zelena wanted to get to know them. Their father didn’t push and when Mikael asked for them, he’d simply made up an excuse and lie after lie because he wasn’t about to push his daughters to meet people they weren’t comfortable with. Zelena did end up taking her sport of choice back up because Mary Immaculate Star of the Sea offered it at both their junior and senior high school. Technically the whole academy started from first grade onward, but the girls weren’t aware of this, they were too busy complaining about how long the school name was, and when it’s exam week and she and Zelena are basically on autopilot with their mother overseeing their study times and making sure they get to school on time and have eaten, the girls just end up taking their tests and not really doing much else..

It’s damn near Christmas and that means many things. Cora’s parents are coming down. The girls are screaming and Happy and Nougat is yipping because that’s a thing he does. Zelena seems to be so much more alive than Regina does at this point and that’s quite possibly due to the fact that she got her grandmother. At least for the Christmas holiday. Christmas shopping is done and all the good things are wrapped up and hidden away, but the most precious of the cargo are Regina’s letters. All of them. Cora’s mother hands her the box and they all just look through the stack and stacks of letters even up to the most recently dated one. Henry and Cora make it a mission to unwrap them from the sealed packaging and rewrapping them in something that will allow Regina access to them anytime she needed it.

Christmas at the Nolan’s is spent without the in-laws and pretty much without friends as the couple had turned down invitation after invitation to go to dinners on claim that they were still settling in which was partially true but it was mostly because of another reason. Their kids and one word. Hesitant. Emma and August had both already taken their tests and though they didn’t pass with their usual high scoring, they still maintained rather good grades and were rewarded with ice cream for having to do it on such short notice with such a janky move. From Tennessee all the way out to wherever the hell they were.

Christmas still turns out to be a lot of cooking for both families and it has laughs and jokes and happiness but then no one notices when Regina slips away in the Mills home and goes in search of Nougat because she just wanted to play with him. He’s officially a month and a half. Really only a month in their care, but a month and a half considering when they adopted him he was already two weeks old. When she finds him, she straps his collar on him and decides to take him for a walk. She
begins in the backyard because that’s the only place she’s really supposed to wander around when Nougat was in her care and the simple fact that she was nine and her father didn’t really like the congested feeling of the neighbourhood. After her mind makes her feel even more adventurous and walking around in the ‘backyard’ becomes too boring, Regina walks Nougat out front and down the little rise of the carport and then she’s unlatching the gate and going for a stroll with her dog who is about as rambunctious as a pack of wolves. She skips down the pathway with Nougat’s happy, chunky self and somehow through all of the pups skittering and skirting and hopping around, he gets loose from his leash and darts off into a blind sprint for somewhere.

“Nougat!” she yells but the puppy is going as fast as his pudgy little feet can carry him. “Nouuuuuuuugaaaaaaat!” Regina yells after him, but it falls on deaf ears.

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“Where’s my little stars,” their grandmother calls and Zelena comes, but Regina doesn’t and that’s surprising.” Zelena, where’s your sister?” she questions and Zelena shrugs.

“I dunno, she went to go play with Nougat outside, I think,” she answers and when her father checks and she’s nowhere to be seen, he panics.

“She’s missing!” he says loudly and Cora bolts from her chair. The adults scramble around in order to go find this missing little girl and Zelena is told to stay there with her grandmother Maria. She obeys and as the other three, dash from the house, her grandmother merely says.

“How about we go bake some cookies for when they come back,” because it’s the easiest way of telling her, they’ll find her. Zelena nods and they head into the kitchen.

With father, daughter and son in law screaming her name and yelling for her, they find it’s harder than it appears when trying to not only spot your child, but ensure not to instill panic in your neighbours that someone had possibly kidnapped her. Henry goes one way with Cora and his her father heads in the next direction. Santiago ends up through a street that’s just behind theirs when he spots a small figure that looks conveniently enough like his little granddaughter.

“Regina!” he calls to her and she can’t quite hear him. So he yells louder.

“REGINA!” he shouts and some sound makes it to the little girl who spins around and it’s clear she’s crying. She, without thought, runs to her abuelo and continues to cry. He picks her up and tries to calm her down but she’s hysterical and scared and Nougat and all the things bad and she won’t stop crying. All she knows is that Nougat is too far for her to go after him, but he’s still in eyesight, so her grandfather walks with her in his arms and the minute he finds a safe distance, he does a specific whistles and hand motion and Nougat comes sprinting.

“He was just following his nose,” her grandfather tells her. “He must’ve have sensed another animal in the area..” he ends before he’d picking Nougat up as well and Regina latches on to the fat little dough ball of cute with all her might.

“I-I’m sorry, grampa,” she whimpers and he shushes her.

“No, sweetie, it’s okay, but you can’t go wandering off like that.. You had your mommy and daddy
worried sick about you..”

“They’re gonna be mad,”

“Maybe a little, but they love you so much that none of that will matter,”

“Really?”

“You know it. Does Grandpa ever lie?” she shakes her head and he kisses her cheek. “Okay, so no more tears, your pretty little face is turning all red.

True to what was said, her parents cried more that they had her then got angry that she wandered off even though she wasn’t supposed to. Her grandfather Santiago tells her they’ll take Nougat for a walk after dinner and presents, and Regina agrees. They do gifts and one by one everyone opens their things and goes through them. The girls get more charms for their bracelets and that was a thing that had started since they were born. Every year one of their grandparents would buy them both a charm to add on to their bracelets and these ones were the initials of their recently deceased grandparents. Zelena gets some games, clothes, shoes and a little science kit that’s child safe and proven to be something that children actually enjoy using. Their parents didn’t get each other anything because they weren’t very big on gifts, but they made sure their girls understood that good attitudes and positive behaviour amongst other things such as love, would warrant them to have gifts.

Regina gets the gift of Nougat.. and that one giant box that’s been sitting in the corner and looking menacing as heck. She tries to push it but it’s heavy until she gets it off of some weird hook thing it was on. She pushes the box and it slides on the hardwood flooring and right onto the carpet. Regina flops ungracefully onto her bottom and then crosses her legs. Everyone sitting around her is watching and she really doesn’t know what the hell it is until she looks at who it’s from.

To: Gina

From: Emma

Is what it says and her little eyes open wide for a split second. She looks up at everyone who is looking back at her and either smiling or trying to tell her to open it with their eyes. She looks back at the box and then rips away at the wrapping, slowly. She’s met with this beautiful leather box with a latch and removes the latch before lifting the top and letting it drop back. It’s letters upon letters, nearly brimming over the box and they’re all in order from oldest to most recent. Regina reaches down and just ends up grabbing a random one before picking it up. Before anyone knows what’s happening, the little girl’s hands drop quickly and she’s up and running off and up the stairs and slamming the room door shut.

Zelena is the first to react and somehow the adults understand that they should just stay there and let her deal with it, even if she is only eleven. She’s proven she understands her little sister a lot better than anyone really, so when she heads upstairs and opens Regina’s bedroom door without a second thought and finds her little sister under a blanket, in a ball with her little light on to read the letter. She knows Regina’s okay, she just wanted privacy.
The letter in question was as said, a random one and it just happened to be a random one where Emma’s talking about Brittany and Nicholas and how she doesn’t like Brittny’s name cus it sounds weird and Brittany’s weird and she’s tall and too old to be Emma’s friend. It’s clear she tries drawing them both but stick figures and pretty generic yellow hair to represent blonde and blue to represent blue eyes was a thing.

“Gina.. can I come under?” Zelena asks and without question Regina lets her in. They bungle together and read the letter together and Regina is asked a series of questions by her sister all along the lines of, are you happy? How many letters do you think Emma sent? Do you think she got your letter? and so on. Most, her little sister couldn’t handle but what she could, she answered as best as possible and that was good enough for Zelena. “Come on.. We gotta go read the rest and see what all the cool stuff is Emma did.”

“Lena?”

“Yeah?”

“Do you know how they got here?” Zelena shakes her head.

“Nuhuh.. Maybe nana brought em,” she offers as a choice and Regina thinks that’s logical because when she looks at the mailing address, it’s their old address.. Something she knows now and hates that she didn’t know it then.

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“Little stars,” their grandmother says with a smile and both her granddaughters are smiling, Regina’s smile is even more radiant and that’s because the only thing going through her head is...

*Emma wrote to me.. Emma wrote to me.*

She climbs into their father’s lap and Zelena climbs onto their mother’s and all seems well and happy and even though the letter are in the other room still surrounded by a bunch of wrapping paper and presents scattered over the floor, the adults are just happy that the girls are okay and happy and healthy, because the talk they were having before they came down, came in the form of the possibility that maybe they should just move back.. But after that.. They figured that hope and a bit of favour still resided in heaven for them.

When they go to eat, it’s the moment where everyone’s surprised, even Zelena and it’s not for anything other than Regina whispers,

“Emma wrote to me,” and a fork clatters on the plate because Regina has barely said a full sentence with that much life since they moved. She repeats it a little louder. “Emma wrote to me!” and then it comes, the smile that’s so bright and so full of life her parents are in awe and directly after comes laughter and this laughter is from deep within this child’s soul where she cried so loud for so many nights that she’d made herself sick. She’s laughing and that laughter, is the highlight of everyone’s
day.

It’s time to walk Nougat and as promised, Regina’s grandfather is going with her. They put his leash on and everything, but the little bundle of energy won’t keep still and he keeps tugging the nine year old in one particular direction, the exact same direction he went in earlier.

“Following your nose,” she comments and he yips cus he does that.

Emma’s in her own yard playing with Daxter and Auggie and after such a quiet family dinner they’d all went out on their front porch and, just to suck up some of the nice and fresh ocean breeze. Auggie was riding around on his bike and Daxter was busy playing tug-o-war with Emma...that was until something just made the dog break away from her and haul ass out the yard.

“How in the hell did she get this fast.. I need to sign her up for track n field, goddamn.

Nougat breaks free of his leash and he’s off again and so is Regina.

“NOUGAT!” she yells for the pup who skirts slightly and stops for a second, but then turns around and begins again,

“Jesus Christ on a bike, not again,” her grandfather muttered. “REGINA!” he yells for his little star and she’s so concerned about Nougat, she doesn’t listen to him.

“NOUGAT!”

“REGINA!”

“DAXTER!”

“EMMA!”

All these names are being yelled and all the pups are doing is running closer and closer until they somehow find one another and collide. Daxter tackles Nougat and they tumble over in playful fighting. Regina arrives at the scene of the crime first.

“Nougat! Stop that! It’s not nice!” she scolds the pup but he’s having too much fun with his new friend that he doesn’t care.
“Daxter!,” Emma says sternly and the pup stops. Daxter huffs and Nougat pouts but tries to get him to play again, but then Regina yells his name.

“NOUGAT! Stop it!” he whimpers so scared that she feels a little bad for him. “Come here,” she commands and he obeys but he’s whimpering and she’s almost positive she’s making him cry. He’s being picked up and looked over.

“Regina!” her grandfather calls after her.

“Emma!” her parents yell after her.

Both little girls look up at the exact same time and it’s as if time freezes for them. There’s silence and shock as the adults and children come face to face. Santiago can’t quite remember where he knows these people from, but it’s not until he looks down at the little girl with the piercing green eyes and blonde hair that he gets it and his heart speeds up with something akin to… fear and happiness all in one go that he’s pulling out his phone and dialling his daughter’s number,

“Hello,”

“You need to come to the street one corner over, right now. And bring everyone,” he says.

“Daddy, why?” Cora questions and Santiago sighs almost happily.

“Because-”

“Emma?..”

“...Gina?”
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

In the next chapter, the girls are either going to be fourteen or fifteen. Either way, if they end up being fifteen, I'll do a little sum sum on their fourteenth years.

There was the blatant screech of a car and doors opening and shutting rather quickly. Eyes were scanning the streets until they settled on the group of individuals taking up the sidewalk. Cora is the first to spot the pair of people and take notice that it looks like a stand off. It looks like someone’s waiting for someone else to just... say something or do something, and then there’s Santiago off at the side just watching with interest in his eyes and almost smiling at the situation. Henry spots the group afterwards and his eyes don’t shy from widening at the sight before him. Cora’s mother-Rose, just stands there because this is a thing that’s happening. She and Santiago had never met Emma or Auggie in person, but now that she’s come closer and closer, the pictures she’s seen of the children, don’t do them and their beautiful features justice. Emma’s eyes are wider, more vibrant... at least, now they are. Had she seen them months ago, Emma’s usual dark sea green was faded and powder blue tinted in hue. Auggie is slightly taller and thinner but his eyes are also sparked in happiness, bright beyond imagination and his face is rosier than any camera could genuinely pick up on.

“Regina,” Cora calls in her usual light tone, but her child doesn’t hear her, she’s still staring at Emma as if she weren’t real and Emma was doing much the same. “Regina,” she calls again and she sees the smallest bit of recognition when Regina’s small frame shivers slightly and her head dips almost imperceptibly in a nod like fashion. “Regina,” she now calls and this time, something snaps in the child’s head and her head swings around, at the same time, it jolts Nougat’s behaviour and he wiggles free of her before hopping out of her arms and dashing over to Daxter. He tackles the older pup and they’re back at it, playing like nothing ever happened and as if they’d been friends for years. Regina’s so lost on who to respond to first that her head swings back and forth between her mother and her pup, but both she and her mother are distracted when a flurry of red curls zooms past and there is shouting of,

“EMMA?” in question. The figure stands before the little blonde girl who has finally tore her attention away from Regina and is now looking at the taller figure before her. It’s Zelena and her face is beaming, her smile is beyond bright and she’s clearly stuck between elated and shock. “You moved!” she says with a grin and Emma nods, almost dumbly. “When?” she questions and Emma shrugs uneasily because she really doesn’t know. Zelena nods like she gets it and then her head
moves around Emma’s body. Emma feels arms come up around her and then arms are holding her tight. “Gina’s gonna be so glad you’re back!” she says in an excited whisper and Emma nearly smiles, just nearly. Zelena hugs her tightly once more before she spots Auggie and that’s pretty much it for Emma. She leaves the group of people to go and talk to the little boy who jumps up and down excitedly when she runs over to greet him and they’re off in their own conversation.

“Emma,” someone says and no one’s really sure who says it considering it’s at least six adults and two very mute little girls. Emma and Regina both take into account the way their parents and Regina’s grandparents are coming closer, but they’re doing it so slowly, almost as if they expect the girls to blow up or something. “Emma,” the voice calls again and when Emma tears her attention away from most of the group, her ears have her head following the voice… it’s her mother’s and her mother looks fearful, not for herself but for her daughter. “Are you okay, sweetheart?” she questions and Emma swallows but she nods.

“yes, momma,” she says quietly and her mother inhales deeply before she nods back. Emma’s head turns back, slowly and then her eyes are meeting Regina’s again, just as her head tilts the same way. “It’s…Gina,” she concludes oddly and her voice sounds dead. It sounds, lifeless, but her eyes are gleaming as if there’s an inner war that has her fighting which emotion to show.

“It is,” her mother agrees with a nod, but Emma is still staring at the little brunette girl before her. “It’s……..Gina,” she repeats, this time a bit more drawn out but this time her father speaks.

“It is, Regina, sweetheart… she’s real,” he says because he figures it’s something she needs to hear, and in all honesty, she does need to hear it because in Emma’s mind, she doesn’t believe it’s real. No one could blame her, or Regina for that matter. Her father kneels down and whispers something in her ear and Emma nods, still staring at Regina. He pats her back and she swallows before her feet begin to move, and they move slowly because Emma’s so hesitant to get closer and fear of it all being unreal, comes to life once more. But, as she gets closer and closer and Regina’s image doesn’t fade, but rather, the fear in her eyes becomes more apparent. Emma halts when she thinks she’s close enough and her hand comes up.

She waves. Then, she speaks.

“Hi, Gina,” she says as confidently as she can and Regina’s eyes dip shut.

She doesn’t respond. She can’t respond- because-because-

She’s crying and she’s crying silently, but the tears that begin to stream out of her eyes make it obvious that she’s distraught. She’s then shaking her head and running, not knowing where she’s going, but hoping it’s somewhere else. As she runs, she buckles into something, or rather, someone and it’s her grandfather, Santiago. He stops her and now he’s holding her and the second he’s holding her, she’s wailing, loudly.

“SHE’S NOT REAL!” Regina belts and hiccups and just about does everything a distraught child would.

“Little star, she is real-,”

“-NO SHE ISN’T! NOT REAL! NOT REAL- I WANT MY EMMA!” she yells out loud and Emma’s face falls into a painful expression as Regina’s grandfather continues to talk to her.
“Regina, she *is* real, look,” he tells her but she buries her face into his neck and shakes her head.

“Shesnotmyemma,” the little girl mutters all in one breath, muffled and teary eyed.

“She is your Emma. You just have to look, little star. Look,” he urges and she continues to shake her head, so he takes her to the side and he begins whispering words into her ear that have her either nodding or shaking her head.

“Hey, Em,” the young girl’s father whispers and she looks at him.

“yes, daddy?” she questions even though she’s still clearly hurt. He rubs the top of her head and smiles a bit.

“Why don’t you go ahead and prove to Regina it’s really you,” he says to her and she’s lost, because-

“how, do I do that?”

“I think you know,” he says before winking at her and giving her a light push in the back. She stumbles forward ever so slightly, but regains her composure and then she’s walking over to Santiago who is now setting a still sniffing Regina down. As he watches her wipe away at her eyes and hiccup a breath, Emma wraps her arms around the little girl and that takes Regina by surprise because she gasps lightly until she hears the words.

“I missed you, Gina,” and those are the words that wreck the little brunette all over again because she begins to cry again, but she’s not crying from anger, she’s crying from joy and fear and everything else. Emma just smiles with tears in her eyes and hugs her tighter. “It’s okay, Gina.. it’s okay.” she tells her and Regina keeps crying.

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After that whole ordeal with tears and shouting and near awkward reunions, they are back at the Mills’ home. August and Zelena are off in the ‘backyard’ playing together like nothing ever happened and as they do that, Zelena’s asking him about his birthday and how he spent it and he tells her about the party they had and whatnot. He asks Zelena about soccer and she tells him that she misses her soccer team back in Maine, but that this new one-

“-isn’t so bad, either,” and he laughs even though he might not fully get it. Zelena then takes August upstairs in order to get her soccer ball and show him all the new things she didn’t get to all those years ago. He gets distracted by how large and spacious her room is, even though his is much the same. Zelena’s room is White, sky blue and black. It’s truly a beautiful room and it remains clean-solely because both she and Regina were raised to keep them that way. There’s plastic bins that have been labelled that wrap around the underpart of her bed and she shows Auggie what each of them holds. Some hold shoes, usually her dirty ones that she kicks the ball around in or helps out when her dad does the lawn and other’s hold books and papers and drawings. Some are empty and others just have weird knick-knacks and such that she’d collected. He sees that the first letter he and Emma had sent to the girls was amongst the collectibles Zelena had. He pulls it out and smiles cheekily at her because it’s still in the envelope and still is as crisp as the day they mailed it. Zelena has to pull Auggie away from her bed so that they can go and kick around the soccer ball and he’s all for it,
except, he’s not really good at it, so she offers to teach him how to play and he grins with excitement at that.

As Regina and Emma sit in the living room where all the adults are pretty much in and out, trying not to hover but their parents are watching them with keen eyes and hesitancy as they talk, no one can really hear what the girls are saying to one another as they do so. Regina and Emma talk, but their talk is borne of hesitancy on Regina’s behalf. Emma tries to ask her friend questions and Regina tries to respond, but she’s so scared Emma will just vanish from sight that she doesn’t really tell her much, so, Emma decides to change the topic. She sees that Regina had just barely gotten into the box and decides to focus on that. It becomes about all the letters Emma wrote.

“Gina?” she calls and the little girl looks at her. Even if she doesn’t verbally respond to her, it’s good to know she acknowledges her presence. “Can we look at the letters?” she questions and Regina nods a bit hesitant. Emma smiles a bit before she gets up and drags the box over and she can tell Regina’s still very iffy about the situation so she searches through all of the letters and finds the most recent one and gives it to Regina. “That one, I wrote before we moved cus I was upset and I didn’t get a letter back and I missed you and stuff...read it,” she says to her and Regina slowly opens the letter. As the little brunette’s brown eyes scan the parchment, she seems, unaffected until Regina drops the letter and tackles Emma with a hug. She squeezes onto the girl so tightly that Emma almost can’t breathe, but she takes it because Regina hasn’t hugged her in years.

“I’m always your friend, Emma,” she admits to the girl and Emma hugs her back.

“Forever?”

“Forever and Ever,” she promises and Emma hugs her tighter,

“Forever and ever,” Emma agrees.

After Regina reads it again, and Emma explains things to her a bit more in detail as best a nine year old could, they began to go through more of the letters and it was a hell of a lot, which meant they definitely wouldn’t finish it by the night end. Regina’s hesitancy had slowly started to cease and as she and Emma continued to talk, she’d gotten much more comfortable with the blonde once again. Soon, Emma and Regina were laughing at silly things and some of the things Emma had tried to draw when it came to the letter, but since she herself didn’t know what half the things were it was they were looking at, she simply explained the ones she knew for a fact were very obvious..

“This one’s my favourite,” the blonde admits as she rests one of the many letters down in her lap. The picture was one Emma had drawn with a rather steady hand. It took up about half the paper because all Emma scribbled was,

‘Look Gina’

“Why?” Regina queries and it’s because she’s read the words and is looking at the picture, but she doesn’t know who in the heck this brown haired big brown eyed person is with such a goofy looking smile on their face.

“Cus, I saw someone who looked like you and I wanted to draw her cus.. She’s pretty like you, but you’re prettier,” Emma tells her as if she should know. So now Regina’s confused because she has no clue if Emma is saying Look Gina! Or Look, Gina! In all honesty her name could be Regina too, but in a nine year old’s mind, all she wanted to know was why she got a picture of someone else in her letter.
“Is she your friend too?” Regina then asks and Emma shakes her head quickly.

“Nope, I dunno who she is, but she looked like you and I wanted you to see cus I didn’t have a camera- but now I don’t need one cus I have you!” she admits to her friend and Regina smiles at her. Regina leans over and kisses Emma’s cheek and Emma blushes.

“I have you too,” she admits and Emma nods surely.

“I got really good at drawing too, wanna see?” Emma questions hopeful and Regina nods eagerly. They both get up and Emma follows a much happier Regina up the stairs and into her room.

“I have paper and crayons in my room!” Regina tells her with excitement as she abruptly stops on the stairs.

“Ohhh! Do you have markers, too?” Emma questions as she stops as well. She’s beaming up at the girl who she’s just realizing is much shorter than she is at this age.

“Uuhh! Aaaand my nana got me twisty yarn,” she informs her and Emma’s head tilts.

“What’s that?”

“I dunno, but it’s really cool and you can make it look like anything,” Regina tells her with a distant shrug. Emma shrugs as well but her smile doesn’t fade.

“Cool!” she finally answers and they continue up the staircase.

Their parents continue to watch until the girls disappear from view and Cora gets up before she calls for Mary Margaret to follow. They leave their husbands talking loudly about the game and Cora’s parents are all mushy in the corner and no matter how old she gets, it will never not gross the young woman out. If she could tell them to ‘get a room’ she would but then she’s sure her mother would smack her upside the head and remind her that’s how she was conceived...not that she’d ever forgotten after her father gave her the talk.

“They’re happy,” is the only thing she can say in the moment as she makes her way into the kitchen and watches Cora pull a pie she’d made earlier, from the freezer. It’s cherry cheesecake and it’s always a favourite amongst her family. Granted, she would’ve loved to make something traditional form both her and Henry’s heritages, but most desserts were fried and so sweet and sugary that she was positive the children wouldn’t sleep if they had any. Cora hums and smiles.

“Still got that country girl accent, I see,” she teases and MM blushes. Cora shakes her head with a smirk and continues to speak. “They are… Regina hasn’t smiled like this since we moved- granted, she hasn’t smiled at all until today.. This is good for her-good for Emma, I think,” she admits and Mary Margaret smiles.

“I know it’s good for them.. It’s good for all of them. Emma’s been miserable and so has August-,”

“- I couldn’t very well say the same for Zelena. Somehow, she went… unaffected, if you’d call it that. Either that or she was in some protective bubble that didn’t allow it to register in her mind that she’d left friends behind- then again.. Zelena’s always been a charismatic child and Regina is more reserved of the two of them,”

“I’d say it was something she got from you,” MM commented and Cora tilted her head in acknowledgment as her eyes dipped shut in thought.

“I don’t think I could deny that if I tried,” she said and they both share a soft smile. “I’m hoping we
don’t move again in the next few years,” she says after a beat of silence and MM nods.

“I’m hoping the same.. For David and me both. It took them almost up until the day we actually did move to get used to the idea of moving and Emma wouldn’t talk to me- she wouldn’t talk to her father. She even stopped talking to August and her friends at school and we didn’t realize it had affected her this much up until we pulled them from school a week before the move.” Cora is silent on that one and her face is clearly pinched into hurt for the woman.

“I’m sorry to hear that.. Sad to admit that we went through the same thing with Regina.. Regina never got used to it. She never got used to the idea of it, she never got used to the possibility of it and even after it had happened, she just shut down…. and Zelena.. like I said, seemed unaffected. When I say this is the first time my daughter has smiled in nearly two years and some- this is the first time I’ve seen the looks of depression and solid death drift from her eyes. Henry had to mentally evaluate her at one point and she’s been diagnosed with an acute case of depression.” MM sighs at those words.

“Hopefully it all goes away now-,” she begins and Cora interrupts with a much better statement.

“- I think most of it already has.. All she’s ever wanted was the one true friend she has had and now that she has her back- even though she’s fearful Emma may disappear again, she’s willing to be happy that she’s here now. But I don’t ever think Regina will completely let go of the fear of abandonment even though Emma never abandoned her to begin with..”

“We just have to do everything in our power to make sure that it never happens again.. To any of them,”

“Agreed,” Cora nods before she sets the pie down and pulls a cannister from the fridge. She slides it over to Mary Margaret and tilts her head at the woman in gesture that she top off the pie. Mary Margaret nods with a grin and shakes the can before swirling the fluffy, frothed and sweetened cream base atop the pie and then squirting some into her mouth as well.

“Ever the child,” Cora comments with a smirk.

“Here’s to never growin’ too old too fast,” she says with a head dip and Cora can’t not smile at that.

“To not getting too old too fast,” she repeats before grabbing a snack of plates a pie knife and some spoons. Mary Margaret grabs the pie and they head back into the living room before they set it down and Cora lets Henry and David divvy up on the pie. They decide they’ll call the kids later because they’re about to drink beer and wine and very alcoholic eggnog, something Cora and Henry were adamant about not doing in the front of their children so often. Mary Margaret and David were much the same considering how easily it affect both their systems after a few swigs.

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“Emma?” Regina calls quietly and waits for the girl to respond to her. She sat on her room floor in the dimly illuminated room because she’s always been too short to push the switch all the way up-digging through her box of art supplies. Emma is sat with her legs dangling from Regina’s bed and lying on her back as she stares at the ceiling

“Yes, Gina?” she answers as she sits up and uses her hands to stable herself.
“Did you really miss me?” she questions and even for her age, the question holds its own weight and density and a heaviness that hits Emma’s core like a bullet. Her eyes never leave the box that she should still be searching through but since she’s stopped, the room has fallen even more silent than normal. Emma nods a bit oddly, almost as if out of breath from the sheer thought of lying to Regina, which she wasn’t about to do.

“I missed you everyday,” she tells her friend and Regina sighs. It’s content and granted, she may not realize what that means just yet, but something triggers off in her mind that it’s a good thing for her. She puts the paper that she’d been holding onto, down and climbs onto her bed where Emma is. Emma looks hesitant and Regina looks, strong almost. Regina leans in and instead of kissing her friend on the cheek. She kisses Emma on the lips and neither knowing the depth of what kissing someone on the lips meant, after pulling away, she says,

“Always miss me, cus I’ll always miss you,” and that’s the sentence that has Emma smiling at her like she was the light that lit up the entire room, making it feel brighter, even when it wasn’t.

The children are summoned downstairs not too long after and they are given pie, or, what’s left of the pie anyway. It is a lot for them to finish.. If you asked their parents at least, but in their eyes, it was barely enough to split between the four of them and truth be told- it probably was. But, they eat the pie and they enjoy it and there’s no evidence of anything alcoholic in the room because adults have disposed of such things, so there is no possibility of a repeat of last year’s accidental consumption of eggnog by Zelena who had later given some to Regina and had made it clearly obvious their usual come up on understanding things had depleted severely. After pie, David makes a run back home to pick up a few things and it’s those few things that come at the request that they all stay over for that Christmas evening from grandparents and children- mostly the kids and somehow, they make it so that everyone can sleep within the house comfortably. The kids all bunk in the living room with the tv and have massive blankies, pillows and sheets out and the adults take the kids’ rooms. Regina and Zelena’s grandparents do in essence have a room they can stay in, but for some odd reason, they decide to sleep in Regina’s bedroom and tell the Nolan’s to sleep in theirs. It’s shot down as the Nolan’s just claim Zelena’s room, the one that actually faces the backyard instead of the side and front like Regina’s does and actually gets a lot more natural air and wind than Regina’s does as well. The kids end up staying up late because it’s Christmas break and Regina guides Emma into the ‘backyard’ where there’s a swing set up, after they believe their parents to be asleep. It’s no surprise that they both can fit into the swing. Emma asks Regina about living in Key West and which school she goes to and when Regina tells her, Emma brightens at the words. She then tells her she goes to the exact same school because her parents couldn’t find another one that was as good as the reviews said. She doesn’t know what a review is but her parents said it was a pretty good school and close to home. Emma holds onto Regina’s hand and tells her that-

“- maybe if we wish really hard.. me and you can be in the same class.” Regina smiles and nods because-

“-that would be the best thing ever!”

Regina’s parents are watching the exchange between the two girls from the window and that happens because their room also faces the ‘backyard’. Cora has her hands on the window sill and her eyes settle in content as she watches them swing back and forth on the swing and clearly they’re giggling because she sees flashes of white from their teeth even if the Christmas night sky is a bit dim. Henry comes up behind her and holds her. He holds her tightly and she relaxes in his arms because it’s been a whirlwind and then some. It’s been depression and then some and then it’s been a huge dose of reality and reunions and then some. They’d barely gotten to reacquaint themselves with
the Nolan’s because everyone was so focused on Emma and Regina’s dynamic and Zelena and Auggie’s instant happiness that seemed to go so unaffected once they met again. She knows once the high has disappeared and the holiday is over and life settles itself, they need to do their own reuniting and so much more. She knows it will be more and it’ll be more for her daughters, Emma and Auggie. She knows they won’t want to spend any time apart if they can afford it and that these children would all turn into that group that had just kept to themselves and one another like they had so many summers ago. All she can hope is that history doesn’t repeat itself and that she doesn’t get a call telling her she has to pack up and go again.

“Stop thinking so hard. Nothing’s going to go wrong,” he tells her that seems to take her out of her mind for a moment. “Trust me. Nothing’s going to happen to them. I think this is where we stay.. For good.”

“We thought the same thing about Maine,” she argues and he smirks.

“We were both born in Maine. It’s a given that we’d think that, but opportunities and changes in economy are a thing. Job offers and transfers increase around certain times of the year which is why your boss expected you to move.. even if the market goes down here, it’s still very expensive and high priced and on a lot of people’s retirement lists. Even if it is in Boca and not Key West,” he continues and Cora rolls her eyes.

“For a pediatrician, you sure do know more about my field of work than you led on,”

“I just play dumb,” he admits with a cheeky smile. “It seems they weren’t meant to be apart,” he says after a beat and in that moment, everything they were talking about before, goes out her mind and her focus shifts. She hums but something’s killing her inside and she has no idea what it could be, but she sinks into the loving arms of her husband just a little more and allows it to envelope her. She won’t try figuring it out tonight and just lets him usher her back to bed.

Mary Margaret and David are laying in Zelena’s room, and looking around- it’s a little more mature than they expected but she was eleven so, it really shouldn’t have surprised them all that much. The bed in her room can fit both of them comfortably, but as they lay there, Mary Margaret speaks out. She asks David what he thinks about the move and he tells her that at first, he really wasn’t for it, even though they’d agreed to it. He wasn’t, for the simple fact that their children- especially Emma, were miserable. She sighs and turns on her side and asks him why he said nothing and he looks back at her with innocence in his eyes and says it’s because she’s been saying she wanted to leave Tennessee for ages and he figured that at some point in time that maybe the kids would get over it, but it’s as if, the one thing they dreaded, was the one thing that gave them back all the things they cried about not having and that was their friends and the happiness that these random kids had magically created for them.

“I guess things do happen for a reason then,” she says and he nods.

“They do… they have to, to get us where we need to be.”

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Out of everyone who ends up all cuddled and comfy, Daxter and Nougat are the most comfortable out of everyone. They’re both sleeping in Nougat’s bed and Daxter is pretty much wrapped around the little pup- protective of him in every way shape and form. Nougat snores a little and Daxter pretty
much growls in his sleep. It’s cute because they mimic Emma and Regina even though Regina’s older than Emma by a good handful of weeks, Emma protects Regina like she’s the only person who ever mattered. Emma then convinces Regina to help her set up a ‘tent’ in the backyard and Regina agrees because that’s been their thing. So, they grab a lot of sheets and throw them over the piece where the swing is. It takes then some very unsuccessful and almost successful to one successful try as it relates to getting that one very fluffy sheet over the bar of the swing. However, once they do get it over, they pull it open wide before putting down another sheet as best as two kids possibly could, beneath the now teepee looking tent. They climb in and under one of the only blankets they brought out into that draft and talk until they fall asleep.

The next morning when their parents find them, they get a scolding but it isn’t bad, it’s more of…. “You girls should not have done that, you could get sick..” and they do end up sick. Emma gets sick first and it’s a good three days later and she’s sneezing, sniffling and miserable because it’s a handful of days later, just shy of her and Auggie’s first day in the new school and Regina and Zelena’s first days back. Yeah, they still had about a week and a half, but still. And then Regina conveniently becomes sick as well, once again, just shy of going back to school. Emma finds the joy in it all and laughs at her friend because she knows she made her sick, if Regina convincing her parents.. or rather, not listening to them in the first place that she was going to sleep in the same bed as Emma was a thing. Even though they walked their dogs together over the course of those three days they did manage to remain not sick, the second Emma got sick, Regina would walk them with her grandfather. Emma’s parents didn’t stay over and it was because they couldn’t, but since Emma was sick- she and Auggie did. They’d left about a day later and were talking about doing a bit more unpacking and prepping for the kids and school, which wasn’t even remotely a lie. It was quite literally the truth. Regina’s parents allow Emma to call her parents and during some of the calls, she’s still very sick and coughing up pretty much anything she inhales, and that spurs the Nolan’s come to check in on her more frequently. Her father makes jokes with her and keeps her laughing and since Regina’s right there sitting up in the bed reading to her, she doesn’t really listen but when Emma laughs, she’s smiling.

“Daddy, Gina’s been readin’ to me!” she tells him with a massive abundance of excitement and he grins at her beaming face.

“She has, huh,” he questions as he plays dumb just to keep her excitement going.

“Uuhuh!”

“Well, what’s she been reading to you, pumpkin?” he then questions and for some reason Emma’s eyes glance over at Regina and Regina’s a blushing mess and a hidden smile.

“Umm.. stuff,” she settles for and tries not to give anything away.

“Stuff?” he questions in a tone that has Emma hesitating.

“Uuhh, cool stuff. Secret stuff that we can’t tell you, right Gina?” she asks and it’s clear she needs backup. Regina nods quickly and David lets it go...for a moment.

“Regina,” he calls and the child looks at him. “Do you know what you’ve been reading to Emma?” he questions and he sees the girl hide a bit of a smile as she shakes her head at him.

“nope,” she says quietly and he rolls his eyes.

“Are you sure?” he questions and her smile gets bigger but she shakes her head. David then
surprises her by reaching over and grabbing her before he tickles her mercilessly and Regina loses it in a light-hearted giggle.

“S-st-stop!” she tries to tell him but he continues to tickle her and she hiccups and giggles and continues to be music to his ears. When he feels she’s had enough and her face is so red that she probably might pass out from laughing so hard, Regina admits that she’s been reading her letters to Emma and Emma’s letters to her. He smiles and rubs the top of her head and tells her-

“-must be some pretty good stuff if you gotta keep em secret… well, I’ll leave you to it. Your mother and I will see you later, pumpkin. We love you,”

“I love you too, daddy. Can you kiss momma for me?”

“I surely will,” he tells her before exiting the room.

When their smiles settle, Regina admits something that she probably would have on Emma’s first day back in her life if she were ever as comfortable with her friend as she is now.

“I cried lots,” she says and Emma looks at her confused for a moment before she asks.

“Why?”

“Cus, I missed you and I needed you and we had to go.. “ she says to her and Emma falls silent.

“When did you cry?”

“When I put the letter in the mailbox.. Papi said it would be okay, but… I dunno, I just missed you and I didn’t wanna go.”

Emma lets the silence go on for a good while before she sits up properly and wraps her arms possessively around Regina. She hugs her and says “I’m here now, Gina.” and that’s all she needs to hear to be okay. Her father had stayed just shy of the entrance of Regina’s room and smiles at them before he turns and leaves them be.

So- that’s definitely how Regina gets sick and Emma’s still sick by the time Regina does get sick which is less than two days later- but she’s not as sick and what Regina did for her, she does in return. She’s now the one taking the dogs for walks with Regina’s grandfather and what has worked perfectly is, the only parent who can keep the kids turns out to be Mary Margaret because everyone else is back to work during the time Emma has gotten sick. It’s not coincidence, it just happens to be a thing that they’re back in office and blah blah. She takes it very serious when caring for the two little sick girls and makes sure that they go through every process of medication and fluids and hot soup. She makes sure to call everyone and inform them of the girls’ progress and that includes the grandparents that are now back in Maine.

After some talk, the kids are shuffled over to the Nolan’s house where they do the whole back and forth thing for the final few days of Christmas break. The families ring in the New year and grandparents are back in Maine- celebrating with them over the phone by the second of January. By the seventh, they’re all back in school. Regina and Zelena have slept by Emma and Auggie and all the kids are up and dressed in their uniforms- navy and white polos. The girls have on long socks that are pulled all the way up and black shoes and Auggie has on long school pants with his shirt tucked in much like the girls who are wearing just shy of kneelength, skirts. Three matching braids and hairs tied off in matching ribbons along with Auggie’s now trimmed hair that used to be a flurry of curls and the kids are being taken to school by Mary Margaret. Of course Cora and Henry meet
them along the way and they all smile at the children making strides into the school and then someone starts crying and everyone’s surprised it’s the dads... Well, their wives are laughing at them and they just cry over their kids. Cora rolls her eyes at Henry and MM pats David on the back and they split until it’s time to get them from school.

After their first day of school, they’re tired and that probably had to do with none of them sleeping much the night before. Every time Mary Margaret went to check in on them- they were still wide awake but trying to pretend to be asleep and she’d scold them and they’d laugh but now this was their instant karma and one by one after they did their homework, ate their afternoon snacks and showered, they passed out. Between their parents’ birthdays on through to exams and spring break followed by their final term for the year and then summer break, the change in all their lives proves to be one that’s not only more hectic but much more draining when they realized that the towns and country like places they migrated from had less traffic, less crime and was much much more quiet. Still, moving because of jobs and better opportunities would always come with a few hiccups but it was manageable. Mother’s Day and Father’s day are spent together and grandparents all come down considering their children can’t necessarily fly back up and take even more time off from work, or be away from their children because school is still open. The kids come up with ideas to get one another’s parents gifts and it’s a sweet thing because Regina and Zelena get MM and David matching watches, clearly paid for by their grandparents and Emma and Auggie get Henry and Cora matching rings, clearly paid for by their grandparents. Their grandparents get lots of hugs and kisses and cards and love and bonding time that they miss because all they now get are phone calls throughout the week for short periods of time. James and Nelson come down and they spend time and the kids go to one of the really cool stalls and they pay for an artist to quickly sketch out drawings of them in bigheaded sized cartoons. They show him that one really cool guy who always has his python out that you could take pictures with and then they go to the Ripley’s museum. Nelson even gets his first henna done at the stall near the trolley expressway and as they travel all around Key West, his favourite are the chickens and baby ducks that peep around the old saloon-esque looking building that’s actually got nothing in it. He hears announcers as they go around the town and talk about old town key west to the tourists and watches in awe, but since the girls have seen this before considering they would have been a round at least twice by now, they revel in Nelson’s happiness and Auggie’s consistent surprise every time they go out. By the time they’re leaving, Nelson kisses Regina’s cheek and she blushes but Emma shoves him and scrunches up her face before she’s telling him that’s gross and Zelena teases her sister and tells her that Nelson likes her but Emma gets upset and tells Zelena to shut up because that’s not true and Zelena says yes it is and Emma chases her around and Zelena’s laughing because it kind of is true. Nelson does like Regina and Emma’s jealous and when they buckle into David and Henry who are barbecuing and taking trays back inside, they ask what’s wrong and Zelena’s hiding behind her father as Emma tries to do a fake out and catch her. She says

“Nelson Kissed Gina and Emma’s upset. She’s Jealous!”

“I am not jealous!”

“Are too! Emma’s Jealous! Emma’s Jealous!” she sings and teases and Emma growls before her father is picking her up and she’s flailing.

“I’M NOT JEALOUS!”

“Are so!”

“Zelena, ” her father reprimands but she snickers.

“Nelson likes Gina!” she says with a mischievous and Emma growls and flails to claw her but now
their dads are laughing as well and David has to set her on the counter for her to stop.

“Emma!” he says loudly and she’s still trying, so he holds her hands and calls her again and she stops. “Emma, what’s got you so upset?”

“Lena keeps saying Nelson likes Gina and he doesn’t! He doesn’t like her at all cus she’s my Gina!” Emma belts and her father suppresses a laugh. “He’s not spose to like my Gina!”

“But Emma, Nelson is Regina’s friend too,”

“So.. he kissed her face, that’s gross! Gina doesn’t let anyone kiss her face but me! She’s my Gina and Nelson kissed her- so I pushed him and told him not to cus-,”

“-She’s your Gina. We know sweetheart, but you have to learn to share Regina, too,”

“No I don’t. My Gina,” she says petulantly.

“Em-ma,” he says through a laugh but she shakes her head. He shakes his head and he tells her. “Regina has to make other friends, Em. You can’t hog her all the time. What if you have to go somewhere, or you’re not in the same class, or you can’t be there for her all the time, shouldn’t she have other friends?”

“Yeah, but she’s got Auggie and Lena.. She doesn’t need other people,”

“She does,”

“No she doesn’t. She’s got us and thas all she needs,”

“Emma,” he says with slight exasperation, but she shakes her head again. The room falls silent for a moment and that’s because Henry had ushered Zelena outside and somewhere away from the situation. Emma is at a stalemate with her father until-

“Emmie?” she hears Regina call and Regina rarely ever called her that. She only called her Emmie if something was bothering her or bothering the young girl. Emma’s head spun around and she locked eyes with her friend. Regina had been listening just shy of the kitchen entrance.

“Gina?”

“hi, Emmie,” she said shyly and Emma smiled at her friend sadly.

“hi, Gina..are you mad at me?” she asks and Regina shakes her head.

“No..cus you’re my Emmie and I don’t like Nelson like I like you,”

“You don’t?” she questions and Regina shakes her head.

“Nuhuh,” she answers and Emma smiles brighter. She squirms and her father lets her off the counter and then she’s over and hugging Regina.

“You’re my Gina,” she tells her and Regina grins cheekily.

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A handful of years later.
“What are we doing this year, though?” Regina questions when it’s just shy of school closing. She’s now twelve and Zelena’s turning fifteen. That’s a special time of the year because it’s going to be her coming of age day.

“Well, we have to plan for your sister’s quinceñera and then we’ll figure the rest of that out. Maybe head into the city and stay in Miami for a while- who knows,” their father says as he comes in. The entire family is in the kitchen and Cora is busy pouring over work and cooking at the same time. She’s rambling on with her co-worker and responding in kind to questions and concerns.

“Papi, what’s mami doing… again? I’m hungrryyyyyy,” Zelena comments in a whiney tone and her father shrugs but smirks at her.

“Stressing over work I’d say,” he comments with a tilted head and his daughters sigh.

“Then-,” Regina begins before sliding off the stool. She walks over to her mother and begins to pick up her work and push her out the kitchen. Cora doesn’t argue because she’s so zoned out in her mindset that whatever anyone did around her was probably going to go out the window. “-we’ll finish cook. It’s Taco Tuesday, how hard could it really be to finish, besides. I’m hungry too and if we leave it up to mami.. We may never eat..at least not tonight,” she jokes and their father shakes his head but nods.

“Pfft, you’d be surprised what I can mess up,” Zelena comments off handedly as she momentarily looks away from her phone. Once the statement has left her lips, her eyes are once again glued to the electronic device..

“It’s frightening, you say this as if you’re proud of it,” Regina comments as she turns around and looks at her sister whose eyes are lit by the computer screen.

“I am proud of it. I can’t cook, what’s the shame in that,” she says rather distracted and Regina laughs.

“Lena, there is way more shame in it than most lead on… anyway, what are we doing for your birthday,”

“I was thinking… 90s throwback,”

“I like how you say 90s throwback when we’re barely out of the 90s,”

“Regina- it’s 2006, pretty sure we’re well out the 90s,”

“Whatever Lenaaaaaa,” her little sister sang and she grinned.

“Anyway- I need mami to help. She’s good with this kind of stuff,”

“Oohhhh, yeah. Mami would have the party together in seconds,” Regina agrees but their father sighs.

“Girls.. Calm down. Zelena, I don’t think she’ll be able to help this time around, sweetheart,”

“Why?”

“Because she’s been really busy lately and this time of the year just happens to fall around the time their company deals with seasonal changes and price range drops and deficits and all that stuff.. Put it like this.. It’s stuff that I choose not to understand and things neither of you will understand,” he says
and Regina snorts.

“That’s because there’s too many numbers… Lena sucks at math and I’m not far behind,”

“Then I know you’re both my children because I’m terrible in it,”

“Daddy, we know,” Regina laughs. “How did you become a pediatrician if you stink at math?”

“I learned the tables and made a mantra in my mind. Mija, you can absolutely just bite the dust on math in a general aspect, but there’s certain parts of every subject where you will excel-,”

“-GUYS!” Zelena shouts to get their attention and they pause.

“Sorry, sweetheart, what’s the matter?”

“What’s the matter? Papi, seriously- wellllllll, what I wanna know is who’s helping me plan my quinceñera if not mami?” she questions and her father bobs his head.

“I can do that, sweetie,” he tells her and she scoffs.

“Ha. No offense papi, but no you can’t plan a party if your life depended on it,”

“I take offense to that,”

“Good- because I hate to agree with Lena, but.. You really do suck, papi… Remember that time you tried to plan Nana and popop’s visit and nearly sent them halfway across the world?-”

“-Or that time you were supposed to chaperone our school trip and figured that they’d just give you a bulletin and tell you what to do when you were supposed to be the one to actually do it and even after you found out- you just… sucked absolute donkey nuts on that one,” she remembered and both she and Regina lost it giggling.

“Ha-freaking ha, girls...fine, I’ll see if I can pull your mother away from her work long enough to plan your quinceñera,”

“Really?” Zelena asked hopefully and her father nodded with a smile.

“Really, mija,” he said and then he felt arms wrap around him with a massive smile beaming up at him.

“Gracias, papi. Te quiero muchooooo,” she sings and he hugs her back.

“No problema, princesa. Ahora! Let’s finish cooking, I’m nearly positive your mother has either not eaten at all, or snacked on a pack of peanuts,”

“Sssssss- damn!” Regina swears as she pulls her finger away from the stove and shakes her hand frantically.

“Regina,” he reprimands.

“But papi, the damn thing burnt me.. “ she said in repetition of swearing and her father shook his head.

“Stop swearing so much or your mother will have my ass,” he tells her and she drops her head and begins to laugh. “What?”
“You jus-you just- ahahahahahaha,” she tries to speak but she’s laughing at him so hard that she starts to wheeze for air.

“Regina- what?” he asks her as he’s now laughing but he’s not even sure why.

“And you wonder why Lena and I swear so much, we get it from you,” she tells him and he rolls his eyes.

“I’ll have you know that I swear when it’s appropriate,”

“Lies!” Zelena says and he laughs.

“I do!” he defends and she shakes her head.

“Papi, you’re just something else,” his eldest says to him and he smirks.

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“Mami?” Regina questions as she walks into the living room. “Mami?” she questions again and her mother’s voice flits through the room as she is still quite clearly on the phone with her coworker. She shakes her mother’s shoulder and the woman snaps from her conversation long enough to look at her daughter. “Mami, dinner’s ready,” Regina tells her and she nods but for some reason, she turns back and continues her conversation. Regina sighs and walks back into the kitchen where her father and sister are carrying the food out to the dining table to eat.

“Where’s mami?” Zelena queries and Regina rolls her eyes.

“Still working. She couldn’t even answer me when I called her,”

“Well… maybe we should take the food in the living room and all eat there, if she won’t move to come here, maybe we should go to her,” Zelena then suggests and Regina rolls her eyes again.

“What’s with you, Regina?” she asks her little sister who then shrugs and sighs.

“I don’t know. Mami’s never been this busy and now that she is, she’s like some zombie,”

“Yeah, but she’s an adult.. We have to do the same things when we’re their age too, you know,”

“I hope not… I’ll be back,”

“Where are you going?”

“To get my camera.. We need pictures to show at your party… and I wanna get all the embarrassing ones… besides.. I need pictures for my scrap book too,”

“Fine-but just hurry up, I’m really hungry!” she reminds and Regina groans as she stomps up the stairs.

Dinner doesn’t really change much as the girls and their father eat around their busy mother and wife.. Zelena looks the most broken over it because as she’s gotten older, she’s noticed so much more about her mother being home, less and her father being home, less and when she was finally old enough to stay home with Regina by herself. She ends up picking at most of her taco and almost shoving the plate against the table as she gets up frustrated and storms into the kitchen before she actually does throw the plate at something and it smashes on contact.
“ZELENA!” Regina shrieks as she comes skidding to a halt and her sister refuses to turn and meet her eyes. Zelena grips at the counter and cries almost with no sound, but Regina senses it. She can feel the pain and soon, she’s hugging her sister tightly and squeezing her. “What’s wrong, lena?” she whispers in question and Zelena tries to pull away but Regina pulls her back.

“Let..g-go,” she says weakly, but Regina doesn’t listen and that’s part of the reason why Zelena never argues with her as much as she wishes she would.

“I’m not letting go, ever..just, tell me what’s wrong, Lena. Please,” She listens for her sister’s words and finally when Zelena sniffs, she speaks.

“M-mami’s just.. Too busy...all the time- I hate it. I just want her back!” she belts tearily but quiets back down. Regina strokes away her sister’s long hairs and hugs her closer.

“I miss her too, Lena… I miss her too,” she whispers and then hears the distinct click of shoes.. They’re her father’s footsteps and Regina’s eyes meet his. They communicate silently and that gives pause to the situation. It lets him know that she has it as under control as it needs to be and he nods a bit uneasily before he turns back and leaves them alone. Regina continues to hug her sister and then guides her upstairs before letting her know that she’s going to wash the dishes and come back up so that they can talk about it. Zelena admits she doesn’t really want to but that only because Regina manages to convince her it’s a good thing- she agrees. Their father doesn’t ask how she is because he knows he just has to wait for one or both of them to tell him and as Regina washes up and he rinses and dries the dishes, he tries to cheer her up because Zelena’s mood is now affecting his youngest very severely. He’s not insanely successful but he manages to make her smile and laugh a little before she heads back upstairs and she calls Emma, but she tells her best friend she can’t talk long because her sister is upset and now Emma’s worried as well.

“You can’t just go and not tell me what’s wrong, Gina..” she whines and Regina sighs heavily before she rests her head on her desk.

“Em, it’s fine.. I mean, it will be, look, I’ll call you tomorrow - but, I really have to go though,”

“Will you at least tell me what it has to do with?” she begs and Regina caves. SHe looks around her room as she tries to compress it as best as possible.

“It’s Lena.. she’s upset that mami is so busy and nothing we’re doing is pulling her out of her work long enough for her to even have dinner with us…” is what she manages to say and Emma makes a noise that Regina can’t quite follow. “Em..” she calls after a beat and Emma perks up slightly from her daze

“Mhm?”

“Call you tomorrow;” she repeats and she hears the audible sigh come from the girl. “Come on, Em. Don’t do that- I just.. I have to, okay?”

“I know, but.. We haven’t talked in days cus we’re always busy!-” she belts almost angrily but hurt coats the words more than anything.

“-shh-shh, I know, Em, but Lena needs me right now, okay.. Can you just wait until tomorrow, I promise I will call you,”

“Huff, yeah, whatever, Regina. Just go,” She says shortly before hanging up the phone on her friend.. Not even so much as a good night out of that one. Regina takes it as it comes and though she’s now sighing, she can’t do anything about it. She puts the receiver down back in its holder and
walks towards her sister’s room where Zelena seems to have either cried herself to sleep, or simply shut her eyes so that no one bothers her.

“Lena?” she calls, and she think the possibility of her sister answering is really low, but Zelena’s eyes open and she smiles a bit weakly at her sister. “Hey- you’re still awake. How are you feeling?” she asks as she tries to put on a brave voice, but it’s clear that her eyes are now watering and the tears are crystallizing.

“I’m fine, but how are you?”

“Me?!” she questions, clearly surprised. One singular tears falls from her face and she’s quick to sniffle and wipe it away with her arm. “I’m fine, why?”

“You don’t have lie to me, Regina… I heard what happened,” Zelena tells her and Regina scoffs.

“You heard half of what happened,” she corrects and even though her little sister is right, she still rolls her eyes at the young girl because Regina and her words...and her sass, never cease to amaze Zelena. “I’m sorry about Emma, Gina,” she tells her and Regina sputters audibly and the tears stream out. It’s always been that way. The second any mention of the blonde came up whether it was good or bad, Regina had always felt a strong passion behind the words, regardless of what was being said. Her crying right in that second..wasn’t something new.. And Zelena didn’t mind that.

Zelena sits up and opens the blanket, a silent invitation for her sister to get in and Regina doesn’t hesitate on the offer. She climbs in and under and Zelena drapes the blanket over her before she’s hugging her sister and stroking her hair.

“Why is everything so hard, Lena?” she questions and her sister smiles sadly.

“Because, we’re growing up and the more you grow up.. Sometimes the worst off things get. Mami and Papi might not tell you that because they don’t want you to be afraid of the future, but I’ll tell you because you’re my sister and I know you’re strong,”

“Sometimes I don’t feel strong,” she whispers and Zelena hugs her again.

“I know.. that’s why you have me.. And Nelson and Auggie.... and Emma,”

“Not when she’s mad at me-,”

“-Regina, you have her.. Especially when she’s mad at you. Emma just misses you and needs you the way I always need you when something goes wrong,”

“I wish nothing ever went wrong,” she says and Zelena laughs lightly.

“If nothing ever went wrong.. It wouldn’t make sense for the words experience, growth and lesson to exist,”

“Then they just don’t exist,” Regina argues and Zelena smirks.

“Just..sleep. You’re going to feel better in the morning. Sleeping things off gets rid of the sad feelings-,”

“-Not all,”

“No... not all, but some go away and if you keep sleeping, you chip away at all of that,” she tells her and Regina is actually smiling some.
“Your logic is weird, Lena,”

“I’m weird, so it fits,” Zelena teases and Regina smiles a little bit brighter. “Remember what you said to me when you were a baby?”

“Yeah… no cwy,”

“Exactly. No cwy… sleep, we’ll figure it out in the morning,”

“Sorry I couldn’t help you get over the thing with mami, Lena,” she apologises in a very shy tone but Zelena shakes her head.

“You did… it just doesn’t look like it. But you did and I don’t mind, Regina… sleep,” she repeats and her sister listens to her. She goes to sleep and once she’s out cold, Zelena slips from the bed and makes her way downstairs where her father had clearly vacated. She can tell he cleaned up around her mother but Cora still had a few books opened up here and there which meant the woman worked up right until she fell asleep. Zelena looks around and sighs. She then closes most of her mother’s books and planners and whatnot and takes the phone from her ear before closing that too. The tv is running and that’s fine because downstairs can become pitch black in seconds. Zelena gets the throw blanket and drapes it over her mother before fixing her head so that she doesn’t wake up with a kink in her neck. She tucks a pillow beneath Cora’s head and strokes the hairs from her face. She sighs again. “I miss you, mami.. Please don’t disappear on us.. We don’t see you much and you’re the only person who can help plan my quinceñera.. Papi’s crap at it..” she trails off with a light-hearted laugh. She doesn’t realize until she goes to breathe and speak again that she’s crying now. “I just.. I want my mom back and I want her to help me plan my coming of age day and I just…yeah. I wanna do my confirmation too, mami- and I don’t wanna be.. So just, please…come back before you go away again,” she pleads and then she’s wiping those silent tears from her face and walking away. Cora’s eyes open once she senses her daughter has left and then she sits up… all she thinks in her head by this point is… things have to change.

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The next day proves to be that change for them all when Cora walks in by afternoon after the girls are home and done with extracurriculars- with a fresh planner and something embossed on the front. All it says is Quinceñera and then she’s resting it before Zelena.

“I’m not going anywhere, mija,” she whispers into her daughter’s ear as she randomly hugs the girl and Zelena can’t help but smile and cry at the same time. She hugs her mother back.

“Thank you, mami,” she says and Cora smiles.

Emma and Regina are good and over their little hiccup from the other day and now they’re coming into the house about a week later, going on and on about how they’re being teased at school because they haven’t had their first kisses yet. Zelena tells them that they’re worrying too much over it. Emma tells her it’s easy for her to say because she already had hers and Zelena snorts. She tells them she hasn’t and that’s because she hasn’t bothered to and Emma tells her she doesn’t believe her. It’s that back and forth that has Regina rolling her eyes because once her sister and her best friend start… it’s game over.

Zelena snorts and shrugs, telling the girl, she doesn’t care if she believes her or not and she shouldn’t
be so bent out of shape for a kiss when she’s kissed multiple people. Emma scowls and says she knows what the girl means by that.

“It’s not the same thing,” Emma argues and Zelena shrugs again.

“Emma- a kiss is a kiss, regardless. If we’re looking at it solely from the basis of a what a kiss is. You already had your first kiss, so get over it…. Listen, I know you mean the first kiss, but let’s be real. It’s awkward and probably gonna be gross,”

“Then it’s gonna be gross, but I have too. Everyone else already is,”

“That’s everyone else. Stop trying to be everyone else… heck, if that’s the case, kiss Regina.”

“Lena!”

“What?! Just.. I dunno.. Go help your friend.. She’s about to have an aneurysm over it,”

“Sigh.. fine… Em, we’re too young,” Regina says and Emma scowls.

“Who’s side are you on?”

“My own… and logic.. We’re twelve… we can’t be kissing people, besides, boys are still gross at this age-,”

“-News flash, boys are gross at any age,” their mother interrupts and the girls freeze. “Calm down. Your father and I heard all of you talking about first kisses and while I agree that you are too young.. It’s perfectly normal to want it at this age-,”

“-mami, no birds and the bees talk, please!” Zelena begs and Cora laughs.

“I’m not going to give the talk.. Besides, I’m rather certain you know enough about it as it stands. That’s why when your father and I had the talk with you.. We didn’t talk to you, we asked you what you knew and if you understood differences… that not all people are born the same and or attracted to the opposite sex and so on,“

“I remember, you said you were raising us to have an open mind and to understand that Religion and Love will always clash and that if push came to shove, Love outweighs a man-made belief system,”

“Exactly.. Never liv in what?”

“Fear,” Zelena answers and her mother nods.

“Good, now, you two, we will have to put your first kisses on hold until you are at least thirteen and that’s give your mother and father agree to allowing you to date by this time as well, Emma,”

“Pfft, doubt it.. Daddy says he’s gettin’ three shotguns.. One for the guy, one for me and then one for the guy again,”

“That doesn’t sound the least bit logical,” Zelena says with a scrunched up face and Emma slightly rolls her eye as her eyelid shuts.

“I dunno.”

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So, as usual Cora plans and by plans, she pretty much lets Zelena run wild with party possibilities that are obviously set to a budget. When Cora plans, she plans well. She’s planning even much better than before because this particular client is her daughter. Her daughter that has similar tastes and interests and ideas and whacky schemes to her father and that’s something she finds joy in, that both their girls got something from their parents… besides looks. They book out a hall that’s just over the bridge and into Miami grounds and then Cora hires a Dj as per Zelena’s request, even though she wanted them to book someone who was a little bit more…. Religious. Still, it was her Quinceñera and they couldn’t deny her the request, so, they booked the DJ. The whole 90s throwback theme came in the process of Disney movies. Most Disney movies half her class and friends could remember vividly. Everything from D3 Mighty Ducks to Alley Cat Strike, Hocus Pocus and Phantom at the Megaplex were all themes they used to base Zelena’s Quinceñera off of. It was colours ranging from darker greens and reds and moss tone browns, so in essence, it was a halloween party come to life and that’s exactly what Zelena wanted, considering how it was sectioned off proved as much. Every section of the room was different. The food was different and the music was different. Every scene represented had their soundtracks played as the party started up, straight through to it’s finishing dance. Zelena’s already done her confirmation the Saturday before and since then, she’s been considered a woman, grown enough that she is allowed to date and beyond that.. No pre-marrital sex, clearly, but that wasn’t any of her concern. The party is amazing so far and you can tell by the excitement that riddles off of people’s faces but Zelena is so out of it that her only happiness comes in the form of people walking up to her, wishing her a happy birthday and asking her to save them a dance.

Some guy in particular who has been crushing on her for ages brings Zelena flowers. He asks her to save him a dance and she agrees. This request is different, because he doesn’t walk away from her.. He stays and he talks to her and he finds out things about her.. Things that shy him at school couldn’t even bare to begin to ask, but it’s because she never really notices him much past class that he seems to have a different aura around him.. He doesn’t really know most of the people from Zelena’s other classes and that’s probably a good thing for him because then is when the young man finds even more confidence that if something were to go wrong, he could just hide or something. No one, not even Kathryn knows that they’re not dating and because Auggie and Emma come to the party as well, Zelena dances with all of the ‘men’ in her life. Her father and mother take the first and last dance because it’s a tradition. She is pleasantly surprised when her grandparents crash the party and her second dance is with her grandfather, after she cries for like a century over it. Auggie takes second because he’s really like her little brother and Wade- the guy whose name she now knows- takes third. Regina dances with Zelena when the entire family dances together, but she sticks with Emma the whole night and Emma won’t let her go, the same way Regina won’t let Emma go. They continue to do their own dance and talk under the low lighting in the hall and Regina buries her face in Emma’s neck.

“I love you Emmie,” she tells her and Emma freezes for a second because she and Regina have never said ‘I love you’. It was always, love you and love you, too. She knows that they’ve hugged more closely than normal friends do and she knows that Regina always kisses her cheek if she sleeps over or just before going home… if they ever go home separately, but the big I love you wasn’t something Emma expected.. Still, she couldn’t shake the happiness that ran through her when Regina said it to her. She smiled brightly.

“I love you too, Gina,” she admits and it’s truth. So much truth.
That’s also the night Emma kisses Regina. She’s Regina’s first kiss and Regina is hers. It’s out in one of the many gardens that place has and they walk straight past the gazebo because, cliche shit. And then Emma just.. kisses her. Without warning, she pulls her in and kisses her and at first Regina is wholeheartedly confused and disgruntled, but then there’s a spark and that spark pushes her to kiss back. Emma doesn’t feel the spark like Regina does and when she pulls away and can see the gloss over look in Regina’s eyes, she asks how she did. Regina is honest with her and tells her she did,

“.. amazing.” She’s somewhat speechless and Emma, well Emma says…

“You’re just being nice. I did horrible,” for which Regina argues,

“I’m not just being nice, Em.. you did amazing. It was.. Perfect,” she admits and her best friend blushes.

“It was?”

“Yeah- totally,” Regina reassures her with a smile and Emma nods.

“You did pretty good, too, Gina,” Emma nudges and she looks surprised. She thinks she was awkward.. Granted she’s already been called an awkward pre-teen so she supposes that has something to do with it.

“I did?”

“Yeah. I liked kissing you, but we have to keep it a secret,” she says and Regina’s face is crestfallen. Emma couldn’t be embarrassed about it already, could she?

“Why?” she queries a bit distraught.

“Because we’re still twelve, remember?” Oh, right.

“Right.. Right,” she remembers and there’s a big sigh of relief somewhere in her chest.

“See, now we have our first kisses out of the way,” she cheers and Regina isn’t so happy with the way Emma says it because she felt sparks and now- now she can clearly tell, Emma just did it because she wanted to get it out of the way.

“First kisses are supposed to be romantic Emma,” she reminds her friend and Emma seems genuinely confused.

“Are they?”

“Yeah.. at least that’s what all the movies say,” she answers the blonde, now unsure if that’s even true, considering what just transpired.

“Yeah, but some look uncomfortable and awkward and… what’s wrong?” she questions, now taking notice of Regina’s somewhat dull eyes.

“Nothing… why did you kiss me?”

“Cus I wanted to and I wanted to have my first kiss, so I did,” Emma says honestly and it’s that honesty that makes Regina want to slap her sometimes. “And Zelena told me I should kiss you. I don’t know why, but, I just followed what she told me to,” the girl continues and Regina internally breaks at every admission at every turn.

“I know what Lena told you. I was there, Em. I remember,”
“Yeah, see.. So are you okay with it?” she asks. **Why ask that now?**

“It already happened, I have to be okay with it,”

“What do you mean by that?” she asks her friend, now very confused. Regina shakes her head and mutters a,

“.nothing, Em. Let’s just have fun tonight.” Emma nods back, still unsure, but then pulls her little notepad from her pocket in her dress and Regina internally smiles at her friend. She can smile in that moment because Emma can’t stand to have a piece of clothing and no pockets available. Ever since Emma had begun drawing when they wrote letters to each other back and forth, she’d improved on it and found herself becoming very intrigued by the prospect of taking art as an elective. She finds a vacant seat and sits before she starts scribbling and Regina is just standing there for a moment until she moves over and sits next to Emma.

“What are you drawing now.. You haven’t given me a chance to look at your drawings since.. forever ago,” she says and leans over to peak but Emma leans away.

“Because.. None of them are actually finished.. And I can’t show you unfinished work,” Emma says and Regina huffs.

“Emma, it doesn’t matter if it’s finished or not, just let me see it,” she says to her and pushes at her side. Emma huffs and drops the notepad in Regina’s lap. Regina looks at her for a minute and then shakes her head. She pushes the book back into Emma’s hands. “If you’re going to be that rude about it.. Keep it, Em. I’d rather not look at it if you’re so bent out of shape over me looking at sketches-,”

“-Regina-,”

“-Emma, no. You clearly don’t want me to see them, so don’t bother showing me something you don’t want my eyes to see.” She shakes her head again at her friend and pushes at her side. Emma huffs and drops the notepad in Regina’s lap. Regina looks at her for a minute and then leans forward against the wall. There’s an unfinished sketch of her eyes and the way they were shining with anger that Emma had angrily ran her pencil through because she couldn’t get it quite right. Then there were a few of when the brunette was crying and Emma couldn’t draw the raw emotion she saw before her perfectly enough that Regina didn’t look angry more than sad. There were many others but the most recent of them all had to be Regina’s doe eyed innocence when Emma pulled away from the kiss. She wanted to capture it as best as possible, but she was once again failing and she’d no clue why

“I’m sorry,” she say to her friend and Regina shakes her head.

“Don’t, you don’t mean it, Em.. it’s fine, just drop it,” she tells her in response and Emma’s face falls even further.

“I do mean it, Regina, please don’t do that. I feel bad now,”

“I don’t see why you do. You didn’t wanna show me because they weren’t finished.. Emma, how many other things have I seen that weren’t finished. Your homemade movies, your homework.. Your interest in lots of other things-,”

“-but this is special-,”

“-and I’m not?!?”
“No! You are.. It’s just… Regina, I can’t show you because I’m not proud of it,” she finally says and Regina sighs.

“Then just say that.. If it’s that big of a deal, don’t tell me it’s because it’s unfinished that you don’t wanna show me.. Tell me the truth, I thought we did that with each other;”

“I’m sorry;” she says again and Regina groans.

“Em, stop apologising.. I’m not mad at you, I’m just.. Sad because it feels like you’re pushing me out of your life and I don’t want you to do that;”

“I’m not pushing you out.. I’m just.. Nervous, about a lot of things;”

“Then we’ll be nervous about things together.. You’re my best friend and I love you for as long as we’re best friends, okay?” There’s a beat of silence until fireworks somehow go off.

“Okay,” Emma agrees and Regina smiles a bit more at her.

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“Pleeeeeease, mami!”

“Yeah, pleaseeee mami,” Emma repeats and Cora snickers lightly but she stays stoic and shakes her head.

“You girls are too young;” she tells them and Regina whines.

“But Lena got hers done when she was 13 mami, it’s not faaaaaaaiiir!” she says and Zelena walks in rolling her eyes and with Kathryn.

“That’s because I wasn’t a big baby about it. I asked papi first and he convinced mami.. You should know by now that daddy can convince mom to do anything;” her sister tells her and she huffs.

“You can’t, especially since we haven’t talked to Emma’s parents as yet;”

“They’ll say yes;” Emma quickly interjects and Regina nods.

“See mami, so can we? Preeeeeesease!” she begs again and Cora sighs.

“I’ll talk to your father and we’ll talk to your mother and father and maybe Zelena and Kathryn can take you both when they go to the mall;”

“Mooooooooom, really! Regina’s a big baby when it comes to that stuff-,”

“-I am not, Lena!”

“You so are!” she yells back and Regina huffs.

“Mami, can you take us, Lena’s being a big idiot about it!” she says as she sticks out her tongue at her sister and Zelena laughs.
“NOT MY FAULT YOU’RE JUST A BIG BABY!” her sister yells over her shoulder and Kathryn just shakes her head. She pulls Zelena back and forces her to sit at the island. Emma leans against Regina and Regina hugs her at her side. Since Zelena’s fifteenth birthday, Emma and Regina had to do a bit of damage control because the more days went on, the more they realized, best friends do fight, audibly. They have their moments and their ‘breakups’ as it was so cleverly named by one of their parents- probably Mary Margaret and then there are the makeups. Regina buys Emma a sketch pad that is absolutely beautiful because it has a wood-ike grain texture on the front and every page is a different sheet setting, giving the girl a range of different textures and patterns to work with.. It took a hell of a lot of Regina’s allowance, but it was worth it when she gave it to Emma on the exact day they met for their first summer together. Their thirteenth birthday and Auggie’s twelfth were celebrated between the beach and with a movie night that he’d planned. August had gotten over the hype of birthday parties and just wanted a quiet night in with his friends.. His friends did not include his sister and the two other girls who pretty much became like his sisters.. Protective in every way and embarrassing on a good one.

“Come on Leen, why don’t we take them,” Kathryn queries and Zelena rolls her eyes.

“Because-,”

“- because ????” Kathryn pokes and Zelena grins.. She rolls her eyes yet again because she’s going to cave.

“Fine! But they have to wait until after I turn sixteen,” she informs.

“Why?”

“Because -you big dumb dumb, you need someone sixteen or older to go with you to get it done!”

“Oh,” Regina says.

“Yeah- oh!” she laughs before tickling her little sister. Regina tries to swat her away but Zelena keeps tickling her and she starts gasping for air. Auggie walks in and he’s covered in grass stains and everything else and Zelena can immediately tell by his soccer uniform he had a rough game. She pauses for a bit and walks over to him before she’s ruffling his hair.

“Rough game?”

“Yeah.. some douche kicked me in the stomach,” he comments and Zelena hisses.

“I know that hurt.. Were his cleats sharp?”

“Not really, but it still hurt. I even have the bruise to prove it,” the boyd says before raising his shirt. Sure enough there was a nice purple welt on his skin. “We lost anyway.. So I guess that’s my punishment,” he jokes darkly and Zelena can’t help but laugh. Emma groans somewhere far off in the corner.

“My little brother is so weird!” she complains and Auggie rolls his eyes.

“I heard that!”

“You were supposed to!”

“Okay-okay, we need to teach you better avoidance skills and maybe I should teach you a few more
of my tricks so you can score more.. How bad was the game?"

"Twelve to nine," he told her and she looked impressed.

"Not bad.. Not good, but not bad.. Then again, the older you get the less you’ll be seeing those double digits."

"Why?"

"Because soccer fields are massive and to score even once takes most international teams nearly an hour. If you’re really lucky, really skilled and have a good game plane, you could score as early as ten minutes into the game. But I’ve seen some people score in less than the first five;"

"So.. I need luck?"

"No, you need better skill.. come on, I’ll show you what I mean," she tells him and he follows her because she’s a better teacher than his coach. She talks with him about the game a bit more in depth and as Auggie gives her a rundown she gives him pointers for the next one before she picks up her old soccer ball that she’d given him and ushered him outside, ready to teach him said tricks. Henry had brought him in after the game because David and Mary Margaret are now out of town dealing with her sick father. So, the kids are staying over and Zelena’s friend is sleeping over even though it’s a school night. Then again it is a Friday. After everyone gets all showered up and the girls beg him to just let them see their mother at the office that was less than a ten minute drive away, he agrees and they make sure to bring her dinner and something to drink and some dessert. They stay with Cora for a bit in order to distract her and prevent premature grey hairs from her job. She takes it all in stride and finds herself feeling so much better after her babies have come to see her. She talks with Emma and August as well and asks Kathryn how her parents are and the usual.. It’s that usual that makes it normal for them all, especially Emma and Auggie considering none of their parents are in Key West at the moment. Henry then takes them into the city and around for night time driving before taking them to the movie theatre. Zelena and Kathryn are let into a more mature movie after Henry says he will accompany them, but he doesn’t. He does a complete u-turn when his daughter and her friend go for some romantic drama and instead, he goes with Regina and Emma and Auggie in to watch something a bit more family oriented.

After the movie he takes them for ice cream and the younger kids nod off once they’re to the beach and enjoying the cool breeze. He gets a call from Cora and they talk a bit.

Zelena and Kathryn walk around the beach for a bit as well and have their own conversation about boys and blah blah. Zelena says she’s not really interested in any of the guys in her class and Kathryn nudges her and tells her that one of the senior’s? likes her and Zelena looks annoyed as she asks who and Kathryn tells her.

"His name’s Wade,"

"Wade?" Wade? She questions herself. Why did the name sound so familiar.

"Yeah, you know, Sydney’s younger brother?"

"Which Sydney? Sidney.. Or Sydney?"

"Girl Sydney.. But then... she likes you too, so I don’t know.. Maybe be a lesbian,” she jokes and Zelena shoves her.

"Kat, you’re an idiot and Wade… wasn’t he the guy at my Quinceñera...and isn’t he Puerto Rican-,”
“-and Black. You guys would have the cutest kids!”

“Ewww, stop being so girly!” she whines and her friends kisses her cheek.

“Not my fault you’re such a tomboy who obsesses over soccer!”

“Yes and I’m trying to figure out how we’re even friends,” she shoots back and Kathryn just smiles.

“Sooooo,”

“Sooooo?”

“You gonna give him a chance?”

“I don’t know.. Maybe,” Zelena says and Kathryn rolls her eyes.

“What are you afraid of?”

“Nothing, but Wade should be afraid of my dad,” Zelena tells her and Kathryn huffs.

“We both know your dad cares less about that. It’s your mom he should really be afraid of,” she laughs and Zelena bobs her head. Kathryn is right on that one.

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When he takes them back home, Zelena drags her friend upstairs after telling her parents good night and Henry puts the girls and Auggie in the living room like they usually do in setup and he retires to his own bedroom with his wife. They talk for a bit and they go to bed after calling the Nolan’s to check in on them and find out how they’re doing. Leopold isn’t doing too hot so that’s a thing.

Days later, David gets a call from the police station and has to come back. He’s finally been called to start work at the station and he couldn’t be happier, but in the same breath, he’s a wreck because his wife and kids are now going to see less of him and he doesn’t just want to up and leave Mary Margaret to tend to her sick father by herself. But his wife pushes him out the door and tells him to go do great things and that she loves him and all the coupley stuff you usually say to your husband or wife. Leaving Mary Margaret by herself was probably his biggest regret, but the second he touched down back in Key West, there on starts his odd shifts at the station. He calls her as much as he possibly can on his down time, but he can’t actually keep his kids still, specifically due to the hours he’s now working. He won’t be able to get them to school in the mornings, but on some days he can pick them up and carry them to practice or wherever. It’s not ideal, and Emma is clearly the first to notice this.

Emma does get a bit upset but it’s normal to her by this time because she’s seen Zelena and Regina go through it and she thinks that if they can bare it for a while, then she can too. She’s not so sure about Auggie, but she hopes he’s just as strong as she is because she doesn’t know what she’d do if he wasn’t. She swallows it back and moves on.

By the time her mother comes back, the parents discuss the possibility of the girls getting their ears pierced and Mary Margaret doesn’t see why not.
Come Saturday and it’s another day for Mass. Regina groans as her sister tries to wake her and yanks the sheet over her head. Zelena pulls and tugs and Regina groans and wails. “Get up, Regina!”

“Lena. Go. Away,” she bites out and Zelena pulls again and this time, because her sister is so wrapped up in the blanket, she yanks hard and Regina tumbles to the ground with a thud. Her sister tries to hide a snicker but she’s glaring daggers at her.

“Sorry?”

“You so aren’t,” Regina says to her and Zelena snickers.

“I kinda am. You look….painful,” she comments and Regina drops her face on the cool surface of her room.

‘I am painful. You yanked me from my cocoon of happiness,” she comments as she rolls onto her back.

“Because we have Mass,” she tells her and the girl groans again.

“But we have to go. Mami will kill us if we’re not ready soon, besides, the earlier you go, the more time from your day you have left. The services are longer in the afternoon- do you really want to put up with that?” she questions and Regina groans internally. She rolls her eyes and sighs.

“Uggghhh, I swear this is too much- and it’s not even like she goes to Mass that often, anyway. Her and Daddy avoid it like it’s the plague and yet we have to go.. Double standards I say,” she recites from her spot on the floor and Zelena just grins.

“You’re an idiot,”

“I’m an idiot that’s going to a chapel I don’t like and mass I can’t stand. I love our religion, but God why is the service so long? Do you know how many Hail Mary’s we say in school as it stands and then we have to go to a three hour mass service until I’ve lost the last of my brain cells- on a weekend need I remind you, only to come out and still Hail Mary it up tomorrow. I’m tired of confessing to sins I know I’ll commit in the blink of an eye. Either that or the priest is judgemental as hell and then God forbid I fuck up the passage during the reading of ‘Lord have mercy. Christ have mercy. Lord have mercy’ They’ll nail me to the damn crucifix in chapel and leave me hanging-,”

“-Regina!” Zelena screams before laughing. “S-STOP!” she belts and her sister laughs at her antics.

“I’m serious- hell, Emma and Auggie suffer just as much considering our denominations are so similar. All we have is a bunch of hail Mary’s and beads. At least when they take communion the music doesn’t sound like a funeral procession-,”

“-Ahhhhhh, my-my s-st-stomach!” Zelena squeals and Regina rolls her eyes.
“And when it isn’t that, we have to deal with the scent of incense constantly burning and a shrine to Mother Mary. It looks Cultic to say the least that mami has a room in the house, specifically for Mary Immaculate herself.” She walks over to her closet and sifts through it. Usually, they dress casually for Mass and by casually.. It used to be those annoyingly frilly dresses with the long bows in the back, the Mary Jane shoes and pristine white stockings. That was when Cora took pride in dressing them like they were to be married every single Saturday, but as they got older, complained and whined that they still looked six when they both very well had matured enough to have boobs and pretty much wear a bit of makeup, their father convinced their mother to let them dress themselves and so far, the girls have remained respectful but they damn sure avoided those dresses where required, unless it was a special mass being held or special communion.. Or pretty much anything the church defined as special.

Regina sighs because she’s thinking about mass and she’s groaning internally at the thought that mass will definitely be a thing.

“Are you ever going to do your confirmation?”

“Pfft, no. I told you and mami, I’m not ready for it,” Regina responds as she pulls a shirt from the closet. It’s a long sleeve navy blue shirt with a collar that’s fitted to her form. She turns around and tosses it onto her bed as Zelena picks up her blanket and folds it. Zelena’s already dressed. Her long Auburn-copper hair is pulled into a tight ponytail and she’s dressed in a summer dress that’s form-fitting and pressed. It’s white and red with roses trailing the sides of the fabric and she has on flats. She opts for no makeup because she’s lazy and it’s a surprise she’s even wearing the dress to begin with, considering she hates anything even remotely girly.. Then again, she always did like those particular kinds of dresses.

“You are ready, you just don’t want to do the confirmation,” she responds with a shake of her head before sighing and sitting on Regina’s bed.

“Is that a crime, Lena?” her sister questions as she raises a critical brow.

“No but-,”

“-But nothing. Look, just because you wanted to do the whole confirmation thing and be a woman so early on, doesn’t mean I want to do the same. Lena, in all honesty, I may never do my confirmation and that’s solely because I don’t want to and I don’t want to feel bogged down by the possibility that mami and papi expect me to be some.. Nun or something and then marry another Catholic Puerto Rican and Italian, guy.. I don’t even like guys,” she says and Zelena just tilts her head and sighs.

“What are you saying?”

“I’m saying, I’m not you and Wade. I’m never going to be like you and Wade and quite frankly, I don’t really want to be like you and Wade. I don’t want the expectancy from friends to fall in love with some guy and get married and have kids- I don’t know if I even believe in marriage-okay-,”

“-Okay-okay.. Just calm down, Regina. Listen to me… That’s not what confirmation is telling you and it damn sure isn’t what Mami, papi or me will tell you. It just means you take responsibility for your faith and your own adulthood-,”

“-That’s just it, Lena. I don’t want to take responsibility for a faith I might not even want to have a handful of days from now. I just wanna exist, besides, in Jewish culture I am already a woman. In other countries, I’ve been a woman and in other countries I’m already legal enough to drink and damn near have sex. I don’t want confirmation to give me ‘approval’ just to do these things because
that’s how a lot of us end up pregnant and single and with how many kids? I am not about to be a stigma-,”

“-You won’t be a stigma,”

“You’re damn right I won’t… can we just get dressed and go to mass so that I can come home and sleep,”

“Alright, let’s go,” Zelena tells her before she takes notice of her sister already dressed, just fluffing her hair. “You’re not gonna shower?”

“Is someone ever going to smell me? Is someone actually going to say ‘ lift your arms, we wanna know if you smell right for the lord’?”

“Well no-,” Zelena snickers,

“-Okay, then, let’s go. I don’t have time to stress over whether or not someone thinks I showered. Once my face is clean, my mouth doesn’t stink and I don’t smell like an actual ass, then I’m fine,”

“Guess you’re right,”

“I am right. Come on.”

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“Mommaaaaaa, stoooop,” Emma groans as she feels her mother tug her from her bed.

“We have mass, get up,” her mother says strongly and she groans.

“But it’s Sundaaaayyy, that means we rest,”

“We will rest after we give thanks to God for another day,”

“Momma we do that everyday!” she grunts out and her mother shakes her head.

“I swear, I could never tell my mother I didn’t wanna go to mass, she’d have strung my lil behind up had I done that,”

“Well, it’s good you’re not grandma. You’re more bearable than she is when it comes to mass,” she tells her mother and then Snow is throwing a pillow at her head. “Momma, really?!“

“Yes really, now get up. Your father wants you ready and downstairs in thirty minutes. No excuses,” she says before exiting. Emma groans and throws the pillow at the door, hitting an unsuspecting August square in the face.

“Emma!” he shrieked and she looked up quickly.

“Sorry Aug, I’m just really tired,”

“No one told you to stay up with Regina on the phone all night. You guys act like you’re in love or something,”

“What do you know about love, dork,”
“I know more than you think.”

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“Hello?”

“Hey.. Just got home.. Mass was.. Eventful,” Emma informed and Regina laughed at her.

“I can tell. You sound like death,”

“That’s because I was sitting in a chapel for nearly four hours out of my life to hear them drag on with songs and drag on with the message from God!” she jokes in her priestly like voice.

“You better stop it or he’ll strike you,” Regina tells her but she’s still laughing.

“If God wanted to strike me, he would’ve.. But I’m pretty positive I’d be like some mutated super hero after that,”

“I like how that’s your logic,”

“Pfft, that wasn’t logic, I was thinking DC and Marvel comics the whole time,”

“You need help,”

“I need food.. Speaking of.. What’s cookin’?”

“Well it’s Italian Sunday.. sooooo papi’s cooking because mami cooked last week on Spanish Sunday,”

“Why do they cook on each other’s days?”

“To learn more about heritage.. Daddy says it’s important to learn things about the person you love and to have similar beliefs and values, but that having differences work the same as well…”

“…oh.. Well, can I come over. Momma might cook and then again she might not. Daddy’s out on the job and Auggie’s by a friend.. Momma might be leaving soon anyway, she’s gotta go out and do stuff cus Grandpa’s still sick,”

“Yeah, I think you should come over,” Regina says happily and she and Emma giggle. “Can’t have you trying to recreate home alone-,”

“-It’s a classic!”

“Never said it wasn’t, but you reaaaallly have to come back to reality.. Not of that stuff is going to happen in real life, Em.. now, are you coming or should I ask mami to come get you?”

“I’ll ride my bike.. Shouldn’t take too long, right?”

“Unless you get distracted.. Short attention span,” she mutters and Emma laughs.

“Stop being mean to me.. I’m coming over,”

“Alright, fine.. Can’t wait to see you, Em..”
“Can’t wait to see you either.. Besides.. Summer’s almost over… again and I reallllly just wanna spend some time with my best friend before it all goes to hell again,”

“Better not let your mom hear you speaking like that,”

“If she does, she’ll smack me upside the head.

“Then let’s hope it never comes to that,” she tells her and they both continue to laugh until Regina hangs up the phone and Nougat crawls into her lap. “Hey boy.. Guess who’s coming over?” she questions him and his ears pitch up. “Emmaaa!” she says happily and then Nougat is a ball of excitement because that means.. Daxter- right momma? “Oh crap…” she calls back.

“I know, I know.. I’m bringing Daxter with me too.. Soon enough he’ll just walk over there when he pleases just to see Nougat-,”

“-and they’ll go for long walks in the backyard,”

“Regina it’s like three steps,” she grins and Regina scowls.

“Stop exaggerating.. It’s like five.. But still.. Lady and the Tramp style,”

“Who’s the Tramp?”

“I don’t know.. Hey Noug.. who’s the tramp buddy?” she questions her dog and he stays silent. “I think he just pled the fifth,”

“Can he do that?”

“He’s not on any grounds to do that.. But I’ll let it slide.. He’s trying to protect their identities,”

“Regina.. Hang up the phone so I can come over,” Emma tells her and Regina blushes.

“Sorry,”

“Mhmmm.. See you in a bit?”

“Yeah.. see you in a bit
Chapter Summary

Just... Oh boy

It was a Saturday, sometime in a year, definitely summer though- and it was hot as hell. Clad in her dry fit shorts and a dry fit shirt and a pair of footies to slide around the house in, Zelena snuck skillfully into the kitchen and opened the fridge in search of water- or juice..anything really. She rummaged and rummaged and found that the juice and water offered was not what she was craving, she wanted something a little more...frozen. So she shut that door and looked up at the other one attached to the fridge. She proved successful in her search when she yanked the freezer door open and found some ice pops that hadn’t been eaten yet, just stuffed nicely beneath more frozen goods that looked to be ice cream and ice cream sandwiches and other icicles, clearly there for the children to eat in times like this. She then pulled a few out before searching for a pair of scissors and clipping the end off one. She shoved it into her mouth and her eyes fluttered happily and she munched on the frozen syrup and water concoction. Regina and Emma were upstairs in the girl’s room doing whatever they usually did and Auggie had called it an early night from at least nine. Strange, that boy..was strange.

August functioned much like an old man would. He woke up with the sun and went down before the moon wanted to party. He ate very controlled meals, but he did indulge himself in sweet things every so often. Granted, the four of them were like that-but his just seemed to be so much more prominent with how he acted. It only served to be an added thing because he now played soccer and had asked Zelena at least once before what exactly it was he should be eating so that he’s as.. ‘Meaty looking’ as he had coined it, as the other players. She’d shrugged and said, anything and everything in the right proportions, a lot of exercise and a lot of practice. Why did she tell him that? She soon found her foot was solely lodged in her mouth because of that, and it proved to be to her chagrin because everyday since their summer started, who was up and calling or climbing staircases to wake Zelena and tell her she needed to come run with him? That’s right- Auggie . See, soccer, much like most other things Zelena did, came natural to her and it wasn’t a surprise considering she was built like an athlete and had the mindset of one. Her records since starting soccer was the top in the state even at her junior level and her skill matched that of High School students who were currently being scouted as she loured around in her kitchen chewing on icicles. And if Zelena was ever so much as out her mind in a short period of time to actually fully give into her natural ability... they’d have ripped nettings for the goals in her school. Every soccer game she had, Auggie was full in attendance without a doubt, and so were Regina and Emma. Sometimes their parents couldn’t make it and it was understandable, but they were never short on making her day amazing before she even got through the gates at her school. She would always get notes and kisses on her success and be cheered on bright and early. Her dad would give her a pep talk and her mother would simply praise her in ways that came in small burst throughout the day. A letter somehow manages to get into her backpack all the time and flowers are always delivered precisely at one o’clock before her lunch period and then there was always someone who brought her only favourite pair of cleats that were always sharpened for her and cleaned before every game. Regina didn’t mind any of that because truth be told, she may have been the most proud of her sister for doing something she actually liked for once and not just because she felt it might help her fit in. Regina always watched her in awe, and though she wasn’t too bothered to play sports herself, she was still pretty good to knock the ball around. She was always the little sister screaming for hers whenever they got on the field or when they made a bad
call or whenever Zelena scored, which was often, which was why Regina’s throat also suffered greatly and had seen many afternoons of lemon and ginger after the games. It felt natural and it felt real, but then it also just felt like something they did everyday and not once did it ever bother any of them. Auggie’s games were much less exciting considering they all had to put up with soccer moms and dads constantly yelling obscenities over nothing really. It didn’t help the children playing because their benches was smack in the front of yelling dads who always seemed to frequent that exact spot. All. The. Time. And for no reason at all, they felt need to bend up the gate because one of the kids got kicked in the leg trying to dribble past another and one of Auggie’s team members just looked at him and said.

“You do know it’s more likely to get kicked in the shins and the ankle because of where the ball is right?” The man had looked at the boy strangely and said.

“Son, I know more than you. Don’t think because you play some sissy game of soccer that means you know much. Wait til you get older and realize they’ve been spoon feeding you this sissy crap version of soc- WHAT! THAT WAS A FOUL! RED FLAG THAT KID!” the man went off in his rant and the young boy just rolled his eyes in an angry flurry. Auggie shook his head and turned back to the game, trying to focus so that when they called him back onto the field he knew what they were dealing with.

His games continued to progress, usually an hour shy of when Zelena’s was set to start or directly after Zelena’s was over, and Dear God in heaven this man was back and he brought more friends and he brought more stupid complaint and he just.. why? Auggie himself had gotten so frustrated once that he had told this same ‘dad’ to just ‘SHUT THE HELL UP!” granted, it worked, but then he got in trouble because the man complained and then Auggie’s coach had benched him for the rest of the game.. Auggie being Auggie, walked off the field and ignored everyone behind him before finding his sister and Regina and then going through the process of explanation as to why he wasn’t where he was and Emma laughing at his comment on what he told the man to do and Regina just looking at Emma with a glare set in place because she was ‘enabling his bad behaviour’..which she was but so long as their parents never found out.. It was fine. Back on Zelena’s end had proved to be very.. Strange. At the early age of 15 she’d almost been scouted twice by another school and some Ivy League college, but that required moving out of Key West and in some part of Florida she didn’t really wanna go to. They were offering to fast track her high school year if she took the SAT’s at that exact age and then applied through the grant scholarship they were offering her. She’d turned it down without blinking because she wanted to enjoy her life and enjoy her teenage years. She didn’t want to be used as some billy goat when they needed her and then they take away her twenties because they wanted her to be international and play in FIFA and nationals and the Olympics. They would all have to wait until after she figured how to stop being so damn adorably awkward as Wade had described after a few months… and that was another thing. Wade. They’d gotten so close so soon after her birthday that she couldn’t even stand the thought of leaving him behind just to pursue a soccer career she only took up because she needed an extracurricular to keep her as bubbly as she was. And she couldn’t leave Kathryn or that would wreck her.. And she definitely couldn’t leave Regina and Emma and Auggie and David and Mary Margaret and her parents. She was not about to just uproot her own damn life to follow behind her foot kicking a ball that she knows so many other people are better at doing than she is.
It was late, and by late, it was nearly one in the morning, but because this was urgent and because she hadn’t seen the woman all day considering she was out and about showing potential investors and buyers a few houses, this is the only time she could get with her.

“Mami.. can I talk to you about something?” came Zelena’s question as she had just perfectly timed her interruption on her mother’s meeting. Cora was usually a frazzled mess about halfway into said meetings because you could always bet that someone either forgot something, didn’t do something or damn well didn’t chime into the calls that they were required to attend.. nearly daily at that. If no one did anything, it fell on Cora. It always fell on Cora and her boss made it known that if something went wrong, he was expecting her to fix it because ‘it’s your job and it’s what I pay you to do.’

They all- and by all, literally even the Nolan’s knew which point was best to pull Cora away when she was on a video call or a conference call with her more than insufferable boss, Mr. Loki. Loki was one of those men who reminded her of why she did what she did for a living. He was misogynistic at best and Cora had to put the damn ignoramus in place on more than a few accounts. He didn’t believe that women deserved to be in the real estate field, not even realizing that a woman’s eye is keener as it relates to appealing to potential buyer about particular properties. He also clearly didn’t grasp that had his business not had women, ethnically different women at that- he’d have been shut down due to his lack of ability to follow the law. There was something called ‘affirmative action’ and in all essence, though Cora knew that was in part the reason she was there, she also knew that it damn sure wasn’t because Loki hired her. The insufferable child of a man’s father hired her and he was much more tolerable, much more open to expansion and diversity and much more lenient because he understood the demands. Someone was looking for a house, a condo, an apartment-something! Everyday.. What kind of boss would he be to not understand that even his employees needed the consistent stability to function. Where Loki sorely failed, his fathered had already made successes. Then there was the fact that he also felt need to hit on her soon directly after throwing a load of backhanded compliments her way… why he ever felt need to do that was beyond her, and soon after, it had stopped.. Well, that was because Henry’s fist had connected with his face…..about nine times. Loki was never able to place the man’s relation to Cora, all he remembered was that he was in some high class bar one night and Henry had spotted him and levelled his fist into Loki’s rather pasty looking face. Cora couldn’t even be mad when Henry walked through the door, hand already bandaged and cleaned and an explanation set in place to convince her not to yell at him.

“Oh hell yeah, daddy!” Regina had cheered and her mother looked over at her with a reprimanding smirk on her face that Regina just shrugged innocently at.

“What we miss?” comes Auggie’s question as he and Zelena stroll in. Emma was staying back after school to help one of their art teachers and a few students with a couple of coursework pieces. She’d asked Regina to take some photos for her, which her friend did happily and printed them off before Emma had carried them with her and showed the teacher how they could incorporate certain things into their work. Emma was a little prodigy herself in that her art was abstract but very cleanly done. She still struggled here and there and almost everything she started, she never finished for whatever reason she could not place.

“Papi punched mami’s idiot boss in the face,” Regina said to the young boy who was climbing up into the bar stool and pulling some granola out of the container set on the counter.

“Mister Loki?” he asked and he got a nod. “The one who looks like a vampire without the coolness of one?”
“YUUUUUP!” she said loudly and Auggie nodded his approval.

“Cool. He was a douche anyway,” the boy answered and Regina threw her arms up.

“See mami, even Auggie agrees. Total douche,” Regina tells her and Cora purses her lips, rolls her eyes but her facade breaks as she smiles.

“Gotta give it to you papi,” Zelena began as she walked over to their father. “You gots you a mean right hook,” she joked and her father lost his resolve not to laugh.

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“Sure sweetheart, what is it?” Cora had asked as she looked away from her paper momentarily and over at her office door where her oldest was stood with a handful of icicle pops. Cora couldn’t believe where the time was going and what time was coming but looking at her no longer tiny little redheaded baby with a flurry of curls, but now bone straight hair and the physique of a professional, Cora felt her heart swell at the thought of having to watch her go soon.

Zelena scrambled into the room quietly and stuck her hand out, a silent offer that her mother take one of the many coloured popsicles. Cora does in fact take one and twists the top off instead of looking for a scissors which would take some time. She begins to indulge in her sweet tooth for a moment as Zelena gets comfortable next to her. She always did this when she could, pulling a chair up to her mother’s desk and staying up with her even when she shouldn’t, just to help her work through her numerous folders that never seemed to go away.

“It’s about Wade,” she admits and Cora looks confused. Zelena takes the quiet moment to bite down on her icicle and so does Cora. They chew in a comfortable silence for a moment until Cora asks,

“You mean the young man who you danced with-,”

“-yeah, yeah.. Him,” Zelena interrupts and her mother nods. “He’s been acting kinda weird lately,” she tells Cora and her mother nods yet again. It’s more of a tut of her head, taking it in and beginning to decipher the situation for what it was.

“What version of weird would you consider his attitude?”

“Very.. he’s been….distant? I don’t know, but he hasn’t been acting like himself in a really long time and I just don’t know if I did something or if I didn’t do something or if I should have done something,” she rambles and Cora watches. She hums for a split moment, still thinking.

“You think it’s your fault he’s distant?” she questions and Zelena nods uneasily. “Why?”

“Because I can’t figure out what it is and I don’t know how to help him,” she admits and her mother sighs gently before closing her files and turning to see her daughter’s eyes. “Wade’s been avoiding me, he’s only been talking to Kathryn for like five minutes and everything he tells her, he tells her not to tell me. His sister Sydney won’t even talk to me and she’s supposed to kind of be our friend too, but I don’t know about that either. And if it isn’t that, when I do manage to corner him to get him to talk, all he keeps telling me it’s nothing and to let it go and that he’s just been on his own for the past couple of days, but I’ve seen how he is with everyone else and how he is with me. He’s different. He’s not the Wade I met, he’s.. Not Wade at all,”
“Well, that does sound rather strange for a young man his age.. Have you tried finding out if he’s depressed?”

“Yeah, but like I said, he won’t talk to me. He won’t, his sister Sydney won’t.. Kathryn won’t tell me because she’s sworn to secrecy. Mami, I don’t know what to do and I feel so stupid and helpless!” she complains almost tearily and Cora quickly drops her icicle to hug her child and hug her close. It was time for a little lesson.

“Sweetheart, listen to me. You won’t always be able to help your friends, or figure out what’s wrong, or help them fix their problems because that’s not how life works,” she begins and when Zelena makes move to argue, she puts a hand up. Zelena pauses. “If that’s how life worked, you’d be surprised how many people wouldn’t have friends. People have friends to make connections and to connect on a level much deeper than just being someone in their life who exists to exist. Wade doesn’t want to talk about it because it’s probably very hard for him to want to, but you have to still be the friend he knows you to be and support him, whichever decision he may make. However he decides to handle it, be his voice of reason and his sounding board. Be his home away from home, but most importantly sweetie, be his heart,” she tells her and Zelena remains silent for a while. The words were sinking in and they were sinking in deeply.

“But mami.. I think Wade just doesn’t wanna talk to me ,” Zelena tells her with a cracked tone and Cora looks so sad for her.

“Why would you think it’s you?”

“Because… because,” she stopped and Cora tilted her head. It’s dawned on her from a while back and at this point, she sees no reason in holding back in asking her child a simple question, so..she does.

“Because.. You think Wade likes you and has no idea how to tell you?”

“.mm, yeah,”she answers quietly and Cora laughs lightly. Zelena looks up at her very strangely and Cora just shrugs.

“I take it you like him as well then?”

“I.. I don’t know, I mean, I think so. He’s really nice and sweet and protective and any girl would be lucky to have him-,”

“-As would you.. But you haven’t actually answered my question. Do you like him?” she questions again, pointing to her daughter’s heart and this time Zelena pauses to frown before she nods, albeit, almost inconspicuously.

“I do,”

“And you haven’t told him this becaaaaauuusee?” Cora asks, picking her icicle back up and chewing on the melting block.

“I was afraid of what he’d say,” she says at first and it sounds much too confident for that to be the reason.

“For some reason, I doubt that,” Cora says and when Zelena blushed, she admits-

“I was afraid of what you and daddy would say,” she says and her mother shakes her head.

“Were you afraid of your father, or of me?”
“Mostly you,” she admits to her mother and Cora smirks.

“Understandable.. Well, I won’t tell you to do it, and I won’t tell you not to do it. We’ve already had this talk with you, so long as you’re careful, remember both your worth and his worth and the young woman we are raising you to be… I have no qualms about it in the slightest,”

“Are you serious?!” Zelena asks very surprised.

“I’m serious,” her mother nods and she tackles her with a hug.

“Mami. You are-the best!”

“I try to be,” Cora smirks and Zelena just rolls her eyes before hugging the woman closer.

“I love you, mami.. Thank you for your blessing,”

“You didn’t need it. You already had it, sweetheart.”

“Just one more question..well two,” Zelena says and her mother’s ears flinch at that.

“Okay..”

“When do I tell daddy?”

“Your best bet would be as soon as possible,”

“Okay and the other one is.. How do I tell Wade?”

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Summer turns into the best ending for all the ‘kids’ as their parents have so lovingly put it as of late and the groans they received in response is nothing short of satisfactory. True to their word, the four growing young teens decided that they wanted to end their hot ass summer with a trip to one of those YMCA public pool places. Now, Cora being the massive germaphobe she is had to be convinced thoroughly that her kids wouldn’t end up coming out the pool with like Herpes or something. Granted, she had every reason to be afraid when something you didn’t need to acquire through sexual acts became a thing. That’s why she was so persistent on moisturizing their faces and then powdering them before they slept to prevent the possibility of night sores being a thing. Mary Margaret wasn’t far behind on the worried train and who could blame them as mothers for how they felt. As a parent the possibility of you wanting to see your own child frequent the hospital is about as enticing as having your limbs ripped from you… and that’s not. They do go and they enjoy themselves, even if it was only for a few hours for the last few days of their summer vacation, and then, it was back to school shopping after their birthdays which they spend lazily because they were running out of ideas, and then Zelena goes missing throughout the days a bit more frequently and she’s insanely secretive as it relates to her sister and Emma and Auggie, but she’s clearly talking about it with their parents.

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They’re fourteen- and at this age, hormones are rampant, styles are changing and hairs are growing in places they probably shouldn’t. Panicking also becomes a thing and sneaking to stay up late on the phone does as well. Sometimes homework doesn’t get done because it’s ‘Too hard!’ or because ‘You never taught us this!’ But for the most part, it’s done solely because it has to be, or because they were told to do it when they gave the ever running statement of ‘I’ll get around to it.’ More often than not, it was Regina telling Emma to get her homework done whilst they were on the phone, but Emma being Emma complained that it’ll take away precious talking time because she knows Regina zones out once she starts working and basically—there’s no stopping her. Regina had rolled her eyes fondly at her friend and wondered how someone as frazzled and lazy as Emma seemed to act, was still so well rounded in her ability to get work done even with procrastination as her top trait.

It was also a new year and with the year 2007 came their spring formal, which needed to be planned. Now their school did not believe in proms which is why homecoming or formal or really whatever the hell you called it (anything but prom), was the new name they’d put it under. It clearly wasn’t original, but who cared. What this formal entailed was that Emma and Regina’s grade, along with the ninth and tenth graders, which was Zelena’s grade, would plan the spring formal under a theme that either didn’t go against the religion of the school, or had some significant meaning to it. Every grade had their own section for work to deal with and it just so happens that Emma and Regina’s grade was in charge of the decorations and the theme. The grade above them was in charge of colour coordinating and musical choices and Zelena’s grade was in charge of the food and delegating whatever other little things they needed to deal with here and there. Emma managed to get a favour done from the art teacher for that time she helped him and a few students deal with their coursework a while back and Regina had gotten some help from a lot of their classmates with the pictures as she’d asked them all to do what she was doing and take two weeks to take pictures of the night sky at different times. She had one particular idea in mind for what she wanted to display in their school’s auditorium and if it went as planned, they would definitely be successful with it.

Throughout the course of all the planning, Emma and Regina realize one very important thing. They didn’t know much about their classmates, that’s considering they only knew a good handful of their classmates to begin with, and that was because the two girls were so stuck to each other from they got there, that they didn’t bother to get to know anyone else if they didn’t have to. It was much the same as Regina and Zelena were with their neighbours who they now had to communicate with and they weren’t very surprised to see that their neighbours weren’t bad at all. They were actually really weird but funny and had a relationship similar to Regina’s and Zelena’s. So, the three girls were constantly staying after school for more plannings with their grades and Zelena and Auggie’s soccer games, and Regina would stay in the art room and do her homework in one of the corners if Emma and the rest of them didn’t need help. She would be lying if she said she didn’t take pictures over the course of that, and it was because her school had approved the use of cameras, not specifically for this event, but because they were trying to expand the curriculum and offer photography and an elective. That was also something Regina had her hands in and it came down to their student council members to help decide, but if she wanted to make a point, she’d need to join the debate team and bring forth some pretty jarring points.. Points she didn’t have. The only thing she could go on was the fact that photography seemed like second nature to her and the thing about it is, she could capture something right as it’s happening in its habitat. She didn’t have to try and recreate it afterwards, and that’s where photography and art differed… that’s where she and Emma differed. Emma would commit things to memory and not be able to articulate it fully- which was what she’d admitted to Regina and Regina remembers this, but with her camera constantly strapped to her, Regina can record these events and not have to think about the what ifs and the hows in order to recreate it. She didn’t know that someone had been recording her as she went on about it in such a passionate manner that she did not break for air and the person listening had been so enthralled that they’d
forgotten the mission at hand and found themselves drowning in the beautifully weaved story of why Regina felt so strongly about her camera—not just her camera, but the art it managed to encapsulate in a 4x4 printout. She didn’t realize that when the office called her in along with the head of student council at the time, that they were calling her to tell her the request had been approved. She didn’t realize that the student council president herself was the one who recorded Regina and pretty much put proof to her words that when art happens, the camera is always the best way to capture whatever it is the eyes may miss.

Days later and both girls were back in the art room, back to planning and back to Regina sorting through pictures as Emma continued to sketch and shade and colour their banners and posters and life size drawings. Since the big reveal that Photography would be an elective, the school had asked about converting half the art room that really was genuinely too large for the minimal students it held into the photography section of the class. The students had immediately agreed, not for the purpose of talking to one another, but they realized that they would get to see art come to life in other ways and it proved genius as most students loaned a helping hand to one another in order to kick start those inspirational gears. All they needed was a teacher for photography and it was fine, but for right now, they just settled for the art teacher they had. Granted, it wasn’t surprising that he too seemed to enjoy incorporating the photography students into the art style.

Zelena had walked into the newly converted room with Kathryn after texting her sister to find out where she and Emma were. It had been a long day for everyone in the three recurring grades considering they were now at least sixty people shorter on help than when they originally began. Some claimed it because their schedules either started to clash with the newfound responsibilities that literally half of them could do at any point in time.. Or it clashed with homework..somewhat, or with their other after school activities. But they’d soon found out that some people just genuinely weren’t showing up to the meetings or bothering to actually try and help because they were lazy, and they had to do a hell of a lot of damage control at one point to figure out how to fix that. Their solution?

Cut them out of the process and continue on. Now did that mean they weren’t invited to attend the formal? No, but what was in store for them was the cleanup after the fact. And no one could escape considering their names were written as well as photos that were taken to identify each student who came in. That list was to be handed into the office at the last possible moment in case someone was smart enough to actually bother helping, but few seemed to be trying it out and then saying they couldn’t after about a moment’s notice.

“I thought you had a game,” Regina had said but Zelena shrugged, noncommittally.

“It got cancelled, one of the girls from the other team broke her leg or something… anyway, you guys need any help?” she queried but Regina shrugged.

“No.. my job’s pretty easy. Everyone’s doing their part so there’s no issue there. Besides, I’m looking for something specific-”

“Specific like what? How hard is it to just find one good picture of some stars?” Zelena teased and Regina rolled her eyes so hard they probably would’ve fallen out her head.

“It’s not just one good picture, Lena, but like I said, looking for something specific… How’s it
“going with finding the caterers?” she asked in topic change and she got an answer shortly after that.

“They all suck,” Kathryn groaned before dropping heavily into a chair in the art room. Regina looked at her sister and then at Kathryn before she spoke.

“What’s wrong?”

“Minus the caterers not taking us seriously about the order or constantly in belief that we’re prank calling them when we aren’t. And then the ones who do believe us telling us they can’t make our exact orders to most of those businesses not even existing anymore.. You see where I’m going with this right?” Katherine questions and Regina nods.

“Why don’t you guys just cook the food yourselves then?” Emma pipes up from her spot at the table where she was still sketching and scribbling, not even remotely breaking her focus on her paper to look at them. Kathryn turns and so does Zelena but Regina turns back to her pictures.

“We’d all suffer from food poisoning if Zelena or I cooked,”

“Then don’t,” Regina tells them. “Find people who can and get them to do it.. If there’s a bunch of you who can’t cook, divide of the grocery list and pay for the food that needs to be cooked and that way we don’t have to worry about caterers,”

“That would work, if everyone could be trusted. Someone could go, oh, I couldn’t do it because my mom was sick and then you ask them for the money and they say they already spent it to buy the stuff but they went bad or something. And then there’s the people who don’t bring money to pay for it at all, or the people who say they can cook, and really can’t,” Zelena said and she did have a point.

“Alright then… Why don’t you just ask mami to give you the number for the caterer at her job or ask her to order it for you?”

“Because I just found out from papi not too long ago that mami’s at the airport.. She got called away about an hour ago and she won’t be here for a while, that’s kinda what I came to tell you,” she says and Regina tilts her head back.

“So, call her when she lands,” Regina says matter of factly and Zelena sighs.

“No..”

“No? Then what are you gonna do, because Kathryn’s over there complaining about no food like she’s about to die and you’re here shooting down every possible answer and avenue. If it’s that tough Lena, just ask daddy to get the number from mami and tell him to order it for you. It’s really that simple. Find out the order cost, divide that amongst your grade and then figure out how to pay for it. Pick a deadline for the payment and if they don’t pay, figure out something else for them to pay for, like more paint or money to print out the photos we need or new brushes or more decorations or something. Just deal with it!” she says almost very much past frustration. Zelena falters on her spot and Regina’s chest recedes to a normal beat.

“okay..” Zelena says to her before she backs away and sighs. “Kat, let’s go figure something out.. Whenever you’re done, text me so we can go, okay?”

“Yeah.. see you later, Lena,” Regina acknowledges and her sister nods before exiting with her friend.

“You okay?” Emma asked in a whisper as she walked over to Regina and the brunette nodded a bit distracted before sighing. “Sure?” Emma asks again and she nods a bit more determined this time.
“Good... so how many pictures have you found so far?”

“Two,” Regina tells her and Emma gapes.

“Two?!” she questions loudly and she is shushed. Emma quiets down and hisses. “twoo!” and Regina just nods at her. “Didn’t you say you needed like 92 of those?” another nod comes and she falters. “And you really only found two?” she asks and receives a sigh.

“Yes, Emma. I really only found two,” Regina says exasperated and Emma looks so confused.

“But, why, I thought all you asked for was pictures of the night. How hard could it be to just pick some stars?”

“The same about of hard it takes for you to ever finish a piece that you started drawing, Emma,” Regina answers her, clearly offended. It was expected from Zelena, but not her. She had hopes Emma would understand, but once again. It’s where they differed. Emma faltered. “Do you honestly believe photographers just randomly take photos or just take one photo and go, that’s the one! I’ve found the one!... No, they don’t. You have to look for the right lighting, the right angle. Something that isn’t grainy, something that isn’t fucked up. Something that doesn’t look like you took it on a Kodak disposable!” she nearly shrieked, but her swearing was the least of anyone’s problems, it was the fact that no one ever saw Regina get this flustered and angry and offended all in one round. And Emma had managed to just do that in no time at all. Her face falls, and so does Regina’s. The brunette yanks up all of her things and rushes out of the room, Emma dropping her paintbrush and pencil in the process and chasing after her, apologies littering the hallway as she chases Regina through the double doors of their school.

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“We’re going to formal together, right?” Emma had asked her one day as they were once again in the art room and she’d pulled away from her current piece in that moment. Emma figured out a system where if she started and did about ninety percent of the drawings, then whoever else was present, could finish them, that way no one knew she couldn’t do it. Regina looked up from her math homework for a moment because truth be told, this particular topic in math.. Was hard as hell.

“Hmm?” she questions with dipped eyes.

“Formal. We’re going together, right?” Emma repeated and Regina made a face in question.

“Yeah, why wouldn’t we?”

“I dunno, I thought you might’ve wanted to go with someone else or maybe someone asked you,”

“No. no one asked me,” she admits. “Probably because none of us really know each other, but that’s okay. At least I have you, right?” she asks and the sincerity in her voice urges Emma’s response.

“No... it’s a good thing I’ve got you,” Emma tells her with a smile. Regina smiles back at her and walks over before engulfing her best friend in a hug.

“You know this means we have to match, right?” is what she whispers in Emma’s ear and the young teen grins and hold her best friend tighter than before.
“I can manage that,” she tells her and Regina laughs against her chest.

“Good, because I already know what colour dress I wanna wear,” she tells her before releasing her.

“As long as I can wear one with pockets, you can pick anything you want… either a dress with pockets or a suit. I can wear a suit right?”

“Once the nuns don’t damn us to hell, you can wear whatever you want, just make sure it matches my dress,” Regina tells her with a bit of sass lacing her tone and Emma pinches and tickles her side which causes her to laugh, which garners unwanted attention and that garners the attention of the art teacher as well.

“Emma?” he questions expectantly and she huffs internally before turning.

“Coming Mister Bentic,” she tells him before rolling her eyes and leaning in to peck Regina’s cheek, probably still being stared at by this man, but she didn’t see an issue with kissing her best friend’s cheek and clearly none of the other students thought much for it either. Regina went back to her math homework and even did Emma’s for her because there was no telling when the girl would actually get around to doing it herself. Once Emma was actually finished, She’d helped them clean up the art room, collected a few more photos for the formal and made a trip to the office and acquired the dress code manual for their formal. It seemed simplistic enough and Regina felt that in their next meeting she needed to make sure everyone had a copy of this to ensure no one got sent home and that no one’s night got ruined all because their school seemed so lackadaisical about everything now, and then drill sergeants about it later.

And that’s how they found themselves already with dates so early into the process of planning this spring formal. That’s also how they end up telling their parents that they’re going together because they don’t really know anyone else in their class and no one asked them. There’s no response of negativity as one of them says,

“We expected this,” and the girls blush and Emma tries to defend them but, she knows and Regina knows that their parents are beyond right.

“You guys couple more than our parents do,” Zelena remembers teasing and that’s also true. Even if the pretense she means it under is completely different. It isn’t a surprise that they’d be each other’s plus one’s to the formal and it damn sure isn’t surprising when as the days go on, Emma would call to ask,

“So.. we’re still going to formal together, right?” and Regina would just smile and grin and tell her best friend.

“We are definitely still going to formal together.”

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“Papiiiii, hurry uuuup!” Regina shouted from the base of the stairs in their home. She was getting a little restless in her wait for both her father and her sister, but it was easier to scream for her dad to get ready than Zelena. Zelena was one of those girls who took hours to get ready, even if she was just going to the damn mailbox just to get the mail. Regina on the other hand, was vastly different from
her sister and you’d expect that as sporty as Zelena was, she’d have more tracksuits and sneakers and running gear than Regina, but no. Regina was the one in possession of more hoodies and socks and sneakers and the running shorts. Zelena had dresses and tights and short shorts that were just beginning to fall farther to the side of bare naked than they were fashionable. Regina’s wardrobe was modest, graphic tees and tight jeans but her chucks and converse and pretty much anything else that wasn’t what looked like it had been puked up in Zelena’s closet, was what she had. That’s not to say she wasn’t girly when it counted, but that also meant her closet had a total of maybe about five dresses, that’s if you didn’t count the fact that two of those belonged to Emma and she was forced to wear them because she had ‘accidentally’ wrecked the other three in her haste to avoid going to a dinner with her mother’s boss. Emma’s style was much like Zelena’s, except less….skin. Emma stayed true to her cowgirl ways with her boots and short jean shorts and plaid, but she’d also conformed to the Floridian style of more graphic universe type shirts and hipster funk with overalls that came in lengths of both short and just above the ankles. Sandals and flip flops and shirts that actually caught more air than parasailing masts did. Auggie had conformed to just wearing polos and trunks more frequently. Plain t-shirts and soccer shorts were another of his go tos. They all had their style that was now affected by their Floridian residence. But it didn’t bother them. Regina and Zelena had modest upbringing in their hometown of Maine and being in the heart of what’s considered the country side wasn’t too far off for Emma and Auggie’s to somewhat match Florida’s dress code of comfort.

Henry was supposed to be taking the girls to get their dresses for formal today and Regina couldn’t be anymore excited about it than she already was. Cora was still away on this stupid business trip, but had told them to just video call her and that way she can help them sift through their dresses.. Either that, or ask Mary Margaret to take them. But no, Henry wanted to do it and he wanted to take all three of the girls, not just Regina and Zelena, but Emma as well. He’d thought it as the best way to save the child from her mother’s constant need to argue with her over what she should wear instead of what Emma wanted to wear. Mary Margaret wanted Emma in a dress, and not just a simple dress, no, she wanted her in something overly priced and poofy and just… Not attractive. Emma wasn’t trying to look like a walking wad of bubble gum from the sixties.

“I don’t have the body to look like I’m ready to have some football player’s kids and I don’t have the body to look like some uptight Stepford child on the no food just air diet!” Emma had yelled back at her mother whilst she was on the phone with Regina, once again asking the brunette if they were still going to formal together, and Regina was on the verge of speaking to reassure her best friend that they were in fact going, when Mary Margaret decided to bring up the dress code situation again. “Uggghhh, momma I’m goin’ in a suit an’ that’s final!” she’d yelled at the woman and that’s when…southern charm had broken through Emma’s usual ability to coax out some very proper english.

“It’s sooo not funny, Gina. She’s ruinin’ my formal all cus she wants me to go in some pepto bismol lookin’ dress!”

“It’s not pepto bismol!”

“Could’ve fooled me, momma! I ain’t goin’ in it, It’s my formal, I should be able to wear whatever I wanna,” Emma argues and her mother huffs loudly.

“This isn’t over, is it?” Regina questions her and Emma sighs.

“Nope. not even by a long shot. I saw some of the dresses an’ stuff when we went the first time and they all stunk to high heavens, but they had this really nice lookin’ suit like the one I was tellin’ you
about and she said I couldn’t get it cus it ain’t ladylike or somethin’,”

“So what are you going to do?”

“I’m gonna ask daddy to take me. He never says no cus he says I’m his princess so I can get him to get me whatever I wanna,”

“That’s your plan?”

“Yeah, you got a better one?” Emma asks a little offended and Regina smirks.

“No Em, I don’t… good luck on getting your tux.. Just make sure it-,”

“-I know. I know. Matches your dress. You picked yellow, right?”

“Yeah,”

“Cool, then I can just get a tie to match and your corsage from that store momma kept tellin’ me about,”

“Make sure it isn’t ugly… or ancient,”

“Ha. You should know I wouldn’t do that to you. Nah, I’m gonna make sure it’s small and cute..like you,” she tells her best friend and Regina blushes instantly. Thankfully Emma wasn’t in the same room as her to see it.

“You think I’m cute?”

“Well, duh. Why wouldn’t I, have you seen you?! You’re all small and adorable and it ain’t just cus you’re Italian and Spanish, you really are somethin’ to look at Gina.. I’m gonna have the hottest date at this formal,” Emma says and Regina can feel her friend dancing like a silly person and she begins to giggle as she says.

“Thanks Em. You’re pretty cute yourself,”

“I know,” Emma says confidently and Regina rolls her eyes lovingly before she changes the topic and they go off on a tangent of new things to discuss.

A soft thud and a thump came right beside Regina and she looked up to see her father smiling back at her.

“Ready to go?” she asks him with folded arms and a now fading expression. He nods happily and Regina rolls her eyes at her father before smirking. “Where’s the queen, herself?” she then asks and he shrugs.

“Not sure,” he tells her honestly and Regina groans.

“My God, can we leave anytime soon?!”

“Clearly not.. I’m convinced your sister would be late to her own funeral,”

“You and her both,” Regina muttered under her breath before she turned to head up the stairs but heard the slam of Zelena’s door as she came into view, her face scrunched up and ..angry?
“What bit you in the ass?” Regina asks and her father gives her a scolding look she shrugs comically at.

“Wade’s being an ass,” she hears in response and now the scolding look is on her, for which she too comically shrugs at before going down the last few steps.

“What’s the deal with you two anyway? I thought you were friends,"

“We are, but he’s being an idiot,”

“You sure it isn’t you too?” Regina asks quizzically and Zelena rolls her eyes.

“Of course I’m sure.. I’m never wrong. He’s always wrong-,”

“-that’s because you always tell him that- even when he isn’t-,”

“-I do not!”

“Do so!”

“Girls!” their father shouts and they pause. “Can we go.. Like now before you both blame me that you missed picking up your dresses,"

“Sure papi, after Regina admits that I don’t tell Wade he’s always wrong!”

“But you do! The poor guy probably thinks if he breathes too many times you’ll tell him he’s wrong!” Regina argues back and their father now groans. He puts a hand to both of their backs and pushes them towards the door as they argue and argue and argue on until he reaches the shop and then Regina stops.

“When in the hell did we get here?”

“Whilst you two were busy arguing over whether Wade wearing suede was a good choice of shoe or not,” Henry muttered.

“That’s because it’s not! If it gets wet it’s gonna get messed up,” Zelena had said to their father and Regina huffs.

“Lena- shut up,” she says quickly and Zelena actually does.

“Inside girls,” their father says to them and they follow, the argument long forgotten.

“Daddy, I’m gonna go look for Em, okay?” she asks her father and he nods before he lets her go off on her hunt for her friend. Regina searches through a good handful of people who are all either walking around with a dress or dresses in hand and parents following behind or hostesses following behind with measuring tape around their necks, papers and pads or just something to do. It’s all overly stimulating for Regina who decides to stick to one part of the store and just scan the whole floor from where she was. Her eyes squint and search and search until she thinks she spots Emma, but before she makes a move, hands are over her eyes and pulling her away from the crowd and into one of the changing rooms. She doesn’t make a sound, because the scent she smells is oddly familiar to a certain someone’s body scent. ‘Hi, Em,” she whispers through a grin and the hands fall from her face, allowing her to turn around and see a cheeky grin from her best friend.

“Hi, Gina..How’d you know it was me?”

“You smell like a walking candy store,” Regina tells her and instantly she’s sniffing herself to see if
this is true. She makes a hmm kind of face as she acknowledges that shoes in fact smell about as good as some candy right now.

“Well, that’s new,” she comments and Regina smirks. “I got my suit already,”

“That’s good. Daddy brought me and Lena to pick up ours. It has to get tailored because I didn’t like the cut on it and the bust has to get taken in a little cuz there’s not much support for it. Lena’s is absolutely… her,”

“It’s green isn’t it,”

“Oh yeah,” Regina says very comically and Emma grins.

“How green?”

“Sprite bottle kind of green,” Regina tells her and Emma winces.

“Yikes… is it shiny?”

“No, thank God. She’d probably be confused for the human form of Venus… don’t want that now do we,” Regina jokes and Emma snickers. “So, did you get your dad to bring you?”

“Yeah, he’s out there somewhere lookin’ for more stuff. Dunno why, I already told him I was gettin’ my suit,”

“Maybe he’s early wedding shopping for that lucky guy you marry,” Regina teases and Emma grimaces.

“I’d marry you before I marry anyone else,”

“How flattering,” Regina rolls her eyes and Emma argues,

“I’m serious. You can cook. You look good in everything and you’re my best friend. Didn’t they say something about the best marriages being from you marrying your best friend?”

“Not literally. But… you’d really marry me?”

“Yeah, why not. You’re awesome, besides, I love you, Gina- so you’re stuck with me til we’re old as dust and I kick the bucket,”

“Then I suppose you won’t be so bad to marry either,” she tells Emma who shoves her shoulder and then there’s a knock at the door before they’re snickering again.

“Is anyone in there?” comes the question and Emma answers immediately.

“Yeah, sorry, we’ll be out in a minute,” she says and the person on the other side seems to make a noise, more than likely indicating they’ll wait. So Emma walks in front of Regina and slowly opens the door. They slide out with only so many eyes on them giving them disapproving looks as they make their way over to the group, David now with them as well.

“I see you found Regina,” David says and Emma nods proudly.

“Yeah, she was lookin’ for me. Did you get my suit, daddy?”

“Yep, it’s right here. We need to get your waist taken in right?”
“Mhmm, and the pants legs are too long, plus I wanted pencil style not straight legged.”

“Right.. Is that all you needed to get from here?”

“Yeah, but I was thinkin’ I could just stay with Gina and Lena cus they aren’t done with their stuff yet and we all have to get stuff tailoured, right?” she asks and Regina nods.

“Emma’s getting a suit?” Henry had questioned and David had answered.

“Yeah, a really nice one, too. Probably better taste than even her uncle James at this point,”

“Well I’ll be. You two might just be the talk of formal this year,” Henry tells his children and Regina blushes much like Emma does, but Zelena’s so glued to her phone and probably still arguing with Wade that it’s not surprising she doesn’t react.

“Oh, daddy,” Emma says and her father perks up. “My tie and my shirt too.. The lady said the shirt didn’t come with the suit. I gotta get a button up,”

“I guess I’ll be taking you to the uniform store and then we might have to go to Ross for your tie.. Or somewhere in JCPenny,”

“Kay, but if it doesn’t match Gina’s dress, I gotta just get a black one.. Or I ain’t wearin’ a tie at all,”

“I got you pumpkin,” he nods solemnly and she looks at him strange.

“Daddy.. You okay?”

“Hmm. oh yeah, just thinking about how your mother will probably have a heart attack because I took you to get a suit instead of the dress she wanted you to get,”

“That pepto bismol lookin’ monstrosity isn’t comin’ anywhere near my body,”

“I know,” he sighs. “I’ve seen it.. Even I wouldn’t want you in that,” her father shudders.

“Well, if that’s what Emma needs to do, she can come with us because the girl’s have to get shoes and accessories and I would like someone to suffer along with me,” Henry says and David looks at him and smiles.

“You just gonna let em run rampant in the stores and just pay with it with your Debit card, huh?”

“Hell yeah. I can’t do this for too long, thankfully Regina’s more agreeable with things than Zelena,”

“Was I suppose to hear that?” Zelena interrupts and her father nods.

“Yes, you were.. Now can you please go and get your dress. We need to be going. I have a week with you both to get these final few things done and I still have to deal with the caterers for you and help Regina print out her pictures. You still have two games this week and we need to find you hairdressers to do your hair, unless your mother is back down before then,”

“Crap, I forgot about that,” Zelena said and her father looked shocked.

“You? You forgot about your hair?”

“No! What? Daddy who do you think I am.. No, I meant mami being back. I thought mami would’ve already been here to do my hair.. And whatever it is Regina was doing with hers,”
“Bite me. Lena!” Regina says in a very sarcastically beautiful singing voice. Zelena ignores her and turns back to her father.

“I was so busy arguing with Wade that I didn’t even think of a back up,“

“That’s why hairdressers exist, Lena,” Regina says and Zelena shakes her head.

“No. I want mami to do it. Just how she did my hair for my confirmation,”

“All she did was put it in a fishtail braid. You know how to fishtail braid already,”

“Yeah, but it’s never as clean as mami’s. I want it like that. No one does it like that,”

“You don’t know that,”

“I don’t care. I want mami to do it, or I’m not going,” she says petulantly,”

“Well then you’ll just have to tell Wade he wasted an entire suit and new shoes for you not to go to formal because of your hair. Just flat iron it,” she suggests and Zelena sighs. That really would be bad of her to tell Wade she wasn’t going because of her need to have this one damn style in her head. She caves.

“No. I want a fishtail braid. I’m getting a fishtail braid. And I’ll go to the stupid formal. With my awesome fishtail braid that I’ll do myself if mami isn’t back in time,”

“There, problem solved, can we move on with life now?” she asks and her sister rises before moving out of sight.

Regina drags Emma away after her father agrees to stay and she picks up her dress that she’d looked at days prior to and had told the lady to put it aside. The young woman had brought it out wrapped and in a coatsafe bag that would protect it against the rain and whatever else. Emma could see the soft yellow of Regina’s dress from the little peephole piece on the patch side of it. She committed the colour to memory to get one as close to or as pastel yellow as possible for Regina’s corsage. Zelena for her part went about looking for her dress and had found that a model of it was still on the rack. Emma had walked up beside her and taken it off, pleased that Regina was right. It was a deep rich green, but it wasn’t even remotely shiny, which was a good thing because those dressed hurt her eyes and looked uncomfortable. Pretty much, they looked like candy wrappers you rejected in the factory.

“I like it,” Emma tells her and she looks surprised.

“You what?”

“I said I like it. Not my style, but it’ll look nice on you,” she tells the older girl and Zelena’s eyebrow raises.

“Why didn’t you get a dress?” she asks as they move down the rack of clothing and Emma just shrugs.

“Didn’t want one. I wanted to wear somethin’ comfortable- you know, be different, besides none of the rules in the handbook say I can’t.” she tells her and Zelena is silent for a while until she just responds with.

“Hmmm.”
After their dresses and Emma’s tux is picked up, they head over to the mall and Regina helps Emma get her tie that matches the dress. Regina isn’t too pleased about any of the styles of the ties and neither is Emma. She takes a look at the bowties they offer, but shakes her head because those will make her feel choked up and Regina agrees with her there. So they look at the black ties. One’s a nice shiny silk material and the other is cotton and something else. Both are nice to look at, but Emma seems annoyed at them as well. She’s annoyed more than Regina is because she actually wanted a yellow tie to wear and now she can’t find one. Regina tells her she can just go without it and Emma sighs deeply before she caves and they just go and pick up her shirt from one of the neighbouring department stores. Regina had convinced David it was a better option than the uniform place anyway and he’d later agreed because none of the shirts would have fit her the way this one does. And then it happens. They go past top man and Emma spots the tie. And it isn’t just any tie, no, it’s the yellow tie. Simplistically so. It’s that beautifully pale pastel of yellow but it has invisible thread etchings that run through it. Ones you can only see if the tie is tilted at an angle. It’s outlined in a thin black striping and a darker yellow border that runs right down the middle of it. Emma smiles and she smiles all derpy before finding a way to slip away from Regina and quickly purchase the tie before she slips back in with a grin on her face and Regina asking her, “What’s got you so happy?” for which she says, “Nothing much.. Just my best friend,” and Regina caves with a smile on that one. They get accessories for Regina and Zelena’s hair and shoes for the girls before they’re leaving the mall and heading back into Key West to drop their things off to a tailor.

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You’d think that with Emma’s smiling face in the mall, it would stick all the way through to the formal, but it didn’t. It stopped just a week prior to the formal and she’d begun acting funny around everyone, but she was even more funny about it with Regina. Regina tried not to read too much into it and instead tried to find reasoning behind it. Maybe Emma was scared of what people might say, or maybe she was just scared in general. Maybe she didn’t wanna wear a tux anymore and now it was too late and she just didn’t know how to voice that.. Maybe..maybe.

She gets up from her desk after having ended her conversation with Emma early as per the blonde’s own wishes. She’s usually the one who has to tell Emma they need to go, but she wasn’t stupid, she knew Emma was making excuses. Why she was making them, now that was a wonder. Regina makes her way down the hall and towards her sister’s room but stops abruptly at the door when she hears Zelena’s laugh and a lot of talk. And by talk, it was cutesy crap you usually heard older people say to one another. The kind of stuff that made her scrunch up her face and feel uncomfortable. But she was more interested in finding out who this was her sister was talking with. So, instead of being the one to eavesdrop, she knocks on Zelena’s door and hears the hushed conversation.

“Come in,” she says and Regina walks in with her sister staring at her.

“Umm.. Wade, I’ll call you later, my little sister’s in my room,” she informs and Regina’s eyebrow raises only slightly at that. Regina hears the mumbling on the other line and waits in her spot for Zelena to be finished. When Zelena hangs up and sits up in her bed, she pats the spot next to her but
Regina shakes her head. She’s confused now by her little sister’s actions, but they’re soon answered, or rather, asked at least,

“You’re dating Wade?” Regina questions and Zelena immediately swallows. She knows the only way Regina could know that is if she’d been caught or overheard saying or doing something. She knows by the expectant look in Regina’s eyes that it makes no sense lying to her, so she doesn’t.

“Yeah,” she caves and Regina folds her arms at that.

“Do mami and papi know?” she then asks and her sister nods. She nods back, taking it all in. And then she just remains quiet, but she also doesn’t move from her spot near the door and Zelena is the one to now ask,

“Are you mad I didn’t tell you?” and for a split second, Regina’s about to immediately say yes, but she catches herself. She sighs heavily and shakes her head before whispering.

“No.. I’m not mad,” but that’s about as far as she goes in asking about Zelena’s relationship with him. If she wanted to tell Regina, clearly she would have but she obviously didn’t want to.

“I was going to tell you.. But I didn’t know how to,” she says and Regina almost believes her, but then she remembers their mother and the belief she has in her sister fades. Zelena can see it and she sighs internally at herself.

“It’s fine, Lena,”

“Is it though?”

“No.. but what’s that going to change.. You already did what you did. If you wanted to tell me, you would have and it’s obvious you didn’t, so why bother,”

“I was just asking,” Zelena tries to defend but Regina’s got her card.

“And I gave you an answer.. That’s my answer, Lena, what else do you want from me?”

“Are you sure you’re not mad at me-”

“-NO!” she shrieks at her sister and immediately sombers in that moment before she retreats into folded arms once more. “no…” she says much more softly before trailing off.

“Gina.. are you okay?” Zelena asks her and she shakes her head, not trusting her words to guide her. “What’s the matter?” she hears her sister ask and she just shrugs before finding the courage to let her words flow.

“Emma’s been.. Weird lately,”

“ Weird how?”

“Just… weird. I don’t how to describe it but she just won’t talk to me and she keeps telling me things are fine but I know they’re not and she just won’t say what it is,”

“Well.. when did she start acting like that,” Zelena asks and Regina sighs before giving into her tired legs and finding a spot on her sister’s bed.

“A couple of days ago.. Formal’s right there and she’s acting like she just made the biggest mistake of her life over something important and can’t tell me what,”
“Maybe it’s just something really stressful on her mind that she doesn’t know how to tell you,” Zelena offers and Regina sighs.

“But she tells me everything, Lena. why is it that this one thing is something she doesn’t…”

“Maybe she knows it’ll be something you won’t like. Just, let her deal with it in her own way. Come on, talk to me about something else, like whether or not there’s someone you like?”

“Mm, no. I’ve got Emma. I don’t need anyone else,”

“Yeah, but e all know you’re not gonna marry Emma, so there has to be someone else, right? Who is it?”

“I already told you, Lena. no one. I have Emma and that’s it,”

“Yeah and I also told you that you’re not marrying her so there has to be someone else,”

“No there doesn’t,” Regina argues back. “And how would you feel if I was gay?” she blurts out the question, but doesn’t regret asking it even slightly.

“Huh?”

“Yeah. I wanna know how you’d feel if I was a lesbian- if I was gay,”

“I mean.. I don’t know,” she says and Regina looks confused.

“You don’t know?”

“Not really. I mean I know I’d probably be scared for you,”

“Scared for me? Why?”

“Because you’ll go to hell-,”

“-No I won’t,” Regina bites out as she looks at her sister incredulously. Zelena’s looks determined and speaks

“Yes. Yes you will. The bible doesn’t lie,” Zelena tells her and Regina growls lowly. She rises from the bed and walks around her sister’s room, words ready to rush from her mouth in a second.

“Yeah.. and guess what, since it doesn’t lie we’d all either be stoned to death or dead right this second because the bible also says it’s okay to stone someone for fornication and sex outside of marriage, for stealing and for showing too much skin and because women shouldn’t be wearing pants or showing their hair or going out during the time they’re bleeding, but would you look at that, you wear pants. You damn sure always have your hair out and I’m almost positive half the things you say to Wade aren’t so biblical,” Regina says proudly by her points. “But wait, there’s more! Public shaming for anyone and everyone against it, Liars, thieves, homosexuals and so many more are people who go to hell aren’t they. Aren’t they people who face public humiliation and even sometimes a royal lashing or stoning? But look at that, you and I lie. You and I have more than likely stolen something by now and you and I face so much other things that we have done wrong that we should already be six feet under and facing the many levels of torture in hell-,”

“-But what about what mami and papi taught us? You can’t just be gay and think it’s okay!” Zelena tries to argue and Regina once again has her card.

“Mami and papi taught us to be headstrong and to fight for what it is we believe in. They taught us
that Love—any kind of love, outweighs a manmade religion—a manmade system and that if your love
was not accepted then it was still okay to be different, because if you wanna go back in the bible
since you and Jesus are such close friends, you and Wade shouldn’t even be together. People of
different religions weren’t allowed to be together. People of a different colour weren’t even allowed
to be together... and Wade would probably be a slave at this point in ‘biblical times’,”

“Whatever, Regina—” Zelena tries to brush off but Regina laughs, almost angrily.

“-No. Not whatever! You’re literally telling me you’d reject me and fear for my dead body all
because Religion has you so scared to accept a different sexuality! You literally just told me without
telling me that you wouldn’t accept me if I was gay!”

“Regina— calm down! It’s not as if you’re actually gay anyway!”

“THAT’S NOT THE POINT!” she yells at her sister and Zelena looks at her with a scowl in place.

“Isn’t it?”

“NO, it isn’t! It’s disrespectful and thoughtless and mean to those who are or anyone trying to figure
out if they are gay, or bisexual or whatever else they may be,”

“Stop getting so offended!”

“Then stop being so fucking ignorant, Lena!”

“It’s not ignorance!”

“YES IT IS! YOU DON’T GET IT!”

“STOP YELLING AT ME!”

“NO!”

“WHY THE HELL ARE YOU SO OFFENDED BY WHAT I SAY OR DON’T SAY ABOUT
GAY PEOPLE?!”

“BECAUSE!” Regina shouts so loud it rattles the room. “Because,” she says now, all the adrenaline
quickly rushing from her as she brings her arms up and around herself.

“Because what?”

“...”

“ Regina... Because what? Are yo- Are you...gay?”

“...”

“Regina!”

“What, Lena! What?!”

“Are you a lesbian?!”

“God, Lena! I don’t know- okay! I d- I don’t... know...”
“Are you going to tell Regina,” Auggie had asked her and she looked over at her little brother before looking back at her phone, shock still written all over her face.

“Shut up, Auggie… and no. I’m not telling her, and neither will you, got it,” she said more than asked and he could taste the threat in her words. He shook his head and walked away from his sister, leaving her to continue staring at her phone.

Did that really just happen? It did. But was she going to tell Regina… nope..

And that right there. That was the moment Emma’s uneasiness had begun.

It’s prom night and it’s awkward for the sisters. Cora’s back from her business trip so she does in fact style her daughters’ hairs and they get themselves ready. Much to no one’s surprise, Zelena takes nearly three hours where Regina takes only one and that’s because her dress had so many safety hooks on it. Their mother had given Zelena the fishtail braid like she’d wanted and Regina had gotten her hair curled in these insanely large curls that pretty much covered her face if she so much as moved a degree. Ever since the big blowout in Zelena’s room, she and Regina have barely spoken. They haven’t been talking about it much, or at all for that matter because every time Zelena tried to bring it up, Regina would avoid her or run in the other direction, claiming she had something to do. She never did, but it was her easiest out at that point and she needed that out like a life raft. Their parents took notice but neither said anything as they expected the girls to work it out in their own time, something they were usually known for doing. This time around, it seemed it would take a good long while before anything was worked out. But, that was another time and another day. Right now, Regina had to focus on the formal.. Or she could focus on her dress, that was a nice thing too.

She’d be lying if she said she didn’t like the way her dress fit. She almost went for strapless but she’d ask the tailor to create three thin straps for each shoulder to keep her dress up and make it a sweetheart neckline that they took in at the waist for her and cut so it came above the knees and flowed freely if she wanted to dance and shake. The material mimicked quinlin almost and the pastel colouring of her dress was soft against her dark and smooth skin. Her shoes were the traditional sparkly silver, but they were a good couple inches in height and her toes were out. She’d decided to go with matching silver polish on her nails and a simple necklace and some earrings to match. It was a simple dress, but it was beautifully worn and Regina had never liked a dress more than the one she was wearing now. It had no limitations or expectations of her and it was something that she wanted. Not something she settled for. When Zelena had come down the stairs in her rich green dress that was also strapless and had an almost plunging neckline. She wore no necklace or earrings but instead wore a gold watch and gold hair accessories. Her shoes.. Black suede pumps and her makeup, done by Cora of course. Because what mother doesn’t have the perfect eye for their daughter’s attire. She was beautiful.. They both were and it was beginning to show when Henry started to cry when she saw them. Regina had hugged him and told him he should be proud he made girls this pretty and he had laughed at that, but it stopped his tears.

Once they were ready they sat and waited on their ‘carpool’ ride to come get them. Emma was going
to meet Regina there because she’d also given the girl an excuse. Something along the lines of final sketches for the formal, even though Regina already knew they were done. At that point in time, she couldn’t actually care much if Emma was or wasn’t telling her the truth. She just wished the not so comfortable awkward silence between her and her sister would go away. Her prayers got answered when a horn blared from outside and both she and Zelena pitched up. She doesn’t know why she did but she did it anyway even though she was very sure their parents were going to take a million pictures of Zelena and her friends. They’d already taken a good handful of the girls prior to the arrival of the other teens, so Regina just hugged and kissed her parents goodbye and went into the rented limo to wait for the rest of them. She had made sure her purse and her phone were with her as well as some gum and her camera. Technically she was also in charge of taking everyone’s photos tonight as well, so there was that. And then her thoughts are interrupted as Kathryn and her date, Robin? Filed in. He smelt.. like a man at least.. A very rugged one. One with too much Axe on his hands. And his hair was shaggy at best on a normal day but it was clear he’d tried sweeping it back for the formal. He was nice to Kathryn though, so there was that and then Zelena and Wade came in and this is when Regina gets a proper look at the boy, and that’s because he decides to sit right next to her.

“Hi.. Wade.. you must be Zelena’s little sister,” he says politely to her and she nods

“Regina,” is all she gives him, but he still smiles… ahh, he’s a true off limits looking guy. He was the hybrid of good skin and nice genes and a bilingual tongue to match. His accent wasn’t thick and his hair was more than manageable. The guy was.. nice looking… and much like Robin, he treated her sister well. He wrapped an arm around Zelena and pulled her in at his side and she melted against him, mumbling that cutesy stuff to him again, and Regina wishes someone would put a bullet in her head and end her misery. A few more people filed into the limo who Regina couldn’t place for the life of her and she didn’t try. Her eye had caught one person in particular but once we and they gave each other a once over, that was it. The ride consists of everyone else around her talking to each other and her finding ways to distract herself in her phone by looking a few things up and clearing her camera for space.

“You take pictures?” Wade asks her and she nods as she deletes a few more, watching as the timer chases itself in an empty box on the screen, indicating it was doing what she asked. “Cool.. what kinds?”

“All,” is what she says to him and he nods.

“You okay?” he asks her and she nods again. “Sure?” Another nod comes and he sighs. She looks up at him and her head tilts.

“I’m sorry,” she says to him but he shakes his head.

“No. It’s okay.. Guess something’s just on your mind, huh,” he questions and she pauses over a picture of her and Emma. “..or someone,” he tries with his own head now tilted, blocking anyone else from intervening in their conversation. She shakes her head violently, but he sees it, and somehow, she knows he does. She feels a hand lightly pat her thigh and Wade whispers.

“It’ll be okay.. Somehow, it’ll be okay,” and for some odd reason or another… Regina chooses to believe him.
Once the party arrives to the.. Party, they file out and walk towards the doors of the auditorium before pushing it open and being awed by what’s before them. During the day no one could see the intent they were going for, but now that the lighting was low and it was dark outside.. They caught it. They caught why Regina wanted them to take pictures and why Emma had said to not draw something this way but to draw it that way. And they understood why everything had been placed the way it was placed by the tenth graders along with the ninth graders. They all understood how the night under the stars came together… Eyes shot up to view the ceiling where 92 pictures, all in 4x4 polaroids were glued to the ceiling, causing stars to cascade across their heads on the 32 foot ceiling. They watched on as the pictures melded together perfectly, creating an entirely new galaxy on its own. You couldn’t see where one started or where another ended with how well they looked to make new constellations and new dimensions the further into the room you walked. Regina’s eyes break away from it in that moment when someone walks over and begins telling her how amazing her work is and she blushes but tells them she can’t take credit when there were other people who’d taken pictures along with her and it was a photo from every single one of them who did. Her mind only drifts away from the group she’d with for a moment until she looks over and sees her sister dragging Wade away and Kathryn doing the same with Robin, and then her eyes begin to scan the floor. She takes notice of every little thing and everyone and yet the only person she’s looking for.. Is Emma. That proves to not be a thing right that moment with more and more people coming to tell her how amazing her pictures are and then it flashes in her mind.

*How hard could it be to find some stars?* She shakes her head free of it before she looks around the room and at the art drawings that line the walls around them, the food station and the ‘photo booth’ Emma convinced them they were putting together. Everything was abstract and unique and unpredictable.. Everything..was Emma. Regina, without thinking took out her camera and began snapping shots of the entire room. The lighting was just low enough to emit a certain sparkle that bounced against the drawings and just enough cast amongst the star covered ceiling.

“You know.. It really is bad for the photographer to still be workin’ when she should be havin’ fun,” comes the comment that is purely Emma. Regina spins around and smiles brightly at her friend who is now gaping at her with appreciation. Her eyes catch Emma’s done up suit and simplistic braid that cascades over her right shoulder and her wing tip shoes. The blonde is also sporting a watch and little bit of a smokey eye look. And it just does something to Regina in that moment.

“Regina you look-,” she begins but hears when the word comes.

“-amazing,” Regina whispers to Emma who grins are her

“… you do look amazing,” she says. “And it’s a good thing I came over.. Thought I’d find you here,”

“Where were you?”

“Hmm?” she asks a bit distracted and Regina tilts her head.

“I was asking where you were?”

“Oh.. I had to do something for someone. And that’s kind of what I needed to talk to you about-,”

“- wait.. Where’s.. You got your tie,” Regina takes notice of and she smiles. Emma looks down and nods.

“Oh.. yeah, I did. Not yellow, but you know.. Had to get something. But listen, Regina I-,”

“- sorry, wait.. where’s the corsage?” she questions and Emma shrugs a bit.
“I couldn’t find it and I was gonna be late and—”

“-Emma! Hey, there you are!” someone says as they near the pair. It’s another girl who is wearing yellow as well. But along with her yellow is a tint of that Aqua blue. The same blue as Emma’s tie. She puts an arm around Emma and Emma looks like she’s about to die.

“Regina.. This is—,” she tries to start with a sigh, but is cut off.

“I’m Kayla,” the girl introduces, hand stretched out and waiting.

“Kayla?” Regina questions, shaking the girl’s hand.

“Her date,” she clarifies and Regina stops shaking her hand immediately. Emma notices and it’s time to intervene.

“Hey, Kayla, can you give us a minute?”

“Yeah sure.. But remember ,you owe me many dances,” she teases and Emma tries to smile as genuine as possible.

“Y-yeah, I remember.”

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“Regina I-,” Emma starts and she knows she’s about to be cut off by Regina’s words.

“-Your date?” Regina asks, very hurt.

“Ummmm… I-,” she stammers.

“Your. Date?” she questions again, the words not quite sticking to her and Emma pulls her aside.

“Yeah, she’s my date but I can explain-,”

“-I’d like to hear this,” comes out of Regina’s mouth but it’s not even registering as angry.. Yet at least.

“She didn’t have a date-,”

“-And what does that have to do with you?”

“Nothing-,”

“exactly.. Nothing… You are- or you were my date, Emma. We agreed to go to the formal together and then you show up with .. her. Who the hell is she anyway?”

“She’s an upperclassman,” Emma answers and Regina scoffs out a laugh.

“Oh,that’s just rich!”

“Regina, can you stop doing that?”

“No! I can’t. We’re supposed to be friends, Emma. BUT NO! YOU THROW ME AWAY THE
FIRST FRIGGEN SECOND YOU GET!” she yells at the girl and thankfully there is music playing loud enough to block them out, not that it isn’t obvious they’re having some sort of angry conversation.

“SHE DIDN’T HAVE A DATE!”

“YEAH, WELL NOW I DON’T HAVE A DATE ALL BECAUSE YOU DECIDED I WASN’T WORTH FORMAL!” she bites out angrily and Emma simpers.

“You are worth formal-,”

“-no.. Clearly I’m not,” Regina says and Emma sighs.

“Look, can I just explain?”

“I don’t see how that’s going to change anything, but whatever. Explain yourself,”

“She didn’t have a date-,”

“You’ve said that two times already-,”

“-yeah, but you don’t know why.. Her date..that guy over there-,” she points to some random dude.
“-told her he wasn’t taking her anymore because he got back together with his ex.. It just happened a couple of days ago and I only know because I found her crying in the girl’s bathroom.. She was sad and I dunno, she looked like she could use a friend… and a date, so I told her I would be her date….”

There’s a long silence and Emma thinks Regina won’t respond.

“Alright..alright. It’s fine- just, you should have tole me-,”

“- I know. I know. I’m sorry. I just wanted to do something nice;”

“I know… I think she’s still waiting on you.. You might wanna go,”

“Are you okay.. Are..we okay?” she questions and Regina nods.

“Yeah.. okay,” Regina says so dead, but it goes right over Emma’s head and she smiles.

“You’re the best. You know that, right?” she asks the brunette but leaves before getting an answer and Regina finds herself a vacant table before muttering.

“That’s what they keep telling me,” to herself.

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She’s been sat at this table for at least half an hour now and the only thing she’d managed to do, was leave it for an actual hour to take pictures of some of the students. She had a schedule, every hour or so, she’d take pictures and take a break for at least ten minutes somewhere amongst that, but at this point in time, she wasn’t too hung up on going back to take pictures, especially since she was now
forced to watch everyone couple up, Emma and Kayla inclusive, and watch them dance all happy n shit. She feels a presence sit directly next to her and immediately looks at the person. Not judging, just… looking. She turns her head back before hearing the person speak.

“hello,” they say quietly and in response, they receive a rather monotone.

“hello,” back. Whoever this person is, they laugh and try again.

“Having fun?”

“Does it look like I’m having fun?”

“I don’t know,” the tell her. “You could be, or you couldn’t be.. Then again, you might just have a really good hold over your facial reactions.. But if I had to judge for myself- I’d say you weren’ t-,”

“-ding ding ding! Good for you to recognize when someone is in a crappy mood,” she says and they laugh again.

“Ahh… I see,”

“What? What do you see?” she asks them, just slightly annoyed.

“Pain,” they say to her simply and she falters. Her anger fades and her face breaks into a soft version of lost acknowledgement. Before Regina can formulate a response-

“Oh, and I’m Nori by the way. Upperclassman, but yeah. Skipped a grade so that’s why I’m two ahead of you and in set with your sister,”

“Y-you know my sister?”

“Pfft, who doesn’t know your sister. She’s a star lead on our soccer team. Why wouldn’t I know her, besides I play with her sometimes. I’m just a filler, but I’ve seen her and she’s amazing!”

“Okay, I get it, but she’s like… way over there. If you wanna go worship the ground she walks on, she’s at least a good twenty steps that way,” Regina points and Nori smirks. “What?!” she somewhat snaps.

“So much sass for such a small person,”

“Well, as they say. Big things come in small packages,”

“They do..”

“Regina.. But you probably already knew that,” she introduces and Nori laughs.

“I did, but it’s because of your work.. Not your sister- or talk around the school… just you and your work.” Regina’s head bobs at that.

“Okay… so, Nori- I don’t know whether you’re a boy or a girl and I don’t want to mislabel you but…”

“You wanna know,” Nori says and Regina nods.

“Well…yeah,”

“I’m…… not into labels, but I identify as both,”
“So he or she is fine?”

“Yeah, totally fine. Is that all you wanted to know?”

“No, why are you here talking to me? You’re an upperclassman,“

“Damn, you don’t skimp or waste time, huh?”

“I find my quickness to be of importance,“

“Truth.. Okay, I came over because you looked like you could use a friend.. Or at least a distraction from what’s bothering you,”

“Why do I get the feeling you’re psychoanalyzing me?”

“Maybe because I am and don’t notice it until someone points it out,”

‘Fair enough. So, where’s your date?”

“I don’t have one,” Nori admits and Regina is confused.

“What?,“

"How does an upperclassman not have a date?"

“Because, I just don’t. Is that surprising?”

“Yeah, kind of is. I mean, you’re really easy on the eyes and you’re good conversation. You look nice in your..thing.” she hears Nori laugh and continues. “And you’re respectful. The only reason I can see you not having a date is that whoever you would have asked would have wanted you to either conform to dressing like a girl or a guy… and you don’t like labels so that would not have agreed with you,” she says and Nori laughs.

“And I’m the one who psychoanalyzes..,” Nori jokes and now Regina’s smiling. “God. I’ve been waiting to see that since I sat down,” she admits and Regina smirks.

“Well, I’m glad that I could grace your face with my smile,” she tells him and he grins.

“Yes, thank you.. Can I ask you something?”

“I don’t see why not,”

“Would you save me a dance later?” she asks the brunette and Regina’s eyebrow raises softly.

“ Why would you ask me that?” she questions Nori and he looks uneasy

“I didn’t mean.. I mean.. Sorry-„”

“-Nori- Nori.. calm down.. I was just asking why you would ask me to save you a dance later after what you did for me,“

“I just thought-„”

“-let me stop you right there. You didn’t have to ask me to save you a dance, because truth be told I’d have asked you to save me one later,”

“You would’ve?”
“I would,” she tells him and Nori grins. Nori gets up from her chair, bends down and kisses Regina’s forehead before hugging her. Regina gasps and whispers,

“You have boobs,” to which the girl laughs and hugs her tighter.

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When Nori leaves, Emma comes over and questions Regina and it’s clearly obvious that she’s jealous. Regina doesn’t see why though, Emma has Kayla, but that clearly doesn’t matter to Emma. Either way, she informs Emma that she’s going to have her last dance with Nori and Emma’s face pales almost.

“But that’s our thing,” Emma tells her and Regina rises from the table before throwing over her shoulder,

“That’s why you have Kayla,” before leaving to go take more pictures. Emma doesn’t go after her and along the way, Zelena bumps into her little sister. She begins to ask Regina about the ‘cute boy’ and if they’re dating and Regina has to stop her there. Clearly her sister has watched too many soap opera shoes to grasp anything of sense.

“Nori’s neither a boy or a girl and we aren’t dating, we’re barely even acquaintances. We just have similar interests and we’re going to dance together later- that’s it,”

“...okay.” Zelena gives in and her little sister walks away.

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After she’s taken a bunch more photos, Regina finds herself hiding outside in the fresh air that the auditorium could not afford her. She’s snapped a few more pictures and has rolled through the film at least four times by now.

“You know, I think I could be a detective. Looking for you is extremely interesting.. And tiring,” Nori jokes and Regina spins around and her camera clatters against her stomach but she’s ignoring the pain..

“Sorry- I was-,”

“- lost in your head there.. I get it.. What’s going on in there?” he asks and Regina is quick to change the topic.

“Is it time for the dance?” Nori catches on and moves on.

“Yeah.. in a bit. But how about this. We stay out here- I mean, we can still hear the music from where we are and it’s way less congested than inside is.. What do you say?” she questions and Regina looks at the outstretched hand before slipping her slender fingers between Nori’s. And they dance. Nori is controlled. Nori is gentle. Nori smells amazing and Nori listens. They don’t over calculate or underestimate her actions or moves. Nori is… everything Emma isn’t in this day and age.
Nori is everything Emma was being at one point in time.

“Emma,” she whispers.

“How?”

“Huh?”

“Oh, it’s just you were mumbling something.”

“Sorry.. I guess it is a bit cold out here,”

“Oh, do you wanna go inside?”

“Please” she says in response and Nori nods.

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Nori guides Regina through the crowd and the music is slow. They come back together as if they’d never parted and they dance around and around until she opens her eyes and they catch sight of Emma and Kayla. Kayla’s got a firm grip on Emma and by the smile the blonde is giving, she isn’t minding it too much. The gaze is painful to hold the second Emma glances over at her and then her attention is pulled back by Kayla once more, and it shows in Emma’s face, she’s giving in without a fight because she likes it. Regina watches as Emma pulls something from her pocket for a moment and she sees that it’s.. A yellow tie. She turns her head and she buries her face in Nori’s neck for a minute and holds on tightly.

“Don’t look,” Nori whispers and she looks up at the girl.

“How did yo-,”

“-Air doesn’t come between you two. Everyone knows you’re pretty much joined at the hip,”

‘Until tonight,”

“Unnnntil tonight.. Yes. Try not to think about it too much,”

“ I can’t,” she admitted. “I’m sorry.. this is happening during our dance but.. I can’t,”

“It’s okay,” Nori reassures but Regina’s eyes are glassy.

“Is it, though?”

“Yes.. it is. Look, you obviously love and care for her, but you need to put yourself first right now and I’ll support you in whatever you choose to do. That being said… what do you want to do?”

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“Dance with me,” Regina tells Nori and he nods with a smile. They dance and Emma catches sight
of the way the pain and worry drifts from Regina’s face, but then there’s Kayla and she’s distracting and pretty and -Oh God! Nori kisses Regina’s cheek and the brunette blushes. Regina continues to dance with her and as the songs change they meld even more until something triggers off in her head.

“I still can’t believe she did that,”

“Hmm?”

“Emma! I still can’t believe she did… that,”

“Did what exactly?”

“Decided to ditch me at the last second all because Kayla’s date dumped her,” she says and Nori pauses with Regina in his hold.

“That’s what she told you?”

“Yeah, isn’t that what happened?” Nori fidgets.

“We should keep dancing,” she says but Regina pauses so stiffly that Nori stops again.

“No. Nori, tell me what happened,”

“I don’t think I sh-,”

“-If you care about me at all, you’d tell me,” she says and Nori is then pulling her off the dance floor, Emma’s eyes following behind them.

“Okay.. what exactly did she tell you?” Nori questions and Regina explains. “Okay.. well, Kayla’s date did kind of dump her, but that was because she asked Emma to come to formal with her.. I’m not saying Emma wasn’t excited, but I think she may have thought about it for a split second before she agreed immediately.. And then she jumped up and down an got all girly…” There’s then an uneasy silence. “It was kind of planned but like.. Wasn’t? But if it makes you feel any better, she did ask her in the girl’s locker room..”

“how long?”

“I’m sorry?” Nori asks confused.

“How long ago did it happen?”

“About a week ago.” An imperceptible nod.

“I don’t feel so well.. Could yo-,”

“Yeah sure, come on,” Nori says before guiding Regina through the crowd once more. They bump her sister and Emma once more but as Zelena and Emma both ask what’s wrong, Regina doesn’t answer either of them but Nori tells them he’s taking Regina home because she doesn’t feel well and when Emma goes to hug her, Regina doesn’t hug back and immediately Emma knows it’s something bad. She settles for saying,

“I’ll call you,” but Regina doesn’t answer her, she doesn’t even look at her.
Instead of taking the young girl straight home Nori takes her to a 24 hours ice cream parlour and buy two pints of rocky road. She hands one to Regina without a word and Regina just begins to stuff her face in silence as Nori drives them down the illuminated strip to the beach. By the time the drive happens, Regina is fast asleep and full of ice cream. Nori pulls up to the house and gently nudges the girl awake before escorting her to her door. Regina doesn’t feel like going in just yet and convinces the young man to stay outside with her for a while longer and they lose themselves in quiet conversation about random things like likes and dislikes and sexuality and sexual identification. Nori asks Regina how her whole ‘I think I’m a lesbian’ thing is going and she’s honest when she says she doesn’t have the slightest fucking clue where to even start and that she and her sister still aren’t talking and after explaining that, she then say that it’s kind of her fault they aren’t talking now, but Nori tells her it isn’t because it’s just not something that’s that easy to get over so quickly because of what someone says to you, regardless of if they’re family or friends. After those words get to her and Nori notices, they decide to say good night. When they rise and come face to face, Regina realizes how tall Nori is in comparison to her. She notices that Nori’s eyes are hazel and dipped in more brown than any other colour. She also realizes the slight crinkly of the boy’s nose when they laugh or wince at something strange. But what she notices most of all is the sincerity and the easiness that Nori gives her where Emma hasn’t been giving her that at all. Nori’s simplistic and sweet and she’s got her head screwed on right and Regina can respect that. And before she can register what’s truly happening, Regina’s leaning forward and so is Nori and their lips meet. The kiss is sleepy, but it’s still sparks. It’s all soft and tenderly done. It’s easy and it’s genuine and... it’s not Emma. And now she’s crying into the kiss, melting more into the kiss and depleting the longer the kiss goes one because- because.. She stops.. She pulls away and she apologises profusely but her tears are wiped away in a hug that Nori gives her where words are whispered that it’s okay. She knows it isn’t and Nori knows this too, but that doesn’t matter because right now feels right. Right now feels okay.. It feels real, and when she’s released… she tiptoes and kisses his cheek before truly saying good night and making her way inside the house.

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“Mijas, is that you?” her father questions as she shuts the door and answers.

“It’s just me papi.” He comes over and looks at her for a moment before he’s hugging her and guiding her into the living room where Cora was as well.

“How was the evening?” her mother questions and she tries to answer that and the many other questions coming her way as best as possible until they hit that patch where one of them mentions Emma and she pretty much turns into a dead response machine.

“No.. she had a date already,”

“Who?”

“I don’t know.. She just had a date,”

“But I thought you two were going together,” her mother said and she sighs.

“So did I..,”
“Then.. who brought you home?”

“An upperclassman.. I wasn’t feeling well,”

“Why, sweetheart?”

“Because…,” she starts but stops and trails off, no words available to express her disappointment in Emma and her newfound happiness with Nori’s presence. “Nothing.. Just tired,” she says instead and her father’s head tilts.

“Mija, are you sure,”

“Yeah, papi. I’m sure… I’m just going to sleep.. I love you guys..night,”

“Night, Regina,”

“Goodnight, darling.”

She takes herself the longest shower she’s ever had and she cries her eyes out in the silence of her mind so that the sound of the water beating against her skin can drown out her voice ever carrying in the wind, and when she comes out, no better than when she’d gone in, she’s curled up in her bed, tears still staining her cheeks and eyes still as red as they once were, but her sleep doesn’t come. And when Zelena arrives and their parents ask her how her night is, not one asks about what happened between Regina and Emma because it’s clear even Regina doesn’t know what happened to her and Emma. And when her laptop pings with notification somewhere on her desk and she looks up at it, she doesn’t move to look at the now illuminated screen calling her over so that she can read a message from Emma. And she damn sure doesn’t move the second time even though this one is actually from Nori… but then, her line rings and thankfully it’s on the table at the end of her bed, the exact place her head is resting. A tired hand yanks the receiver off its base and the phone collapses against her ear.

“Regina?” comes the question and the voice sounds so muted and mumbled that she can’t tell who it is until the person continues to speak. “Gina are you alright, you just left the formal and I tried messaging you but you didn’t answer and-,” click.. She’d hung up the phone and yanked the cord from the wall. Regina then turned over and somehow, she forced herself to sleep.
Things Happen. They happen badly..and then they just..happen

Chapter Notes

It's late but it was already written, not even gonna lie. Over the course of the hurricane and blah blah I'd written this and another chapter this and the next chapter are important turning points because Nori is and will continue to be an important person in Regina's life. No, Nori doesn't impede Nori's just Nori, and for good reason too. Emma's a bit of a douche for a bit and that's also for a reason Nothing I write is always fluffy and the perfect love story It's realistic and based off of things I've experienced as I've always said. I never write on something I haven't gone through whether recent or not. If you don't like how it's starting that's fine. If you want it changed you won't get that with the chapters that are already written for it but you can leave comments about what you do want to see later int he story. Granted it's pretty much been outlined and me releasing the pictures for it that I did- moodboard style could come at any point in time It all depends on the chapter it fits

Emma tries it again that night. After the way Regina hung up the phone on her, she had to try calling her back. But what was she going to say to her? What could she possibly say to her after the way everything turned out that night. She felt guilty, didn’t know why-but she felt guilty. Regina didn’t even answer her, so what the hell was that? She tries calling Regina’s private line again that night, all with no answer. She tries it again and again, but still- no answer. She retires for the night, but then again in the morning, she tries it again.

“Come on. Pick up,” she begs silently, but nothing. “Please, just pick up,” the fourteen year old begs a little louder and still, the busy signal comes to her ears. It vibrates in her eardrum and the sound begins to seem louder and louder the longer Emma stays on the line. She sighs and hangs it up before she has an idea. She stares at the phone for a moment before her fingers trail over the dialpad and she dials out. She slowly puts it to her ear and waits. It rings.

It rings.

“Hello?”

“Hi, Mister Mills. Good morning,“

“Hello Emma, how are you?”

“I’m good. Uhhh, Mister Mills I was just calling to talk to Gina, but she’s not picking up,”

“She’s not? Are you sure you dialled the right extension?” he questions.

“Yes sir. It’s just busy,”

“Hmm, maybe it’s disconnected. I’ll go up and see about it, okay?”
“Okay, thanks Mister Mills,” Emma says. Henry trudges up the stairs of his home and makes his way towards the room of his youngest before he’s tapping on the door lightly.

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She’s awake. Well technically she’s been awake for about an hour now, she just didn’t feel like moving. Her phone was in fact disconnected because she’d angrily yanked the cord from the wall and receiver after realizing that Emma wouldn’t stop calling her if she’d left it in. It only could have been her, considering she was the only one who knew the number for that direct line. Regina rolls over and stares at her wall with a sigh. She tries settling her head against her pillow, but the slight hardness has her pulling something from under it. It’s a picture book of memories for her and Emma. Without thinking, she flings it at the ground and slams her face against the pillow.

*Why did Emma have to lie to her?!*

A knock comes to her door and she rolls back over before she’s dragging herself from the bed and towards the sound. She answers it with an arm over her eyes.

“Regina,” her father calls and Henry watches as his youngest daughter limply moves her arm from her face and her eyes painfully bat.

“morning daddy,” she manages and his head tilts.

“morning Sweetie..it’s Emma,” he begins in a whisper even though he has the receiver pressed against his chest. “She wanted to talk..she said something about not being able to reach your line,”

“Daddy, can you just tell her I’m still sleeping. I don’t really feel like talking to anyone right now,” she pleads and his face softens.

“Alright, mija. Emma-I’m sorry, but she’s still asleep. Yes-yes she’s okay, probably just tired from last night,” he lies after looking at Regina. “Later today?” he repeats in question and mild-mannered Regina merely shrugs. “Later today would probably be best. Okay, yes I will tell her, Emma. Bye,” he says and hangs up. “Should I ask?” he questions his youngest.

“You can, but I may not answer,” she tells him.

“Well then, that *is* my answer. I’m off today- so if my sulky little one wants to go out and do something, papi’s free,” he offers and she’s smiling- only slightly, though.

“Thanks daddy, but...nothing. Maybe you can take Lena out and drill her about Wade,”

“I like your thinking, kiddo. Alright-,” he kisses the top of her head. “-I’ll bring you some churros on the way back. They always make you happy,”

“They do,” she agrees. “Bye daddy, love you,”

“I love you too, darling.”
“Regina! Gina! Re-Gina!” Emma shouted and yelled as she rushed up the steps and towards Regina’s bedroom. After the whole thing earlier that morning, Regina had taken a shower, plugged her phone back in and found herself distracted by text messages from Nori. She still hadn’t eaten, but she was snacking on fruit- so it was enough at that point. She’s jolted from her conversation by Emma’s screaming and distractedly opens her room door before looking at the blonde.

“Hey!” Emma grins at her and she nods.

“hi,” she says, leaning against her doorpost and Emma just walks right into her room before hopping onto her bed and bouncing.

“I tried calling you, but something was wrong with your phone and your dad said you were still asleep,” she rambles and Regina closes the door, but she keeps her back to the blonde.

“mhm,” she answers and Emma takes a look around the room.

“Hey, what’s our book doing on the floor?”

_I threw it there because you were being a righteous idiot!_ Is what she thinks of saying and instead, settles on-

“Dunno, guess it fell,” she says as she turns to finally face her friend. Emma hums and opens it up before pulling a picture from her pocket and ripping it in half. She looks for the picture of Regina that she’d snuck last night and tries fitting the two of them together. It’s lopsided and fits… not.

“There!” she says with a cheeky grin. “Another milestone down. Prom with Gina seems like a fitting topic,”

_It would be fitting if it actually happened!

“You can’t put that in there,”

“Why?”

“Because it didn’t happen. You and I didn’t go to formal together,” she says before taking the book from the blonde and shaking it. The pictures slip free and fall away, dropping to the floor in a haphazard manner. Emma picks them up.

“Well, I know that, but we kinda did,” Emma argues and Regina’s face scrunches.

“No. We didn’t. I met you there and you had another date,” she reminded.

“Yeah, but you went with the other upperclassman,”
“That was after the fact,” Regina said pointedly.

“Alright. Fair ca-,” she gets cut off by Regina’s cell phone and the brunette forgot she’d even put it down. She moves to get it and reads the text- a smile splitting out across her face.

“Who’s that?” Emma asks and Regina blindly places the book back down before answering distractedly.

“Nori,” she says with a grin as she types out a response.

“The upperclassman from last night?”

“yup,”

“Oh….well, cool,” Emma says. It is clearly not cool. Emma takes the book back and looks for some tape before repairing her original photo. “Guess I’ll just put this one of me and Kayla in and you can put one of you and Nori then,” she shrugs and because Regina is only slightly aware, she rolls her eyes and says,

“Sure, whatever,” before leaving her room and going in search of something to drink. Emma follows with a sour look and is constantly peeking over her shoulder. She catches a few glimpses that say ‘pretty’ and ‘miss you’ and ‘I love you’ and she has no idea what it is and what it does, but it pisses her off. Regina doesn’t notice- or at least, she pretends not to.

She’s mad

Who?

Emma. it’s killing my mood

Why? wait, she came over?

Mhm...and I don’t know. I guess she’s jealous?

Isn’t that a good thing?

Pfft, no. she gets jealous over a lot of things. I’m not different.

Aw, come on. Don’t say that.

It’s true though!

It so isn’t. You’re worth more than you give yourself credit for and for what you let Emma give you credit for

Oh? And how worthy or valuable am I?

Very..

Very?
Mhm, that’s all you get.

I suppose it will suffice

It better, that question caught me off-guard. I couldn’t think of anything more expensive or precious than life and diamonds.

Oh God! Stop it or I’ll get diabetes and cavities!

There’s no cure for my sweetness ;)

It’s cheesy at best

You wound me!

Seriously though. Go deal with the..thing. You guys are too close for this

Yeah, maybe. Talk later

Only if you want

Lol. I’ll talk to you later, Nori

Cool. Later, Gina ;)

:)

Your phone’s unplugged,” Emma commented.

“Hmm?”

“Your phone,” Emma says, holding up the cord for Regina line. “It’s unplugged..why?” she questions and Regina falters for a moment. Ohhhh. The young brunette honestly thought she’d plugged both ends back in..clearly not. She sighed.

“I didn’t wanna talk to anyone last night-,”

“-or this morning. No one except Nori."

“She texted me,”

“Yeah, but you answered,”

“So?”

“So? Regina, I was worried sick about you and you blew me off!” Emma shrieks a little, her voice now beginning to rise.

“I blew everyone off-”

“-Yeah, everyone except Nori!”
“Why do you keep bringing him up?!”

“Because you ditched me-,”

“-Oh, like you didn’t ditch me? Like you didn’t do the same thing to me with Kayla?”

“What do you mean, I told you what happened,” Emma says, her words now sounding genuinely lost.

“Oh, come off it, Emma. Nori told me what happened. She told me everything! It was planned. She didn’t come crying to you in the girl’s bathroom the day before- it was a whole week ago!” she spat and Emma flinched. “You lied to me and you kept lying to me even when you had the opportunity to tell me the truth. It doesn’t matter if you were trying to spare my feelings or not hurt me. The point is, you lied to me and I asked you about it. You keep saying I blew you off but didn’t think about how embarrassed I was at that dance to be the last to know that you already had a date. To know about you two. And as it turns out- having a sister who gossips and talks about anything and everything helps. I heard Lena say it- She called you. She called you and you told her yes, but then again, I should expect my sister to know something like this and not tell me. So yeah, get pissed at Nori, but she told me the truth where you lied. She gave a damn when you blew me off because your head was so far up Kayla’s skirt to care…” she trailed off and Emma stood up before grabbing a hold of Regina’s phone and yanking it from her. “What are you doing?” Regina asked before trying to grab her phone.

“Reading your conversation, what’s it look like?” Emma questioned her rather angrily.

“An invasion of privacy,” she tells her before yanking it from her. Emma glares.

“If you’re so innocent, you’d let me see your phone,” she challenges and Regina throws it back at her.

“Fine..Read it,” she says and Emma does.

Thank you for last night

I should be thanking you, I didn’t even have a date!

I didn’t either, my best friend dumped me for an upperclassman

You say that as if we’re all bad :P

No..not everyone. Still, thank you. I never thought I’d be that happy even after what happened.

Regina..you cried- like four times.

I know, sorry.

And when you kissed me

Correction, you kissed me..

Point is, smarty. You cried

I said sorry. What are you, keeping score? Lol
Pfft, no and I know. It’s okay, you were too busy thinking about Emma not to cry, but I get it. She’s like your soulmate.

Well, she’s not being a very good one as of right now.

She’s human.

Oh, I learned that last night. I thought she’d never hurt me, much less let me down or make mistakes.

Once again, she’s human.

Well, can she not be?

Would you rather her climb up on top of the school chapel and start singing songs of I miss you and I love you and talk about how pretty you are?!

Oh God, it wouldn’t hurt to try…

Gonna get juice

Pick apple!

I’m allergic!

OH-dang!...Pick Orange!

Already did!

Good!

Why the yelling?

Cus it’s fun!

Well..it was..

Why?

She’s mad

Who?

Emma. it’s killing my mood

Why? wait, she came over?

Mhm…and I don’t know. I guess she’s jealous?
“You kissed her,” Emma says and Regina sighs. “You kissed her!” she says louder, angrier and clearly upset.

“Yes, Emma. I kissed her,” Regina answers rather annoyed.

“I told you you’re mine! You can’t kiss other people!”

“What’s it to you who I kiss?! Besides, I wasn’t your date last night!”

“What do you mean?”

“Do I have to spell it out for you?! Kayla, remember her? The girl you took to formal-the girl I am beyond positive that you kissed good night last night! The girl you ditched me for over a week ago! The one you lied about! You have no right getting on me about Nori when you played house with Kayla all last night until you saw something that you didn’t like!” Regina yells and raves and then, her door is being banged open and there’s Zelena with the most confused and flustered face of the moment.

“Hey! What the hell is happening in here?!” Zelena yelled at both of them in question but neither answers. Emma scowls before storming right past her and Regina shakes her head. Zelena watches Emma leave and then turns her attention back to her little sister. “Regina-”

“-don’t, Lena! Just...don’t, okay,” Regina somewhat begs, somewhat commands and Zelena sighs.

“...huff, alright… Papi told me to give these to you. Hopefully they make you feel better,” she says and Regina looks at the bag and then takes it.

“Thanks.”

The weekend came and the weekend went and neither of the girls called each other. Their parents were lost one the matter- but that was probably a good thing and where Regina didn’t talk, Emma might have, and where Emma didn’t talk, Regina definitely didn’t. No one asked, so no one bothered to answer. Nothing was mandatory at that point…..and then...well, Monday came- and all hell broke loose.

Emma was on a mission- a suicide mission at that. Bright and early on a Monday morning- one of the three days for Mass, Emma had managed to convince both her father and her brother to be ready early enough so that she got to school in time to do what she’d planned to do. She’d barely eaten and didn’t bother telling her father bye for the morning as her mind continued to be focused on this one thing. She stormed through the school and down the hall towards the seniors’ block. She stuck her head into each of the classes on the block until she spotted the person she was looking for. That just fuelled her anger and made her blood both boil and rise. A group of seniors are sitting around in a large setting, someone in the middle telling a story and everyone laughing right on cue with the jokes and funny parts. Emma pushes her way through and then taps the unsuspecting victim on the
shoulder. They turn around and then is when things go south.

Emma swings, her fist and part of her arm connects with their face in a heated blow to the cheek. It was stunning to say the least, and not in a beautiful way either. It was flat out unexpected and very-very shocking. Someone in the room grabbed her by the arms and yanked her back, but her green eyes were so dangerous that most probably wouldn’t have, and then she’s flailing.

“YOU MADE HER HATE ME!” she yells angrily.

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“Regina! Regina!” one of their classmates had shouted after sprinting towards Regina’s father’s car. She’s barely out of it and barely telling her father good bye before they’re pulling her up the steps and into the school. Her backpack flails wildly and she fights to hold onto it before she’s yanking the boy to a halt and he stops abruptly, his own hair now out of place.

“Dillan- what’s wrong?!”

“It’s Emma,” he breathes deeply and she fixes her bag on her shoulder. “She punched someone,” he continues and Regina’s mind goes blank.

DEAR GOD!

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

“I made her hate you?” Nori questions the younger blonde with a raised brow. She’s confused and annoyed now. Her mouth is bleeding and her cheek is beginning to bruise quickly. She’s not nursing it because she’s so confused as to why Emma decided to come after her of all people.

“Yes, You! Because of you, s he doesn’t wanna talk to me anymore!”

“That’s no one’s fault but your own,” Nori tells her flatly and Emma flails in the hold of one of the seniors. “If you weren’t so caught up with going to formal with Kayla, you’d had had enough common sense to think far enough that it would hurt her in the process. But no, you notice nothing past yourself!” Nori spat and Emma raged.

“You kissed her!”

“So what! You kissed Kayla and she wouldn’t shut up about it! We’re even,”

“Regina’s not yours!”

“News flash- she’s not yours either, kid. Do you even know how bad she felt that night? How she felt? How much she cried because it wasn’t you she was going to prom with- or kissing! She cried ,
Emma. She cried and it’s because you dropped her like she didn’t mattered and even when I kissed her, she wished it was you! She talked about how much you hurt her and how much she wished you didn’t and how bad all of that made her feel. But all you cared about was Kayla,” she tells her and Emma wiggles in the hold...again. Her face and anger are dissipating, but she’s trying to keep up the facade. “So yeah, I told her the truth, but it’s because she asked me. You lied to her- you did that. Not me. You lied to her and now you’re pissed she won’t forgive you? Seriously?”

“I’m gonna kill you!”

“I’d like to see you try- and let’s see if you don’t end up in the hospital first,” Nori challenges and Emma’s miniature rage tantrum gets the better of the senior holding her and she charges clear across the room and towards the senior.

“Emma! Stop!” Regina shouts across the room, and Emma falters, stutters and nearly trips to a stop. It was the tone in her voice that forces her to make that stop and then Regina’s rushing into the room, straight past Emma and towards Nori. She falls to her knees and puts her hand to Nori’s face with a gentleness to soothe and ease. “What’s gotten into you!”

“You’re my friend, not hers!”

“Well, act like it!”

“I do!”

“You didn’t last week! Unlike you- Nori actually cared about me the entire night- but you, you just stayed up under Kayla all night! You cared more about Kayla than you did about me!”

“That’s not true-”

“-save it! I don’t care...Nori, are you okay?” she asks and the senior pulls away from her, eyes still glued to Emma.

“mm,” Nori responds.

“Does it hurt?” Regina then asks and Nori is about to answer her with actual words this time, but..

That doesn’t happen.

“I-”

“What in heaven’s great name is going on in here ?!” comes the very sharp and very chilling question from one of the head nuns of their school. She pretty much floats into the room and over to the large group of teenagers before her eyes settle on Nori and a still heavily breathing Emma who is thankfully a fair bit away from her. She also sees Regina who looks so concerned and her mouth opens. “What’s happened here?”

“Clipped my chin after I fell on the desk and almost passed out,” Nori says easily, somehow incorporating that adorable little dimpled smile for the nun. Her attitude is so nonchalant that the nun is surprised.

“Are you alright? Do you need to go to the infirmary?”

“Nah, I’m good, but I think I should probably go home early. I’m still feeling a bit light-headed. Is that okay?” Nori questions the woman and the nun nods quickly.

“Of course, of course. I’ll call your parents,” the nun says before rushing from the room. Nori and
pretty much everyone else sighs and feet start moving. It’s Emma making her way towards Regina and then she stops. Her hands come up in that awkward position that it usually does and she tries to speak.

“Regina I-,”

“- I said save it, Emma. The only person you should be apologising to, is Nori-not me,” she tells the blonde before leaning in and whispering something in Nori’s ear. The senior nods, then Regina kisses the not bruised side of her face before leaving. Everyone looks at Regina as she leaves and then they all look at Emma with shock and confusion. Emma wants to disappear right then and there because she’s sure most of them are judging her. Emma opens her mouth to speak again, but is instantly cut off.

“I don’t want your apology. Keep it, because you won’t mean it anyway. Your apologies are useless to me. The person you need to make it up to, she just left,” he says before standing and making his way out of the classroom, his bag on his shoulder.

Storming through the hallway never felt this unfamiliar to the little brunette. She has done it before, but now, it was feeling so strange to do it today. Zelena has seen her mad before, and so have their parents, but today—today...she was fuming and hurt and everything she didn’t want to feel. Her phone goes off and it’s a text message. She stops and pulls it out before reading it.

Where are you? The person questions and she sighs, pauses and then she’s tapping out her response.

Hallway. Why?

I’m going home

Is it your jaw, still?

No… it’s just the situation. I think we should keep apart for the rest of my year here.

Are you serious?

As a heart attack…

that was me trying to lighten the mood.

don’t

Sorry, but- I don’t think this will work. Emma’s...possessive, territorial. I can’t get in the middle of that.

So you’re dropping me because Emma made an ass of herself?!

Don’t say it like that. I’m not dropping you.

But that’s just it. You are. I thought you cared!

A moment passes.
I do care..

No, you don’t. You’re doing the same thing to me that she did.

Don’t compare me to her

And why not? You’re both two sides of the same coin. Toss me when you don’t need me or want me.

I do want you- hell, but I care about you too much to force your hand in this situation even though I know you will choose her

No you don’t

I do. And that’s okay because your heart clearly belongs to her

…..I hate you

You don’t. You’re just mad at me, but

I wish you didn’t have to be

I wish you didn’t have to be

Her phone rings and instantly she picks it up, but doesn’t speak.

“Would you believe me if I said I still can’t find or think of anything more precious than life and diamonds to compare you to?” Nori asks and a sputtering of wet tears leave Regina’s eyes as she laughs tearily. “Hey, come on. I know my jokes aren’t that funny, but I didn’t think they’d make you cry,” she manages and Regina laughs.

“You’re an i-diot,” she sniffs.

“I know, it’s part of the charm.. You gonna be okay?”

“nope. You’re saying goodbye and I only just met you,”

“There will be more people like me,”

“Not like this.. Why does it hurt so much?”

“To say goodbye? I don’t know. Either good or bad reasons, but it hurts because it meant something to you the same way it still means something to me,”

“Then why let it go?”

“Because, you’re not mines to keep,” Nori tells her solemnly and the weight of the words hit. She sniffs again.

“Why couldn’t I be dating someone like you?”

“Because it’ll only last a week before you realize you don’t want anyone but Emma,”
“So just let it last a week, I could use a break from that,”

“I can’t.”

“Why?”

“Because… it’ll only remind me every hour why I fell for you that night to begin with,” Nori says and Regina leans against a locker in the hallway. She slides down it and speaks.

“I’m sorry,”

“For what?”

“You. You sound like you’re letting the person you love-go,”

“In the most honest way I can put it. I am. But, it’s for the best,”

“Not for you,”

“It would be like that for someone. Better me than you. You’re still young, but you’re mature. You need happiness where I’ve already had a chance to have it. Besides, it’s my last year. I qualified to take all the final exams and everything else with the rest of the seniors. If I pass- I’ll be out of here a year earlier than they expected. I’ll be out with them and moving to another state for engineering. Do you really think you’d be okay with dating someone so many miles away that you have to cry for them to come back to you?”

“....no,” Regina swallows after shaking her head and Nori hums.

“Exactly. Look, you’re my right person, wrong time. But with Emma, you’re her right person- right time, all the time. You’re it for me, the same way you’re it for her, but I have to find my person- my someone that’s just like you...you know?”

“Yeah, I know… You suck, Nori Michaels,” she laughs tearily.

“I suppose I should add that to my transcript,” Nori jokes before quieting down. “My mom’s here,”

“Is it okay if I call you later?”

“You’re gonna have to let go at some point,”

“Yes, but I have your graduation for that…. please ,”

“....oh, alright, but just so you know, you really did make my life a whole lot better- I gotta go,”

“Okay.. bye Nori,”

“Bye Regina,” he says and they hang up.

After that, Regina finds herself functioning on autopilot for the remainder of the day. She wasn’t mad or sad or worried..she was just...there. Her teachers noticed, the nuns noticed- her classmates noticed and Emma damn sure noticed.. All she’d managed to do was head to the printing room and print off all the photos she took at formal, separate the folders and drop them off to each block and each class. The more intimate ones of her and Nori were packed differently and dropped off at the office with the young girl’s name on them and then the last few for her own class, she’d just dropped on the
desk, noticing the way her classmates fan for them and everyone began mumbling and giggling and smiling because they loved them. A lot of them came to thank her but all she’d done in response is nod at them and crack the smallest smile she could manage at that point.

She doesn’t go to her sister’s practice or Auggie’s game. She doesn’t even tell them she’s not coming. Walking home would take her over an hour- which, at this moment, she’s damn near willing to do just so she can be alone, but...she takes the bus. She pays to get on, remains mute and fiddles with her nails until they drop her off about seven minutes from her home. She’s so used to going through Emma’s corner to get home that the second she goes through it this time, she looks away even if Daxter is barking for her to come play with him. He keeps barking and keeps barking and it causes her to begin crying until she’s walking over to the fence and bending to pet him. He brightens instantly and hears the little ruffled footsteps of Nougat. He runs up to the gate and tackles Daxter and Regina smiles even though she just wants to curl up and die. Nougat spots her and scratches at the gate before he waits for her to pet him.

“you being good, Noug?” she questions him and he yips happily at her quiet question. “good boy.. I gotta go, buddy. Keep Dax company, okay?” he yips again and she bends closer to kiss the top of his head before standing and walking down the path until she’s home. She uses her key to open the door and tosses it on the table before slipping her feet out of her shoes, walking straight past the living room and throwing her school bag on the kitchen counter. She doesn’t notice that there’s someone else there and as she sighs over and repeatedly and wipe at the tears threatening to fall, Regina pulls some juice from the fridge before looking to her left and staring at the cordless phone just sitting on the dock. Her shoulders sag in defeat before she chugs the juice back and puts the carton in the trash. The person in the kitchen is merely watching her with worried eyes. They watch as Regina goes to pick up the phone and shake her head before pulling her hand back as if she weren’t going to do it anymore. And then she reaches for it again, this time picking it up.

“ Freeze! ” comes the dominant and still chilling tone of her mother. Regina flinches and spins around. “No, ‘good afternoon, mami?’ Cora questions from her spot.


“I feel like I haven’t seen you or your sister in eons- you more so than Zelena. At least she comes out of her room, even if it is only to see Wade,” Cora says with a roll of her eyes. Regina’s shoulders sag even more. Cora’s not even remotely pissed but her tone and the way she speaks always has them believing otherwise “I mean, is that how we raised you. Come home and just throw things about like someone’s done something to you?” she questions but doesn’t wait for Regina’s response as she sighs and stands up before walking over to her youngest with her arms folded. Regina doesn’t answer and Cora tilts her head. “Any reason I should be concerned that you’re throwing a tantrum and nearly almost crying every few seconds?” she questions and Regina looks away.

“No, mami,” she tells her in a quiet response.

“Don’t lie to me, little one,” she says and that’s what she hates. Her mother knowing her way too much.

“I’m not ,” Regina bites out, beginning to feel annoyed by it. She wishes the conversation was over.

“So, you cry for nothing, then? Is that it?”

“I wasn’t crying, mami,” Regina answers and Cora shakes her head.

“Then I suppose grounding you for throwing things about the house is a better option,” Cora tells her and she looks up at her mother, a scowl threatening to form on her face. Cora leans against the
counter, arms still folded and Regina shakes her head. “Why are you shaking your head. If nothing’s bothering you and you threw a physical tantrum, for absolutely nothing, you should be grounded,” her mother said and Regina huffed. “Either that, or tell me what’s actually bothering. I just want to help sweetheart. I feel like I’ve barely seen you. I don’t remember the last time I have seen you for more than a moment,” Cora starts up again and Regina shuts her eyes, her little hands balling into fists. “I mean, you wake up, you shower, eat and hole up in your room…again and again and ag-,”

“- you wanna know why I do that, mami?” she starts and her tone isn’t her usual levelled tone, it’s higher. “It’s because life sucks! Okay, it sucks, mami! And the reason you haven’t seen me in days is because you’re never here long enough to see me! You disappear all the time and leave me, Lena and papi by ourselves! You’re never here! NEVER! You’re never here when I need you. You talk about how you haven’t seen me in days- it’s because you haven’t! You’re too busy these days to notice any of that! I hate it! I just want my mom back!” she yells, now obviously upset and Cora shifts on her spot. She lets her arms fall away. She sighs and bends to the height of her youngest. With an arm on Regina’s shoulder, she speaks.

“What’s with the attitude. Your father told me what happened- rather, your sister rambled and he clarified.. You’re not still fighting with Emma, are you?” she asks and Regina looks away.

“Emma and I were never fighting,” she mutters, fiercely wiping away her tears.

“Regina, I may be getting old, but I know a fight when I see one… what you both were doing- was fighting. Care to tell me why?”

“Not really,”

“Because?” she asks and Regina breaks again.

“Because.. I just want it to stop already, mami!” she belts and the tears rush out before she’s falling into her mother’s open arms and Cora is cooing her and hugging her. She cries and sputters her way through an explanation as her mother guides her to their living room, listening and nodding and hugging her when she breaks even more. She does this until Regina’s passed out from sheer exhaustion and then picks up her phone before she’s dialling out and cancelling the rest of her day at the office. She calls her boss directly and after she tells him that she needs to take a few days off, he questions her and questions her and questions her about it and all she repeats is that she needs it. They get into a small argument about how he needs her and blah blah and she tells him to get a replacement, but she’s taking that break. He threatens to fire her and she tells him to go right ahead. She’s not phased by it. She knows that even if she doesn’t work, her family is still set. She’s not even remotely worried. He simpers because he knows she’s his best worker. She’s close to becoming partner-hell, she could open up her own company if she wished. He gives her the days. He’s not happy about it, but he gives her the days and that’s that.

About three hours later, Henry comes strolling in with sweaty soccer players minus Emma. Auggie is grinning from ear to ear about his win and Zelena is extremely proud of him because of it. They’re both grass-stained and happy, but when Auggie spots Regina’s staccato like sleep, he asks,

“Is she still mad at Emma?” and Cora answers,

“It’s likely,”

“I’m sorry.. I would have told but Emma made me swear not to.. She almost beat me up over it,” he
tells them and Zelena’s eyebrow raises as Henry shakes his head and Cora sighs.

“It’s alright, August. I’m sure she’ll understand somehow,” the woman tells him, her fingers running through her daughter’s thick hair.

“Daddy?”

“Yeah, pumpkin?”

“Can you take me in town for a bit. I need to pick something up,”

“Apology present for Regina?” he asks knowingly and that always shocks her how her father is easier on the come up that she screwed up than her mother is. She hasn’t even told them anything, but by the way his current phone bill had been, he can tell that Emma had been calling out a lot just to have no response, and that particular line was a Key West extension number.

“Yes sir,” she answers, clearly defeated. He nods.

“Alright then, where to?”

“Somewhere that lets her know how sorry I am.”

The house phone rings and Zelena hops up to go and answer it. She’s already showered and Auggie’s currently showering. That was a common thing, and they were positive he’s already had a drawer and extra toothbrush in their house. He and Emma both did. She was helping her father make dinner and moved to grab the phone before answering it, prompting her to walk into the living room as she listened and responded in kind. The Nolan’s were due rather soon for their ever running tradition of family nights. It was agreed upon, which meant that none of the kids could duck if they wanted to.

“Mom, it’s Nori… it’s for Regina,” she tells her mother and Cora nods before lightly shaking the girl awake. Regina wakes, eyes bleary and she rubs them lightly before she stretches. She looks around and her mother points towards the phone that Zelena hands over to her. “It’s for you,” Zelena tells her and she’s confused.

“It’s Nori,” her mother says and she nods before taking it, getting up and leaving the room.

“hello?” she answers groggily and tired.

“Someone was catching up on her beauty rest,” Nori teases and Regina laughs hoarsely.

“Shut up, I was going to call you but then I kinda sorta broke down and told my mom what happened.”
“What’d she say?”

“What’d she say?”

“Nothing. She just let me talk,”

“That doesn’t sound helpful,” Nori says and Regina hums before heading up the stairs and towards her room. She begins to undress after closing her door and sighs heavily from how tired she still feels.

“mm, it can be. Our parents just let us decide how we handle situations, bad or good, it’s a choice for us to make. If we do it wrong, it’s to be expected. We learn from it and learn not to repeat it,” she tells her and then she’s tossing her clothes into the hamper.

“How do you know if you did it right?”

“That’s for us to figure out,”

“Oh… my jaw still hurts,”

“Did you ice it?”

“Pfft no!”

“Did Emma apologise?”

“Told her I didn’t wanna hear it because it’s useless and she wouldn’t mean it,”

“Never cease to surprise me,” Regina says with a roll of her eyes but her tone is light.

“Part of the charm,” Nori claims and Regina laughs before walking into her bathroom, her towel wrapped around her. She makes a sound that indicates she’s going to be doing something in a minute and then the tap runs. Nori waits until she hears the obvious sound of teeth being brushed.

“Yes, which you seem to be in possession of quite a bit,” Regina says jokingly after spitting the first time.

“Shhh, secrets… soooo, what’s happening tonight?” Nori questions and Regina brushes her teeth, thinking until it hits her.

“Ahhh crap! It’s family night- as in, mine and Emma’s family night. It’s been a thing since we were little,”

“You’re still little,” Nori teases and Regina groans before spitting again and then rinsing her mouth out. “Need someone to come and save you from the impending doom?”

“No, but could you come over later,”

“Yeahs, sure. I take it you wanna tell me I suck to my face?”

“That, amongst other things,” Regina grins and Nori smirks. “I’m gonna take a sh-,” she’s interrupted by the doorbell ringing and hearing Auggie yell,

‘I’ll get it!’

“-ower,” she finishes.

“You gotta go?”
“Shower, yeah.. And then go directly after that too,“

“Want me to call you after you shower?”

“No.. I have to be prepared.. Time to die!”

“A little more enthusiasm,” Nori jokes and she groans but she’s smiling.

“Up. Shut!”

“ Fine . I’ll call you later. Save me some food,”

“I’m Italian and Spanish- there are never leftovers!”

“You say that as if I should know that. I’m white as crap!”

“Dramatic much?”

“You’re mean to me,” Nori squints even though Regina can’t see it but she laughs anyway.

“I have been nothing but accommodating!”

“Yeah-yeah. Go eat food. I’ll come see you later,” Nori tells her and she smiles.

“I’ll save you a plate,” Regina tells her back and she smiles.

“Sound good. Do I get a smile with this plate though?”

“Byeee, Norriii,” Regina sings and Nori giggles.

“Alright- alright. Bye Gina,” he says before hanging up. Regina shakes her head and goes into her bathroom before she takes a shower and finds herself something comfortable to wear. She settles on a tank top and pjs because, why not. It didn’t matter anyway, she’d be sleeping soon enough.

“I can do this! I can do this!” she chants to herself even though there is no way in hell that she possibly could do it. She walks towards her door, still chanting it to herself and when she opens it, she freezes. She is absolute shock as she looks at the person standing in her doorway, blocked by the many things in their hand. There, stood in her doorway, is Emma with the biggest teddy bear Regina’s seen in a while, an apology card- hand written, a promise ring that clearly came from a gumball machine and her usual awkward smile.

“Hi.”

“~~~~~~~~~~

“So, you guys fixed it?” Nori questions Regina as the young girl leans up against her car. Regina shrugs before lifting herself up by her tiptoes and rubbing her own arms for warmth.

“I don’t know,” she says, looking back at her house with a weird feeling. “It feels like we just slapped a bandaid on it for now and I’m waiting for it to get wet again and just peel away,”

“That sounds...too realistic,”
“It’s how I have to be when it comes to Emma these days,”

“Yeah, I know what you mean… but what about you-you okay?”

“I miss you. Does that count?”

“I’m right here,”

“You know what I mean, Nori,”

“Yeah, but I’m playing dumb. You know I can’t- we can’t-,”

“I know. I remember and it sucks. I’m going to go through life attached to Emma’s butt whilst she latches on to everyone else,”

“Sounds worse when you say it out loud huh,”

“...yeah,” she sighs and Nori opens her arms. Regina falls into them and they hug tightly “I’m going to miss you terribly,”

“I’ll miss you too...but could you wait til graduation? I’m saving the tears,” she jokes.

“You...you are something else, you know that,”

“Yeah, I’m a hybrid,”

“Not what I meant, Einstein...you gotta go. We have school tomorrow,”

“Nahh. I have a doctor’s appointment in the afternoon,”

“Your jaw finally getting the better of you?”

“Yeah, she socked me hard!”

“She hit you with her art hand,”

“No wonder. She must have been passing the talent on to me-,”

“-Nori. Go home,”

“Fine. Make me come all the way over here just to give me the turn around,”

“I saved you food!” Regina yells and points at the stacks of plates she gave the girl.

“Yeah, but I didn’t get a smile with that,” she says and Regina rolls her eyes before putting on a sickeningly sweet smile.

“Here,” she forces it. “See. a smile. Happy now?”

“Very.. how about a kiss? Or is that too far?” Nori asks and Regina sees the shyness in his eyes.

“No.. it’s not too far,” she admits before stepping forward properly and tiptoeing. Nori meets Regina more than halfway and their lips spark with an invitation of happiness- that is until her father opens the door.

“Regina! At the risk of me calling your full birth name- I suggest you stop sucking face with Nori!” he shouts and they jerk apart.
“Really, Papi!”

“Yes, really! Bring your narrow little tail inside!”

“Ugh fine! I’m coming” she yells back and he slams the door. “He’s never this bad with everyone else,” she mutters.

“That’s because the age gap isn’t like ours,” Nori laughs and Regina rolls her eyes.

“I’m starting to regret it now,” she says and Nori shakes his head.

“Don’t. It’s totally fine. See you when I see you?”

“See you when I see you,” Regina says and they both lean in again to kiss and are yet again interrupted.

“Regina!”

“Daddy!” she belts after jerking away the second time. He disappears behind the door and they laugh.

“I feel like I actually am dating you now,”

“I told you we should have tried the week,”

“No- you tried to convince me to just let it last for the week,”

“Did you really mean it, though?” Regina asks and Nori knows exactly what she’s referring to, answering instantly.

“Every single word for it. And that’s why this is hard, because I’ll have to leave soon enough,”

“And I’ll probably cry. We’ll try to keep in touch but life will happen,”

“How about this- look forward to me coming to your graduation,”

“Which is like eons away, but okay.”

“Too much sass I say...go inside. I’ll text you when I’m home and then tell you about my appointment tomorrow,”

“Fine, good night Nori,”

“Good night, Regina.”

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Regina waited until Nori had pulled out of the lot before going back inside and sitting at the dinner table. Her father had a smirk on his face unlike most. That man was happily evil at the best of times.

“Well, look who decided to come back inside!” he teased and Regina scrunched up her face at him.

“Mami, why did you marry someone as embarrassing as papi?”
“For love,” Cora smirks and Regina scowls.

“Well, can you divorce him for embarrassment, please. He’s the worst,”

“I beg to differ,”

“Differ all you want. Daddy you interrupted us.. TWICE!”

“You were out there sucking face! What did you want me to do? We needed to eat and you were too busy kissing to care!”

“You could have eaten without me!” she argues back and they both start to laugh at their banter.

“Gina, it can’t be that bad,” Zelena said and Regina raised a brow at her.

“Say that when papi does the same thing to you and Wade!” she sasses and Zelena attempts to throw a roll at her. She ducks and their father interrupts.

“Hey- those rolls are good. If you’re going to throw anything- throw the mixed veg. That stuff’s disgusting,”

“Henry!”

“What! It is!” he argues and Cora rolls her eyes and shakes her head. The table is quiet for a moment until, “Anyway, at the risk of sounding like a goo monster and to reduce the possibility of these two ripping each other’s hair out... I quite like Nori. He’s a fine young boy.” Ha, yeah papi...boy Regina thought to herself and then David speaks.

“Wait.. did he say sucking face?” David queried and Mary Margaret swat him.

“DAVID!”

“WHAT, HENRY SAID IT!”

“YES, but you repeated it!” she scolds before swatting him again.

“Ow-OW! ALRIGHT! I’m sorry,” he mutters and she settles with arms folded.

“Uhh, did anyone pick the movie?” Emma interrupts in question because this is making her uncomfortable to hear and Regina can see that. Prior to their dinner, she and Regina had managed to talk- argue and talk some more. The whole purpose of everything she bought began with the bear. He was in representation of Emma’s protection- insane and aggressive as it may be. The gumball promise ring was a reminder that they’ll always be friends first like in the beginning. The flowers- a blatant I’m sorry and the letter did things where Emma’s mouth failed her.

Regina had forgiven her, apologised and mentioned that she no longer wanted to talk about it. Because the young blonde was not about to push it and break what little progress they had made, Emma let it go, which is why Regina referred to it as a band-aid. It probably would peel away eventually, but when would have been hard to say.

Someone picks a comedy movie and then the second and then the third until Emma and Regina are back to being all in each other’s spaces. They’d gravitated back to one another and as they cuddled up, Zelena watched. She’s still yet to say anything about Regina’s likely coming out moment to their parents from days earlier and that’s solely because they haven’t really been speaking and she and her
sister are fighting- and then she’s fighting with herself on thinking it’s not her place to speak about it. Heaven knows she’s come close many times, but right about now-she’s just happy things are functioning the way they used to.

They don’t stay the night, but the next day in school- everyone’s surprised when they both get in class and are talking to each other. Regina does notice, but their school is small and news travels fast whether you want it to or not. She decides to ignore everyone around them and distract herself on her phone. Within that distraction, she keeps talking to Emma and on the few occasions that she’s interrupted and pulled away from it, Emma tilts her head.

“Who’s that?” Emma queries and Regina shakes her head.

“It’s Nori at her doctor’s appointment,” she says and Emma’s face scrunches in worry.

“Oh..is she okay?”

“Seems so. She’s too busy teasing me about being in school to care,” Regina waves off and Emma tilts her head.

“Umm, okay- do you think I could use your phone. I kinda still need to apologise to her,” she remembers after putting two and two together.

“Yeah, hold on,” Regina tells her and she nods.

Emma wants to say something to you

What is it?

She wants to apologise

She doesn’t have to

But she wants to. I think she feels guilty about it

Then let her sit in it for a minute

Evil much

Yeah well, it’s Karma

Come on, Nor- pleeefaaaaasssseeeee! For me?

……

……

……

Crap, I can see the pout from here..alright. Fine, but you owe me.. I still can’t believe you guys talked and are on good terms again.

I’ll do whatever you want..and neither can I, but I wouldn’t say good terms. I’d say-wreck mode.
Should I give her your number or let her use my phone?

Ummmm…

My phone it is then, hold on

Uhh- hi, it’s Emma.

Yep, it is.

Listen, I’m sorry for socking you in the jaw but I was just mad at everyone and everything and refused to see my own mistakes and it’s only because I care so much for Regina..

She is a great girl

I know! And that’s why I acted the way I did. That’s why I got so stupid and possessive and so angry that I hit you. She means everything to me- like everything. She’s family.

That’s important…look it’s all good. Everything’s cool. She and I talked and we came to an agreement. Point being, you don’t have to worry about me trying to take your place. And like I told her- you socked me pretty hard. She said you used your art hand so I see why it held so much power….Regina’s your art, but I just have one more questions for you.

What is it?

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Regina watched Emma stop suddenly and hand her back the phone.

“You okay?”

“Uhh-yeah-yeah. I’m fine,” she waves off.

“Clear the air?”

“Mhm!” she says frantically and Regina’s eyes widen.

“O-kay,” she says before turning back to her phone.

What did you say to her?

Nothing out of the ordinary…she didn’t answer my last question

What was it?

I think you should ask her that
What is it with you two?

Nothing. I asked, she didn’t answer…

“Hey, Em?”

“Yeah?”

“What did Nori ask you? She said she asked you something but you didn’t answer. What was it?”

“Oh umm, it was nothing serious.”

“You sure?”

“Yeah- sure,” she lies and Regina catches it but says nothing

She won’t tell me

I’m not surprised. She probably couldn’t answer it

Sigh, fine. Neither of you will tell me-let’s talk about something else… how’s your appointment going? She questions and Emma is just sat there at her desk thinking and there are only two words ringing off in her head.

I don’t.

“Nori Michaels!” the priest belted throughout the chapel. An applause of control came because the school was too anal to allow a more thunderous one to erupt within the chapel walls. And there-sat at one of the pews was Regina who had accompanied Nori’s family to their child’s and sister’s graduation. Turns out, Nori’s not an only child like Regina had initially assumed. She’s the second of six. Nori’s older brother Kevin and her two sets of twin brothers and sisters. Candice and Catherine. Josiah and Jonesy. All dark haired and hazel eyed- vastly different from Nori and Kevin.

“Kevin and I have the same dad. He died when the gas station got held up and he was trying to save some other lady and her kids…our mom remarried what’s his face and yeah- four more siblings.” she’d told Regina one day when the brunette had gone over to hers for a visit and noticed a pair of eyes belonging to a little person, staring right at her. They were watching her from behind the wall of Nori’s home. She later learned it was shy little Catherine who had no idea who the new stranger in their house was. Candice was more outgoing though. Running and tackling Regina as if she’d always lived with them and well, the boys were boys, googly eyed over the pretty girl. Kevin was estranged to his mother if only for the fact that she remarried and the man she married turned out to be their father’s best friend, but he was very very close with his sister. She was all he had left of their father. All he had left, period. But now, all the stories of Kevin were sat directly next to her cheering for a sister he loved more than life itself.
It was a Tuesday- somewhere coming down to the last few exams for all the students. Who didn’t suffer mentally- just suffered flat out. Regina was in class with Emma taking the second paper for her literature exam when a knock came and that jarred all the students and their teacher from the papers they were dealing with. It was Nori and he was smiling. Today was also the day Nori wore uniform pants instead of her skirt. All the students immediately looked at Emma and Regina. Needless to say, they were both nervous.

“Miss Ericson?” Nori began.

“Yes, Nori, how may I help you?”

“I was just wondering how much longer the literature exam was for, ”

“Another ten minutes- why?”

“Oh, no reason. I just wanted to know if I could speak with Regina,”

“About?”

“It’s kind of a personal matter, Miss Ericson,”

“I see. Are you able to sit the ten minutes?”

“Yes ma’am,”

“Alright then I suppose you may sit with me until then, but bare in mind, I do not need you distracting my students,”

“Duly noted,” he had said and sure enough, he waited for Regina to finish her literature exam and after passing their papers up, Nori grabbed Regina’s bag and walked her into the hallway.

“You know I’m scared about what you’re going to tell me, right?” Regina had asked the moment they both leaned up against Nori’s locker.

“I know, but it’ll be worth it. I hope,” Nori says before rearranging Regina’s bag on her shoulder. She pulls out an envelope from her back pocket and held it up. Regina knew by the markings on it- this was important. “I didn’t open it yet,” she said and Regina swallows. Nori hands it over.

“You want me to do it?” A nod and she nods back before taking it and peeling it open. Regina slides the paper from the envelope and reads it over. “You..passed,” she whispers and Nori smirks. “You passed- Nori! You passed!” she belts before tackling the girl with a hug. Nori holds onto her tightly and whisper.

“Kinda knew I would- and that’s why I planned this,” he says before releasing Regina.

“Planned what?” Regina asks and Nori wastes no time in getting down on one knee. Completely forgetting their hallway was congested, Regina started to panic.

“What are you doing?!”
“What’s it look like I’m doing,” the senior smiled. “Okay, so, I passed and that means I’m graduating right- which also means another prom- well, formal. Anyway- I have two invitations for you and don’t worry, I already ran them by Emma. She’s the one who gave me the go ahead...uhhh..lost my train of thought,” Nori laughed and Regina sputtered out happy tears. “Ummm..gosh you’re beautiful-wait, sorry!”

“Nori?”

“Yeah,”

“Shut up,” Regina smiles. “Whatever it is-yes. Just-stand up already! Whatever it is you want to ask me- I’ll do it,”

“Are you serious?” Nori asks shocked and Regina nods aggressively with a smile.

“Uhuh!”

“Oh God-thank you!” he says before standing and engulfing the smaller girl in a hug. Nori spins Regina in her hold and then sets her back down, but she doesn’t release her. “Thank god you said yes- because I didn’t know how to ask you to be my plus one at graduation and prom,”

“All that charm and you’re still a bumbling human,”

“I can’t help it. You’re intimidating,”

“I’m fourteen!”

“You’re perfect..thank you, for saying yes,”

“Thank you for asking,” Regina smiles and they pull apart. Applause comes and they both blush, but Emma’s right there with her arms folded. Regina spots her and mouths a thank you before receiving a nod from Emma and she turns back to Nori before leaning in to kiss her.

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“Claire Oakesfield!” he’d called and that jarred Regina back to reality. She clapped robotically but her eyes searched for Nori’s and when they met, Regina saw life behind those eyes.

By the time the whole ceremony was over and Regina was at Nori’s family’s home- laughing and playing with the senior’s little siblings and talking with his parents, Nori had told them she was taking Reigna home. Her brother had engulfed Regina like she was a little doll and whispered something along the lines of her being good for Nori and a really good friend to his sister/brother.

“I have a question,” Regina had said in the car.

“What is it?”

“How does your mom feel?”

“About what?”
“About who you are and what you identify as,” Regina says and Nori grins.

“Ohhhh. I guess she’s still kind of worried, but she thinks it’s some sort of identity crisis because it started happening after my dad died...at least, that’s what she told me,”

“Did it?”

“I dunno. It could have, but I’ve always felt like this so maybe not,” Nori says with a shrug.

“...okay,” Regina nods and she’s lost herself in her mind about that one. Nori notices and speaks.

“Anymore serious questions?” she nudges and Regina nods.

“Just one,” she admits.

“Okay, what is it?”

“Do you mind if I tell my parents? My dad thinks you’re a boy and my mom… I don’t think she caught on to anything yet,” Regina tells him awkwardly and the teen looks surprised.

“What exactly are you gonna say? ‘Mom- Dad, Nori’s not a boy, but not a girl either’?” Nori jokes and Regina rolls her eyes.

“Something like that, but with less attitude,” Regina sasses and Nori laughs.

“Ha-ha...yeah, you can tell them and if they’re still curious or confused, they can ask Kevin. I’m sure he’ll take great joy in explaining it to them...just- don’t tell them today,”

“Why not?”

“Because- I still wanna take you to prom,” Nori smiles.

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So, prom arrives and of course Regina goes with Nori. Emma doesn’t go with Kayla this time because technically Emma can’t go to a senior prom, anyway. She’s still very much a junior like Regina, but Regina gets away because she’s Nori’s date, well ‘plus one’. As of late, she’s always been Nori’s plus one. At first, she didn’t know how to tell her parents she’d be needing another dress for an entirely different formal- but one day, Nori had just surprised her.

“Get in,” Nori grinned and Regina looked at the senior a little strangely.

“Whyyyyy?” she drew out her question and Nori rolled her eyes.

“Because, I wanna take you somewhere- so, get in,”

“Fine...where are you taking me?” she asked once she was comfortably in the car and Nori leaned over to buckle her in.
“You’ll see,” is all Nori told her, and that she did.

Nori took Regina over the bridge connecting Key West to the rest of Florida. The four hour speed through consisted of questions from Regina, almost the entire time.

“Don’t you get tired of talking?” he’d asked through a laugh and Regina’s mouth instantly shut on that one. Her head hung low and her face saddened. Nori notices and leans over before kissing her cheek. “I didn’t mean it that way, I just meant, don’t you wanna see the view and not drill me so much. I think I’ll still have to go through that with your dad, and I’m barely prepared as it stands,” she’d said sweetly and Regina’s little pout turned into a little smile.

“Sorry.. I just wanted to know more,”

“And you will.. We have until my graduation, remember?”

“Yeah, but… nevermind.. Where are you taking me?” she’d said, changing the conversation and Nori smirked.

“Tskkk, the lady must wait,”

“The lady is tiny and impatient,” Regina stuck her tongue out.

“Alright then.. You need a dress, right?”

“Yeah…”

“Yeah, so, since I heard you talking about it and then you kept talking to me about it, I figured I’d take you to get measured and fitted for one, whichever one you choose- and before you tell me it’s too expensive, I’m a senior. I’ve had and still have jobs. I can afford to buy you a dress.. That and Kevin kinda sorta gave me his card and told me to get whatever.. So… we’re going in to whichever store you pick and we’ll get you a dress whether you think i should buy it for you or not,”

“Nori I-,” Regina begins to argue

“- I said not to fight me on this one,” Nori says very softly and very caring.  They pull into a parking lot and Nori points up at a sign. “Now, we’re here. You gonna get your dress, or no?” Nori questions, but she isn’t really asking Regina, just challenging her. Regina bites her bottom lip before looking at the sign and then back at Nori.. She smiles and opens the car door before stepping out and looking back at the girl.

“Come on then.. I’m really picky- we could be in there for hours!” she grins and Nori pulls the key out of the ignition before exiting the car. They shut their doors and Nori takes Regina by the hand.

“Then by all means, let’s get to it!”

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“You’re gonna need to pack a spare change of clothes. Shorts-tank top- and sandals- the gold ones I bought you,” Nori had said one evening on the phone with Regina. It was days before prom and they couldn’t stop talking about it. The young girl laughed.
“Why are you so specific on shoes?”

“Because, gold matches turquoise, duh!” Since Nori had finally managed to get Regina to tell him which colour her dress was, he’d taken it upon himself to buy the girl every accessory to match the dress that really did make her skin look extremely golden and tan.

“Fine. I’ll see if I can find my gold sandals. Anything else, pharaoh,”

“No..just be prepared to have fun.”

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It’s finally prom night and Emma came over and helped Regina get ready. She helped her curl her hair and do her makeup even though Regina couldn’t stand makeup. They found themselves distracted by Zelena on more than one occasion as she came in to check and see if Emma knew what she was doing.. and in her eyes, she didn’t. So, Zelena called Cora and Cora came in- wiped all the makeup from Regina’s face and did something completely different. She didn’t put foundation on Regina’s face, she didn’t add lipstick and she damn sure didn’t put any of that weird concealer thing on her either. Regina’s skin was already smooth and her skin tone was beyond even, all Cora did was emphasize her eyebrows and add a light gloss to her lips.. Besides that, Regina’s entire prom getup already made her look older than fourteen.

“This is the dress you chose?” Cora had finally asked her. She and Henry usually let the girls pick whatever it is they wanted to wear, but this dress was insane. It was low cut in the front and in the back, but it was wrapped around every single curve of the fourteen year old and the colour was just absolutely amazing against her skin. Regina blushed as her mother took a seat on her bed. Emma moved around the room to busy herself so she wasn’t interrupting their conversation.

“Yeah, Nori got someone to fit it for me and take it in.. Kevin paid for it..he said to get whatever I wanted- soooo, I picked this. Is it bad? Is it too much??” she asked, now feeling afraid, and probably for no reason at all. Cora merely smiled softly and shook her head.

“It’s..mature, but you’re growing up. You’re almost fifteen, you’ll be a woman soon enough, I suppose it’s time to let you begin finding things that work for you.. I just hope your father doesn’t have an aneurysm when he sees this..” she had trailed off and Regina smiled a little sadly.

“Do you think daddy will think I’m pretty?” she had asked and Cora leaned in before kissing the top of her head.

“Sweetheart, he’s going to think you look like an angel.. You look..beautiful, sweetheart. Just absolutely beautiful and your father will see that, once he’s past the initial shock that his youngest is beginning to come out of her shell. But, before that.. we forgot one more thing,” she tells her before standing and Cora goes towards Regina’s dresser before picking up the golden headband and placing it gently on Regina’s braided curls. “There..now you’re done,” she said before hugging her tightly and Regina smiled.

“Thank you, mami.. I love you,”

“I love you too, baby girl. Now- I must prepare your father and everyone else for...this,” she winked and Regina blushed again. Cora left the room and Emma came over before she sat on the bed next to Regina.
“Your mom’s right, you really do look nice, Gina,” Emma had said awkwardly, but she managed to smile. Her shoulders were up to her ears, but the smile on her face was more genuine than not.

“You think?” she’d asked, suddenly feeling the shyness again. Regardless of how bad Emma could be sometimes, her opinions meant more than anything to the little brunette. Emma nodded eagerly as she watched her best friend fiddle with her fingers and look at them— not at her.

“Yeah.. you do,” she smiled and Regina finally looked up at her. She saw the smile and smiled back before she wrapped her arms around Emma’s neck and hugged her.

“thank you,” she whispered and Emma shrugged but hugged her back. The hug was relaxed and calming and as Regina found herself revelling in the familiar feel of her best friend’s love, she’d soon felt Emma begin to pull out of her hold just slightly. When she senses it, it’s nearly too late as Emma’s looking back and forth between her eyes and her breathing is laboured. “Em,” Regina begins in a whisper, but Emma’s mouth falls open slightly before shutting and she swallows back her words. Her bottom lip folds inward and her eyes look so scared and worried. “Emma?” Regina calls again, but this time it’s in concern. Emma’s brain registers everything, but her actions clearly speak how irrational and once again, possessively desperate she was being with Regina when she had gone as far as to kiss her just as quickly as she’d thought to— for whatever reason.

To say Regina jerked away was an understatement and Emma’s face fell with some very frightening realization that she’d probably just screwed up. Again.

“no,” Regina said softly, shaking her head and putting her hands up between her and Emma… “don’t... don’t do that, please ,” she begged and Emma didn’t know why, but she sensed it was because of Nori. To Emma, it was always because of Nori. She supposes she shouldn’t feel jealous, or threatened by the senior.. By the absolutely adorable senior who was a sweetheart to Regina. Who was caring and awkward just the same, but nice and in all honesty, a God damn Saint. But, this was Emma and with Emma, logic didn’t apply—it never did. Regina was hers and by hers...she didn’t know what the meant, but she knew she didn’t want her with anyone else... even if that did mean she herself was with everyone else.. Regina promised to be hers forever...and she was holding her to that, however petty it may be.

The blonde just nodded and stood before making her way to the door and holding onto the knob as if she didn’t want to go. Truth be told. She didn’t because that meant that Regina would be spending an entire night..by herself..with Nori. And Emma shouldn’t be feeling this way because she’d told Nori to do it. She’d given the go ahead.. But why. More than likely to make herself feel better for the way she’s been acting. She wanted to justify it by hiding it in being nice to Nori.. if only to get back on Regina’s good side. How twisted. She used the situation to her advantage and now look at it.. It backfired for her. She left, and when she left, she left the entire house completely; walking straight past Nori on the way out, confusing the senior who had waved and smiled at her and even said hi. Emma just rushed from the house like someone lit her skin ablaze. To say everyone was confused, was the best word one could use to describe what was happening. That confusion lasted a split second when someone spotted Regina coming down the stairs. She walked slowly and a little hesitantly down the staircase and caught the eyes of her parents, Nori and even Auggie and Kevin. Ori’s jaw went slack and Kevin nodded approvingly. Regina’s usual fiery Puerto Rican curl were looser and draping across her honey kissed skin. Her gold headband pulled it together as her dress gave her the dominance of an Egyptian queen. The gold bandings on Regina’s wrists and thin necklace—all bought by Nori with Kevin’s card of course, further made Regina look like some untouchable beauty. Her clavicle being as prominent as it was, held the thin strapping of the necklace against her as if it were specifically made for her.

“The Puerto Rican princess has let herself become an Egyptian God for the evening….beautiful,”
Nori had whispered the last word and Zelena looked impressed by how Nori herself was dressed. A tailored black suit with pencil legged pants and black loafers. A vast contrast to Regina’s beautiful blue and gold.

“Nori..one word,” she begins, her smile becoming confident as her shoulders square and her look goes sinister. “Queen,” she says and Nori bows before her and she grins. Zelena now groans and Kevin makes himself sparse after wishing his sister a good night with her beautiful date. Auggie walked up to Nori and tapped his shoulder.

“Take care of her,” he says and Nori nods. If Nori wasn’t aware, she’d have missed the slight threat in Auggie’s words and smiled internally at herself. Auggie nodded back and went into the kitchen before shouting over his shoulder, “You look really pretty, Regina!”

“Thank you, Auggie!” she had shouted back with a shake of her head.

“Okay.. everyone else..out-out. I need to speak with these two and then I will speak with Nori for a moment,” Henry had said and his reference was to his wife and Zelena. Zelena pouted.

“But daddy-,”

“-Zelena… did I let Regina stay when I talked with you and Wade?”

“No.. but that’s because you thought mami would be crazier about Wade,” she argued and he huffed with a small smile. “You’re freaking out about Regina, but you didn’t with me,” she continues and he bobs his head.

“She’s younger than you,” he says simply and she goes quiet. “You’re nearly sixteen Zelena. We’ve met Wade a good while ago and he’s been with you since. I waited until after you turned fifteen to talk to you about him. Your sister is fourteen and heading to a senior prom where I’m almost positive she wouldn’t be allowed to go on any regular circumstance. She’s about to leave with a senior- a senior who has nearly three years on her, mind you..Also a senior I found out is soon to graduate?” he’d said in genuine question, now turning to Nori and Nori nodded shyly.

“Yes sir.. I passed all of my exams and everything.. I’m being fast-tracked to college on scholarship. I’ll be staying with my brother Kevin,”

“Right, the young man we met tonight.. Rather good father figure in your life I’d say,” Henry acknowledged and by the way Nori lit up at that, he could tell she took it as a compliment. “Your mother and father are proud I’m sure,” he said and Nori nodded.

“My mom’s...getting used to the idea.” Yeah, the idea of not having a babysitter for her two sets of twins!

“And what of your father?” Henry questions and Nori stiffened slightly, but by the way Regina held onto his hand, he softened. That didn’t go unnoticed by anyone in the room.

“I’m sure my dad is proud of me. He and Kevin were pretty much alike in that way,” the teen says and by the wording, Henry wants to ask, but he doesn’t. He thinks better of it.

“Come along Zelena. We need to go or your sister will be late..and so will you. Don’t you have a date with Wade later as well?” Cora had questioned their oldest and Zelena shrugged.

“He’s being weird, so I don’t know. I guess he feels sick or something,” she says aloud and Cora looks confused.
“Did you two have an argument?”

“No that I know of. It’s just Wade, really. He gets like that sometimes. If he comes over then he’s fine, but if not, he’ll call an hour before and tell me and he’ll just stay home or come over and we talk about it,” Zelena says a little proudly and Regina snickers.

“What are you guys, married?” she questions with a grin and Zelena bites back.

“No more than you and Emma,” she teased and Regina rolled her eyes.

“Emma and I don’t act like you and Wade,”

“Yeah.. sure,” Zelena said a little sharply and Regina looked at her because.. What the hell?

“Whatever, Lena,” she says to her sister and is surprised when Zelena comes over and hugs her. It’s odd to say the least.

“You know I love you,” Zelena admits and Regina softens.

“Yeah..love you too, Lena,”

“Just have fun tonight. Nori- take care of my little sister or get a soccer ball to the groin, got it?!”

“Got it,” Nori nods very threatened by the sickeningly sweet way Zelena said it.

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“We’re leaving,” Nori had whispered to Regina after a while of being at prom and the young brunette looked at Nori and shook her head.

“Already?” she questioned and Nori nodded, looking around the room at the people who were beginning to stare at them both for whatever reason.

“Yeah, it’s starting to get a little too congested,” Nori told Regina and she let Nori have that one. They grabbed their things and left, sneaking out the backside and laughing at the extremity of it all. Nori held the door open for Regina and allowed her to get in and after they were both buckled in and ready, Nori began driving, not really using a particular route to get where she was taking Regina.

“I can’t believe we only spent one hour at your prom!” Regina said in disbelief and Nori shrugged. The windows of Nori’s car were down and at the fast pace the senior was going- it beat against their faces in a soft thump, wholeheartedly welcomed.

“Well, you know how that works. You come- show your face and leave-,”

“-but we didn’t even leave! We snuck out the back! Besides, you didn’t take any pictures,” Regina argued and Nori scrunched up his face.

“That’s not true. We took like two of em going in, and that’s why I told you to bring your camera with you too. I prefer the pictures you take over the ones where they force me to pose as something that looks beyond uptight...your pictures make me look alive,” Nori whispers softly, eyes focused on the road and Regina looks over at her before smiling shyly. She screws her window up and looks over at the girl before she speaks.
“You are alive, Nori,” she tells her and Nori glances from the road for a split second, looking for Regina’s hand to hold until eyes settle back on the road and Regina’s hand is being held tightly. Silence engulfs them both for a good while until Regina becomes curious. “Where are you taking me?” she asks and Nori breathes.

“Somewhere that actually fits the colour of your dress and the beauty of your soul.”

“The beach,” Regina had whispered almost breathless and Nori nodded.

“The beach...you coming?” he’d asked her after parking the car on the curb and beginning to leave. Regina nodded dumbly before following along.

They walk a good distance of the beach, but only that particular distance because it’s both dark and Nori doesn’t want them straying too far away from his car in case something happens. Nori watched in awe as life floated through Regina’s split beauty expressions. The young brunette floats in the air with happy jumps and skipping and giggling that mesh with the quiet of the air, seemingly pulling her vocals out in a drift-like manner. Regina’s slender and small feets leave only the slightest imprints in the sand as she continues to skip and walk with a bit of a dance in her steps. Her giggle becomes a heavenly melody to Nori’s ears and he continues to watch until Regina’s grabbing a hold of her hands and pulling her along with her. She tugs and the teen gives in, running behind her and it’s as if the whole experience is slowed down. They’re running along the shoreline and even in those beautiful gold sandals and Nori’s very expensive loafers, none of that seemed to matter once they were together, having fun. Not being a couple, just two friends- enjoying what nature gave them.

They collapse on the sand, Nori first and Regina directly on top.

“Ummf,” Nori grumbles, not angrily, but in a slight bit of pain and Regina loses it laughing. “You think that’s funny, huh?” she questions and Regina nods through her laugh only to receive Nori’s invasive fingers to her side, inducing even more laughter from the girl. It causes her to sputter and shatter her words as they come out, chopped and diced, wrapped in an envious tone of joy. Nori then flips them over and settles atop Regina, listening as her melodious laughter begins to cease fire. Her eyes bat open, full and innocent and God was she shy and daring. A beautiful contradiction of epic proportions. She lay there and Nori looked-no, Nori saw the conflict and the urge to fight with the inner peace and beauty. Nori saw Emma in places that Regina probably couldn’t. And then, she saw Regina look away. The stark reminder was right there before her and as her own smile drifted away, she sits up and sits beside the young girl who remains laying down. A quiet passes for some time as neither would dare say a word. She then wraps herself around Regina and remembers hearing the young girl’s plea.

“Please don’t go,” she begged and Nori kissed the back of her head.

“I have to,” she’d said, but a violent shake of the head meant that wasn’t the best answer.

“you don’t,”

“I don’t,” Nori repeats in acknowledgment. “But I have to,”
“I know.” And she did know. She buried herself deeper in his arms. “Please,”

“I wish I could..”

“But I’m not yours,”

“Not mines,”

“I’m...hers,” she dare not say the name.

“Hers..”

“When?”

“Regina sks and Nori knows.

“I pray soon. I can’t bare to see you like this..to see you suffer,”

“You’ll come back?” It wasn’t a question as much as it was a recollection of a promise.

“I will come back,”

“Promise?”

“Promise.”

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“thank you,” comes the whisper and it’s Regina whispering those words none too loudly. It’s only for Nori to hear, and she does. She hears it all. She hears the crack in the words and the sincerity. The smiles creep back onto their faces and then Regina’s tackling Nori with a hug that has the older teen wrapping her up in the blanket they’d also brought out with them from the car. They sit there and watch the waves. They watch the quiet and realize it isn’t as quiet as most assume it to be. The waves throw small tantrums and birds still yell. Regina’s mind still ticks and Nori’s heart still drums with despair. Cars still pass and so many other things come alive. Only the moon is still. Only the moon is quiet. The quiet.

“Come on. You gotta change your clothes,” Nori had told Regina in an effort to cease the pain she felt. She urged, that’s what she did now. Urged Regina to do things. She was shivering in that thin thing anyway, but would a pair of shorts and tank top that she told Regina to pack in her bag really be any different? Probably not.

“It’s too cold,” Regina mutters with a pout.

“Hence the blanket,” Nori told her and she pouted harder.

“Fine, but I’m only changing…” she trailed off.

“Only changing?”

“mm,nothing. Hold the blanket up, I’m not comfortable changing in your car,” she tells him and he
nods, standing after the girl goes and retrieves her bag. Nori holds up the blanket and she changes. Never once does Nori peak, probably because he himself was panicking silently anyway. When Regina tells her to, “drop the blanket,” she does and she’s stunned. “We’re going in the water—come on!”

“Wait, Regina, how did y-,”

“Nori- you pretty much gave it away! Shorts, tank top and sandals—really?! Now come on, we’re going in the water!” she grinned happily and Nori yelled back, watching the girl retreat.

“But you could get sick!”

“And that is a chance I’m willing to take!” Regina yelled happily and she clearly meant it.

“What about your camera!”

“Waterproof and disposable—duh! Now come on. The waves are calling!”

Regina was determined. Regina was an influence of statically charging proportions. She was a force that damn sure pulled Nori at the same time.

“I can’t,” Nori admitted and Regina stopped. She turned back and knelt before the teen. She ran her fingers through Nori’s hair and said,

“Is it because of…” Nori nodded. “Just take your shirt and jeans off. I assume you wear boxers and I’m sure it looks like a swimsuit top. No one’s here to judge you, Nori,”

“Except you,”

“And I won’t,” Regina says seriously and it takes him off guard.

“Promise,” she finds herself asking almost timidly.

“Cross my heart—now, come on. Meet me in the ocean.” she challenged before running off towards the sea floor again. Nori looked on for a moment before kicking up from his spot and yanking his shirt over his head and peeling off his jeans and shoes, kicking and tossing them to the side. Nori ran down the confusing terrain of sand and splashed down into the water. It was freezing! “Bad Idea! Bad Idea!” Regina screeched and the goosebumps ran up her frame in seconds. The two piece she was wearing was a stark contrast to her caramel skin. White. The fabric was threatening to fall away from her already slim figure, because her body had folded in on itself. And then, arms were around her and fabric was against her and she was warm. Wading in the water with Nori soon turned from a chilly encounter into a soothing dance. They took few photos—mostly of the night. Not themselves and then Nori speaks.

“Remind me to keep track of the time. I have to get you back home in a while,”

“My eleven o’clock curfew?” Regina asked and Nori shook his head.

“Actually, no. I sorta kinda managed to convince your parents that I could bring you back at a later time and you’d still be unharmed. Granted, your dad had threatened me with a shotgun and the loss of my legs if I was so much as one minute late with you,”

“You know daddy’s joking, right?”

“Umm-no. No-no-no-nooooo-nope.” Nori shakes her head defiantly. “Regina, I like my legs, I’d
very much like to keep them. Your dad and joking-ha-no. Nooo,” Nori manages as her eyes dip lazily in a manner that indicates to Regina that ‘we are not even taking that chance’

“mm..what time did they give you, anyway?”

“2 am,”

“Wow, what did you say to them? They’re never this lenient with Lena, and she and Wade have been together,”

“I have no idea, but it worked. Though I’m nearly positive he took down my license plate number and ran it through the system,”

“Probably uncle David,” she said. She forgot she’d taken to calling him uncle after all those years of knowing him. “He’s a cop. Emma’s dad,” she clarifies and Nori’s head tilts back.

“Oh..well, I’m not about to screw this up then.. I’m too soft for prison…. he trails off and Regina laughs before leaning into him some more. “Hey, can we get out soon- my nipples feel like rocks,” he’d commented and Regina choked on her own laughter and spit, laughing.

They get out about twenty minutes later and Nori grunts angrily as they’re changing.

“What is it?”

“It’s my binder..it’s soaked,”

“So, take it off. You can’t get sick and you didn’t bring towels,”

“I could just drive shirtless and then heat up,”

“Or you could get sick as a result. Nori, you can take it off- I won’t judge you...if it’s so bad, I have a singlet you can wear under your shirt, but you can’t afford to get sick and still be stubborn,” she’d said and it’d taken a good bit of coaxing to get Nori into it, but once she was, it was so much easier to see her relieved and relaxed in an environment she should always feel comfortable in. “Can you take me home?” Regina had then asked after a minute of silence.

“Are you sick? Bored? Unh-,”

“-no, just..remember the thing we talked about doing?”

“...yeah,“

“Well.. I think we should do it tonight,”

“You sure. Won’t your parents be-you know…”

“I wanna do this. I’m not too young-,”

“-yeah, but you’re not old enough yet to handle that sort of thing. I don’t want them to make life harder for you if we do do that, you know?”

“I know, but we’re going to and whatever happens after..it happens,”

“Are you sure?”
“..mhm. I’m sure. More sure than I’ve ever been.”

Nori drives and it’s obvious her nerves are on her and with her binder being a sopping mess, she felt even more exposed, but she drove and drove. The silence between them was drowned out by the radio. Regina was shaking too, but her was for an entirely different reason. Excitement, from cold air, who knew, but she was spring loaded and ready. They pull up to the house and Nori helps her by gathering their things and walking towards the house door. The moment reaches and after Regina uses her house key to open the door, she motions that he come inside.

“Mami! Papi! You guys in?” she’d asked and then Cora responded.

“In the living room, sweetheart.” They walked forward and into the opening doorway of the living room and looked at the adults. Her father looked up from his book to regard them both with a smile, even though he spotted their change in clothing and still obviously damp appearance.

“Have fun?” he queries.

“Mhm,” she nodded towards him.

“Good. Looks like Nori brought you back well before your curfew,” he acknowledged, now looking at Nori after glancing at the clock above their head.

“Yes sir,” Nori said in response.

“Nori did that for a reason, papi.. And that’s kind of why we’re here. We need to talk to you about something..s,”

“Well, tell us,” he said but neither he or his wife put their respected items away.

“Guys. I kind of need all of your attention. This is important,” she urged and they listened. Cora folded her crossword she’d usually do daily and tucked it away and Henry marked his book for later.

“Alright. Full attention,”

“Yeah.. Nori and I have something to tell you-,”

“-Regina, are you pregnant?!” he’d asked instantly and was now standing.

“What? Daddy! No! And I’m fourteen!”

“So, Mary was only 13 when she got knocked up!”

“I’m not Mary! This is not some immaculate conception or the usual hispanic teen pregnancy,”

“And you’re sure you’re not pregnant?”

“No, daddy, I’m not pregnant. This isn’t even really about me- I mean it’s about Nori, but like the second part is kinda about me-..but-,”

“-Regina, darling.. You’re rambling,” Cora had told her and she blushed.
“Sorry mami...Mami, Papi, what I’ve been trying to tell you both is that-,”

“-not pregnant,”

“Henry!”

“..sorry,”

“No, not pregnant, but daddy, Nori’s not. He’s not a boy,” she begins and that goes straight over her father’s head. “But she’s not a girl either,” Regina continues the the confusion instantly comes.


“Not medically, no sir, but mentally and physically, yes sometimes,”

“But you’re not female either?”

“Medically yes, but mentally and physically, not all the time,”

“The..are you..” he motioned. “Transgender?”

“No sir,” Nori says.

“Well. I’m lost,” he admits honestly.

“Nori’s kind of nonbinary. I mean, she’s not male or female but her medical record say she is. It’s just not how she feels all the time though.

“Yes but I’m not nonbinary to say I don’t identify as either. I do identify as both... For me to be nonbinary it would imply that identity doesn’t exist for me at all, but it does. It would imply that I identify as neither male nor female- at all. Granted, my mother calls it an identity crisis because my dad died when I was really young, but it’s not that. And then there were times I was called a shim, but that’s what comes with it. You have people who understand and people who don’t and then you get. Others... I’m..genderfluid. I go back and forth between the two quite often. Most times I’m both, but that’s just how I am...like tonight for instance, Regina managed to convince me to take my shirt off and go in the ocean. She promised not to judge me for wearing my thingy and even after it got soaked, she just gave me a spare shirt to wear so I’d be comfortable. She still, never judged me about it, but looked at me like I was the only thing she saw and like it was normal.”

“That’s because you are normal, Nori,” Regina whispered and Nori leaned over to kiss her cheek.

“thank you..”

“So, you bind?” Cora now questioned in interruption and Nori turned to her.

“Yes ma’am. I do,”

“And it’s comfortable for you?”

“Yes ma’am. Better than the bandages. They’re a health risk. Sometimes I used to pull them too tight...for other reasons,”

“I assume you mean arguments with your mother,” Cora said knowingly and Nori nodded slowly at that.

“Yes ma’am,”
“How long?” Cora asks.

“The binding or-,”

“-everything,”

“For as long as I can remember,”

“And you’re comfortable? Confident.. safe and happy?”

“Most days, but it’s a constant battle to not feel like people are judging me or looking at me like I grew another head,”

“That’s not likely to happen in this family,” Henry tells her. “I’m surprised to say the least, but this isn’t an issue, and it isn’t necessarily new to me. We have dealt with and done case studies on children and their identities, though it leaned more towards sexuality that gender identification... still, wow…” he trailed off and the room fell silent.

“Regina?” Cora called in question and her youngest looked at her.

“Yes mami?”

“You said you had things to tell us.. What was the other.. thing?” Cora asked her and she faltered slightly for a moment.

“Are you-,” Henry began and she beat him to it.

“Daddy! I am not pregnant, besides you won’t have to worry about boys where I’m concerned,” she mentioned and a random shiver ran down her spine.

“What do you mean?” he asked her, once again confused.

“Well, for one. I’m fourteen and even at this stage, boys are... gross-no offense,”

“None taken,” both he and Nori say at the same time and then they laugh. Regina groans, but continues. “Anyway, I’ve looked at boys then and I look at boys now and they are just.. Not my speed. I don’t like any of them. I don’t think of marrying any of them- none of that,” she tells them. “But I do look and I look at people I’m attracted to,” she says confidently and Cora tries to do her crossword again. “Mami, please put it down. This is just as important,” she begs and her mother listens. “What I’m trying to say is... God,” she breathes and covers her eyes. “I’m into..” she stops herself. “I’m not..” she stops again. “I like..” she trails off and that’s really it for her. She inhales deeply and speaks. “I’m not straight. I like girls,” she finally gets out and the silence is deafening.

“You’re... gay?” Henry asked her and she removes her hands and nods strongly.

“I’m a lesbian, yes,” she corrects and she sees him inhale heavily.

“But you’re fourteen,” he says and no one, not even he knows how he meant that.

“That’s more than enough time to know something. I knew a long time ago,” she retorts and Cora tosses the paper.

“I just wanted to do my crossword,” she mutters and shakes her head before sitting up.

“Regina.. could you repeat that,”

“I’m a lesbian,” she says with so much more confidence that her mother is impressed. Cora swallows
before nodding.

“I thought I heard you say that,” is all she says and Regina and Nori stand there very awkwardly. Nori blindly reaches out and holds her hand and no one misses that.

“You’re fourteen, how do you know?”

“I feel it, mami. I can look at any boy and not feel what I feel for a girl. One girl. My entire world lights up when I look at girls- this one girl and with guys..it’s lackluster I mean- yeah, Emma and Nori are like my only two friends inside and out of school, but I know what I’m feeling and what I see is different with girls than it is with the boys in my school. I know I like girls. I know I’ll grow to fall in love with one when I’m older and I know I’ll marry one too,”

“But you never said anything,” her father said.

“Would you have listened to me at age six or seven if I did say it?” she questioned and her father shook his head. He wasn’t sure. “Daddy, I never said anything because I was scared. I didn’t know how to approach this.. I didn’t know how to tell you or mami. And then I asked Lena about it and that turned into a huge argument..”

“Your sister knows?”

“No,” she shakes her head. “I didn’t tell her. She suspected and went off about how I would go to hell and how she’s afraid for my soul. She already started judging and condemning me the minute she said that-,”

“-She said those things to you?”he asked and she nodded.

“I told her you guys taught us to fight for things we believed in and that you’ve said love always outdoes a man-made belief system,”

“We did say that,” Cora nods. She sighs, looking at her youngest with the most glassiest and pleading eyes for hope that Cora wasn’t about to dash in the slightest. “We aren’t angry,” she finally speaks. “Are we Henry,” she says turning to her husband and he shakes his head.

“No, we’re not angry. Shock, once again, but never angry..but you do realize that your grandmother is going to kill me right. She will literally throw the bible at you, then at me and then at me..again.. and say how I gave you the gay gene. Mama would have been happy to just have you. Lord knows she wanted a gay grandchild, she’s just not here to have it now..”

“I didn’t plan on telling her… or Lena,” Regina says and they all look at her.

“But she will find out,” Cora says.

“I think Zelena already knows,” Nori interrupts.

“Why would you say that?” Cora asks and Nori shrugs.

“She came to our class one day and was just asking everyone around there how they felt about it.. She got mixed signals so I guess she’s just trying to figure out if she’s being unreasonable or rational in her thoughts. She doesn’t know how to deal with it and Regina asked me how to tell you all this before but I’d just told her when she was ready.. And she was ready tonight..and prepared to be kicked out,”

“That’s not likey. Her father and I may argue about stupid things every so often, but one thing is for
sure, how we raise them and are raising them is to be open minded but to keep values. I see why Zelena’s struggling with it, but it’s not her life to condemn and judge… our children will be different,” she’d said solemnly.

“Do we have to join PFLAG?” Henry interrupted. He was now on his laptop and however he managed to get on it was a real shock.

“Huh?” Regina sked lost.

“PFLAG..you know, the club thing for parents with gay children. Do we have to join? Do I need to put rainbow stickers or the coexist sign on my car? Wait- should I get the coexist sign, anyway?” he rambled on and on.

“Daddy?”

“Yeah?”

“No...you don’t need to get any signs or stickers or join any clubs. I don’t want to make this a bigger deal than it already is..Emma still doesn’t know,”

“Why not?” Cora questions and she shrugs.

“I don’t know. I don’t know how to tell her,”

“Well, I believe, like Nori said, when you’re ready, but now you’ll have to leave the room door open,” Henry told her.

“Da-,”

“- I kid. I kid. It’s never that serious...was that all?” he’d finally asked and Regina and Nori looked at each other before nodding at the adults. “Good, was it as hard as you expected it to be..or as scary?”

“Not really,” Regina admitted and her father smiled.

“Then, by all means, stop bottling all the important things in your life, up. And impassioned speech like that proves to us you’re serious and you know where your head is. It’s good that you waited until you were ready and you never let someone push you if you’re not..now go, you have three hours until curfew.. I’d like to spend some time with my wife,” Henry told the pair and Regina ran over before hugging her father tightly and then doing the same with her smiling mother..

“I love you guys,” she’d said with a whole lot of love encasing her words. She and Nori leave again and Henry turns to Cora, both sighing in the relief of it all.

“We did good?” he asked her and she nodded softly.

“We did good.”

!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

“So, that went well,” Nori said as they got back into her car. Regina nodded, clearly distracted..

“What’s wrong?..you, what’s wrong?” he’d asked her twice and she dazedly shook her head.

“Nothing, I’m just..okay I guess. I feel- free,”
“And that’s a good thing,” Nori says just before Regina presses her lips against his, softly. She pulls away and looks at Nori’s striking eyes. Looking between them, Regina saw nothing but safety. She saw something of comfort, something that was beyond a sign that everything would be okay. She smiled softly and opened her mouth to speak.

“Take me somewhere,” she whispered to Nori and the teen nodded before leaning in and kissing her again.

“Your wish is my command,” she smiled back before starting the car. Regina grabbed a hold of her hand and kissed her knuckles.

“Thank you…”

“No..thank you.”
Lay down with me

Chapter Summary

I was a dumb dumb who forgot she already wrote the chapters... sorrrrryy

“Now boarding flight 196 to-” that was it. Those were the words she’d been dreading. Stood in the airport with a fattening pretzel and equally as fattening and cholesterol inducing processed cheese dip, Regina blinked a few times upon hearing the announcement. The boards all switched and flickered over, indicating the new information for all passengers. It switched over flights and flight times along with gates and gate numbers. It also indicated which ones were on time and which ones were delayed. This one was sadly on time. More than on time.

A sound, soft and distinctive indicated that someone was near her. Very very near. They were coming directly towards her even though the entire airport sounded like one loud and noisy party.

“Hey,” comes the whisper and Regina turns around, eyes still white because it hadn’t dawned on her yet that once she was on the plane and up in the sky..there was no next day arrival back. It would be a good while before anything..before a letter or a phone call.

“Hey..they called your gate,” she’d managed but her grip on the pastry was slipping. Nori’s face contorted from that known solemn comfort to a worthy grimace.

“...oh,”

“Yeah,” she managed before the announcement came again.

“Nori!” her older brother had shouted. He waved frantically at her to indicate they needed to leave. Nori had made the decision to go to one of the colleges out of state where her brother was. It was closer to Florida, but still one hell of a drive and a flight. Nori nodded at him and then looked at Regina’s now crestfallen face. Taking the pretzel and cheese and throwing them away- Nori took hold of her hands and led her to a chair.

“You won’t be here for my birthday,” Regina had muttered tearily and somewhat angrily.

“No, I won’t be, but I’ll call you and sing you happy birthday,” he’d offered.

“It’s not the same,” she argued.

“Nothing’s the same.. But remember what I promised?” Regina nodded. “Can you hold onto that?” Another nod comes and Nori managed a smile. “I have something for you,” she said before digging around in her pocket and balling her fist around the item. “I thought I’d have more time to give this to you, but...here,” Nori whispered before opening his hand. Regina blinked once and then again but said nothing. “My dad gave it to me..it was his promise to me he’d come back,” Nori says as a memory comes back and he shakes his head at it. “...I know it seems like I’m saying I’ll die or something, but I know this is one promise I can keep. I won’t forget you. I promise you I won’t. I know it’s what you’re afraid is going to happen, but it won’t. I will come back. I don’t forget the amazing people in my life that easily,” she’d ended and then Regina’s hand was on the dogtag locket. Something makes her open it and it’s a good thing she did because in there, right smushed on
the right side is a picture of her and Nori at the boy’s graduation. “Save that spot for yours. I’ll make good on my promise-.”

“-Last boarding call for-,” there it was again. Words. Nori looked up and around at the interruption and so did Regina… still, there were those words. Ones she wished she could drown out, but they were her reality. A friend as sweet and as caring and loving as Nori was leaving. Promising not to forget her, but leaving anyway. She stood up robotically and watched the last few stragglers head to the gate.

“You have to go,” she says in a hollow whisper. Nori just nods. He moves to hug her and she flinches. He wincses. “Just go.” Regina commands.

“R-,”

“-no, Nori. Go, I’m.. I don’t wanna fall apart and if you hug me I’ll just break in your arms. Go- please!” she begs and Nori’s eyes are full of hot tears so close to falling. She shakes her head and they break free.

“Fuck,” she cusses, watery and drained until the counter calls her name over intercom.

“go,”

“now I don’t want to,”

“you have to,”

“I have to,” Nori repeats. “Not mines?” she questions one final time and Regina shakes her head.

“Not yours…”

“Hers?”

“...hers-,” she’s silenced by a kiss that isn’t used to indicated she’s owned by her. It isn’t her begging to be Regina’s. It’s none of that. It’s just a kiss. A kiss that could mean a million things to anyone, but it means nothing to either of them right now. It just seals fate. It seals. A promise, even if it wasn’t looking or searching. Regina feels weak- by the kiss, but by the moment that will end in seconds. It won’t fall to the back of her mind. It won’t drift away. It’ll just hurt like hell because like Emma, Nori means something to her. And then it ends and Nori’s departing words are,

“More valuable than diamonds and worthier of all things in this life and every life,”

“don’t.”

“But I gotta.. Part of the-,”

“-charm,” she says and now they both smile. Regina rubs her thumb across the cheek of her friend and kisses her one more time... “Go catch your flight, Nori Michaels,” she nods her head in the direction of the hangar.

“See you when I see you?”

“See you when I see you.”
She walked out after watching Nori disappear down the runway. Her feet were being dragged just like the rest of her and all she wanted to do was collapse in a heap and dissipate.

“Regina?” her father had called maybe for the seventh time through the ride back to Key West. Zelena was complaining about any and everything and their mother was doing a crossword. “Regina?” he’d tried again and only then did his youngest look away from the window long enough to answer him with a distant stare. “Not okay,” he said knowingly and she managed to let her eyes dip shut with a soft sigh. A slight twitch of her lip showed she wanted to answer, she’d wanted to respond- but she just couldn’t. “You will be,” he said and she’d believed him times before- so why stop now.

When she got home, all of her fell apart-well rather- fell into bed still clothed in her jeans and t-shirt from earlier that day. Her phone rang once and then twice and then-SMACK! She’d blindly tried to shut it up and somehow succeeded. Exhausted from the thought of the day, Regina turned over. She felt like she’d only slept for five minutes but when her bed dipped and the familiar scent reached her nose, she rolled over and into Emma’s chest. Lanky arms encased her rattling frame and no words were said. It wasn’t needed. She doesn’t cry audibly- almost never has and right now, with her lungs threatening to give out on her, she wailed like an infant. Sniffles and Staccatos. Tremors and pleading. She wailed. And in all honesty, after all of that….she has no idea when she passed out.

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“Oh My God!” Emma exclaimed happily but as quietly as possible from her window seat in the plane. Someone had politely shushed her but for the most part- no one bothered or no one cared at least. Regina was sat next to her with a gentle smile on her face. They were going to Maine- more directly, her and Zelena’s grandmother and grandfather. They’d ended up at the exact gate where she’d told Nori goodbye and at first, it irked her, but then it made her sad. No one knew why and she wasn’t going to tell either.

“Mom,” Zelena called in interruption and Cora looked up from her files like a deer caught in headlights.

“Yes, sweetheart?”

“Nana wrote...” she’d said but trailed off and Cora’s bottom lip jutted out for a split second before she pushed away from her desk and retrieved the letter from Zelena. Cora wasn’t estranged to her parents, and they rarely still had catty arguments-her and her mother over how she and Henry were raising the girls. So that stumped her that her own mother who chose calling over writing actually wrote a letter...and mailed it. She physically documented words to paper and mailed it. She flicks it open and reads it. Nothing perplexing, saddening or rude. Just a simple request.

“She wants to see you girls for the summer..actually, she wants you, Regina, Emma and August to go,” Cora corrected herself and Zelena looked lost.

“Why them?”

“I don’t know,” Cora shrugged honestly and Zelena sighed. She followed her mother over to the
couch and they both sat down. Zelena fidgets where she sits as she questions,

“Sooo...are we going?” Her mother looks up at her and nods.

“You and Regina are going...but I’ll have to ask about Emma and August,”

“She wants to see Emma and Auggie?” David questioned as he handed everyone their coffee. Cora nods.

“But why? Isn’t it tradition for just the girls...and what about our own tradition to visit West Hollywood?” MM queried.

“I suppose it still has something to do with what my mother witnessed with both Regina and Emma,”

“She thinks Regina’s going to have another mental breakdown?” MM asked and Cora tsked.

“Probably, but she also said since Emma and August have never actually been to Maine before, this would be the perfect time for them to go...all with permission of course,”

“This is also my mother in law’s way of saying to go on our own vacation from the kids. We won’t be young forever;” Henry interjected and David snorted.

“Well, that’s a rather subtle way of puttin’ it,”

“Believe you me, there is nothing subtle about that woman.” Henry joked and David smirked.

“Your call, hun,” he told her and she just shrugged.

“I don’t see why not- though Emma and Auggie would pretty much have to carry their entire wardrobe with them if they’re staying the entire summer-,”

“No they won’t,” Cora interrupted gently. “Knowing my mother, all of the children will come back with more clothes than they can carry... that’s also her way of taking care of them for the summer. They will be spoilt,” Cora finishes and David and Mary Margaret look very surprised by it.

“She’s not kidding. They’ll come back with more clothes than they’ll bother to wear.. Everyone except Zelena at least...” Henry tittered.

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Touch down and Maine is... well, the airport is noisy and the the heat is more than bearable.. Lucky them. The airport may be a chatterbox, but the town itself is quiet, sleepy almost. It’s cute because it has those really old streetlights like the one you’d see the guy who sang singing in the rain dance on. Old model cars and true to life Stone houses, with chimneys!

“Ho-ly-,”

“-don’t say it,” both Zelena and Regina scold the blonde girl as Emma did a complete 360 spin. It was awe inducing the things she saw and was so close to touching that it made her giddy with
excitement. Auggie was distracted by other things that only had to do with soccer, but the moment he
did glimpse at his surroundings, he’d quite affectionately said,

“You guys grew up in the cool part of the county,”

“Yeah,” Zelena started disgruntled. “And it’d be a crap ton cooler if this place had any service. I
need to call Wade,”

“It’s an airport, Lena. Cell phone frequency around airport areas aren’t safe,”

“Too bad, my honey bear misses me,” she said and Auggie cringed deeply enough for Emma and
Regina as well.

“That’s embarrassing,” he’d said and she rolled her eyes.

“Cat’s out of the bag. I don’t have to hide anything anymore since mom and dad know- unlike
some people,” she said slyly and Regina’s brow quirked because, once again- what the hell did that mean?
To reduce to probability that she would throttle her sister, Regina picked up her bag.

“Can we just go look for our doting grandmother and stop with the attitude?”

“Fine,” Zelena still sassed and Regina lazily rolled her eyes as she grunted. This was going to be
one hell of a summer.

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So, they didn’t find their grandmother, but they did find the driver, Klause. How they knew it was
Klause? Minus the blatant sign and scar above his eye he claimed to have gotten because his sister
slapped him with a fish, the girls knew Klause, because..well- he was Klause. Even in his old age he
was still awkward and sweet and barely spoke a lick of english. He never bothered to learn it and
definitely stopped trying after they left.

“Klause happy to see ju,” he’d managed and then went about hugging the girls. He looked at Emma
and Auggie and jutted his chin out at them. “Who they?” he’d asked and at first Zelena was going to
give him the run down, but this was Klause..and in all of his 5’6 awkward old man glory, he needed
simple words. So, she stuck with,

“Family” and that worked out perfectly because he then nodded and smiled at them. He went to hug
him and Emma noticed two things- she was already nose level with Klause and Auggie had already
began to surpass her which put him just above eye level with the old man. Somehow, in all of
Auggie’s random growth spurts, Emma hadn’t even noticed. Regina, well she was always short and
tiny, but then there was Zelena and she was something to gape at. Her legs were long and luminous,
beautifully kept and without a scar on them. She had heaven sticks of porcelain glory and a beautiful
face to match. It was enviable at best and Emma realizes this is why she takes so much damn time in
the bathroom “prepping”. Klause guides them to the limo and makes sure everyone is in before he
begins driving. Considering Klause likes driving, he takes the long way, which in turn means they
pass the girls’ old school.

“It looks like a church,” is what Emma ends up saying in comment and Zelena laughs.

“All catholic schools do…”
“So, will you guys show us your old house?” Auggie queries and both the girls shrug.

“I guess so. We can ask grandma about it and see;”

“Yeah, we’ll have to ask but I don’t think she’d mind much. Maybe that way I can get to the post office and thank whoever it is that managed to keep all my letters…” Regina interjects and Zelena actually softens to smile at her sister’s hopes.

Klause finally pulls into the insanely green, manicured and completely new looking driveway of Fort Sorentini as their grandfather had put it.

“So, Sorentini Manor would’ve fit so much better,” Regina remembers Zelena saying.

“Yeah, if we wanna sound like the Addams family, ”

“Pfft, it’s not like you couldn’t already pass for Wednesday Addams. Doom and Gloom,” Zelena teased harshly.

“Well then I guess that makes you cousin IT. Forgot to wax your unibrow and mustache, ’sis’.”

That almost turned into a knock down drag out kind of fight day.

“Ho-Ly-” Auggie begins and Zelena clapped a hand over his mouth.

“-Don’t you dare say it,” she said and he shook his head. Klause pulled right up to the door and immediately two very well tailoured men opened the large oak doors. The ‘fort’ was that traditional white stone with bushes and hedges all uniformed and trimmed. Simple black roofing and grey box trimming- and not a blade of grass seemed misplaced. To say it was massive would have been a serious understatement and as the teens and a very awestruck August exited and went up the steps, Klause got their bags and everything else. Almost like the chirp of a rather fragile bird came a voice that quite clearly said come in- so, they did. They went in.

“Oh-My….Fuck!” Emma finally got out, struck stupidly enamoured with the foyer’s high ceilings and paintings that lined the walls. Everyone hissed at her but she couldn’t help it.

“This is amazing,” Auggie admitted.

“Yeah, it was better when we were younger, right Gina?” Zelena had asked and that was rare for her blockhead sister to reminisce.

“yeah, we got lost….a lot,”

“How could you not, this place has-what? 12 rooms?” Emma questioned and Regina laughed one of those ‘wrong guess’ kind of laughs.

“Try 19,” she comments and Emma blanks.

“19 fucking rooms!” she belts and the men at the doors give her a disapproving look, though she could have sworn she saw them both crack a little smirk at her intrigue. Auggie also gave her that disapproving look and he was one that was not smiling.
“You pick up the worst habits, I swear,” he scolds and she thumps him.

“Shut up. I’m just...impressed- that’s all!”

“Well I guess we better not tell her about the olympic sized swimming pool in the backyard or the tennis court that’s about five miles from here, just off the property,” Zelena intentionally spills and Emma draped a hand over her mouth this time before she let the obscenities riddle out.

“Whilst you fry her brain, I’ll look for the hostess,” Regina said before leaving.

“Grande tour?” Auggie asked with a hopeful smile and so did Emma.

“Hell, why not!”

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“Abuela?” Regina called loudly but got no answer. “Abuela?” she tried again. No answer. “Abuelita!” No answer. She paused, quirked her eyebrow and smirked. “NANA!” she yelled and there it went. Heels clacking in a distinct rush to find the little culprit. Regina was about to do it again, but

“-don’t you dare, little one!” her grandmother said and she chortled.

“Well, if you answered to anything else- I wouldn’t have to call you the names of the unholy,” Regina sassed. Her grandmother was impressed.

“My- my. The shy little thing- my shy little angel has grown a rather thick backbone,” she praised before hugging her tightly.

“Experiences make you stronger,” Regina said, returning it.

“That they do...now, where are the rest of the miniature members of your clan?”

“Minus Lena’s tall self. She’s probably showing them around. Emma almost fainted when she found out it was 19 rooms.”

“Well, how many did she assume?”

“12,”

“Not bad. Better than most who’ve been here...and am I to be expecting any special calls?” her grandmother asked and she knew exactly what the woman meant by that.

“Only Lena. She and Wade have been stuck on cloud nine since they met at her quinceñera,”

“Ahhh and Emma?”

“I don’t think she’s looking...at least I haven’t asked her and before you ask- Auggie’s too young,” she defends and deflects and her grandmother hmphs at that.

“I’m aware of August’s age group to yours, but you haven’t cleared your own position,”
“My position?”

“Yes...what about you—your parents mentioned someone by the name Nori? Was it.”

Shit!

“*Oh* .um, Nori was just a really close friend. She got really high marks and graduated early, so she left for college a while ago,”

“*She?* Double Shit! “Your parents left that part out,”

“Because Nori doesn’t just identify as female, she identifies as male too,” Regina says with a protective confidence.

“Is she...was she?” her grandmother tries and she answers so the woman doesn’t lose her mind.

“No ma’am. All female in every sense of the medical word but she’s a guy too,” she tells her and the woman pauses. She scoffs lightly, not in disrespect, buuuuut,

“The youth of today,” she says with a shake of her head. Regina has to keep from rolling her eyes. “I hope they didn’t influence you to be... A homosexual or something.”

*Yeah nana, the youth of today with their sadistic gay agenda. Triple Shit!*

“pretty positive I’ve been there, grandma,” she mutters as she rubs her eyes and the woman’s head snaps around.

“What was that?”

“Oh, I was just...thinking,” Regina covers.

“Thinking out loud makes you seem crazy,” she reminds the young girl.

Well then I guess I’m crazy...I know who I’m not telling about my lesbianism anytime soon.

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They’d found Emma, Zelena and Auggie all in the kitchen talking and Regina never felt this relieved.

“You okay, Gina? You look a little pale,” Emma says to her in concern and she puts on her best, light and sarcastic tone she can manage loudly, in her head of course.

*OH.. YOU KNOW. JUST HAD TO KEEP FROM CRAPPING MYSELF WITH MY HOMOPHOBIC GRANDMOTHER, BUT I'M GOOD- YUP-SO GOOD.*

“I’m fine, Em.. Lena show you and Auggie all the rooms?”

“I couldn’t, Emma got way too stimulated and Auggie kept drifting. You deal with them, I need to find a phone. Grandma- can I borrow your phone. I was supposed to call Wade when we got in,” she informed and the younger ones teased her.
“Honey bear!” they said in playful tones which made her turn the most deepest shade of crimson her body could manage. Even her grandmother snickered, foregoing the reprimand on her tongue about Zelena not at least greeting her first and handing her the phone.

The rest of their evening is good, most of their conversation is thankfully about school and nothing else. Extracurricular activities and such are also a topic of conversation under their school life. Their parents called and as everyone took their own turns exchanging words and I love you’s and so on, Regina’s brain flickered.

“You sure you’re okay with your mami and me not being there to celebrate your birthday with you?” Henry had asked his youngest and she nodded. She also shrugged like it didn’t matter. It probably didn’t anyway. “Regina-”

“-mm, yeah, I didn’t wanna have a quinceñera and a birthday party is too much energy to plan.. We can just go out to eat or stay in and watch movies when everyone gets back, papi,”

“But mija-,”

“-daddy- it’s fine. I want you and mami to go and enjoy your trip. We’ve celebrated every single birthday every year, one missed birthday won’t kill us..besides, we all agreed this was mostly so that mami could ease back off work and just relax.. If we have to plan my birthday, she’ll spiral,” Regina then jokes and he laughs softly.

“You are right,” he told her but he looked so sad still. Regina walked over to her father and sat on his lap before she hugged him and patted his back. They had respected the fact that she didn’t want to have her quincé just after she also told them she didn’t want to do her confirmation ceremony either. It had surprised them, but it really didn’t matter either way. Whatever Regina wanted and requested, they would respect it. “I don’t like this, we never celebrate any of your birthdays apart,”

“I know,”

“And you don’t even want a small party before you go?”

“No daddy,” she’d said and if only he knew it’s because she was still so caught up on thinking about the whole airport moment with Nori that she genuinely didn’t feel like celebrating it ever again… maybe he’d have got it if she told him… maybe.

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“Has your grandmother asked you about Nori?” her mother inquired and Regina sputtered out a sigh.

“Ohhhh yeah,”

“I’m sorry, sweetie- this was before we found out-well-you know,”

“She knows,” Regina says and Cora chokes on something. She knows what Regina is referencing and the noise she makes indicates for the child to continue speaking. “Her exact words were along the lines of -the youth of today and her hopes that they didn’t influence me to be a lesbian..or ‘something’,” she air quoted and Cora groaned.
“Jesus Christ, mother...dear God in heaven that woman and her tongue- Regina-,”

“-mami, it’s fine.. Tongue’s just sharper than her wit,” she tries joking and Cora smirks.

“Very…” she sighs. “Your father and I shouldn’t have told her,”

“She would have asked anyway, mami,”

“Yes, but less aggressively…. I wish we could be there for your birthday-”

“-Mami, you and daddy really need to relax on the synchronized worrying. I know you’d be here if you could,”

“And we could, but he said you told him no,”

“Because I want you guys to have fun too and a call would make me happy more than any party would,” she’d said and heard her mother sigh. “Mami, come on. It’s really not that big of a deal,”

“Easier for the birthday girl to say,”

“One year older- one year closer to both feet in the grave,” she joked and Cora groaned. “This is what happens when you marry for love. His seed makes even worse jokes than him. Morbid….. mami?”

“Yes sweetie?”

“Love you,”

“Love you too, sweetie,”

“Talk to you later- who’s next?”

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Post cussing, homophobia bash dodging and gooey parental moments, everyone had sat down to eat and grandma asked about,

‘The little troublemaker’ and by that she meant Nougat...and

‘His partner in crime’ and clearly she meant Daxter. Nothing had changed with either of the pups, except for the fact that,

“Nougat and Daxter are never home and they’re too fat to be delinquents.” that had surely gotten a laugh. When it came time to sleep, everyone was showed their rooms. No one complained or asked to bunk, but there was no doubt they’d find some way- minus Zelena, to end up in the same room giggling over silly things and staying up later than they should.

“Does your grandma really need all those people?” Auggie had questioned and Regina shrugged just slightly before she shaked her head.
“No, the only person who consistently stays, is Klause. Grandma does most of the work around here. She did the whole grand gesture for you guys.”

“Yeah, but how the heck does she keep nineteen rooms clean?” Emma blurted but Auggie had whispered cool based on Regina’s response.

“Well, it’s just her and our grandfather- so really it’s their room, their bathroom, the kitchen, grandpa’s study and wherever else they end up.. Grandma’s almost never home and neither is grandpa. He’s always out on business. She opens the window everyday and keeps the pool covered unless she or he wants to go swimming. Every end of the month they hire Mister Bellotello to cut the lawn, but she won’t tell you this. She hates having maids. She hates having to see other people work for someone who can literally do it themselves.. But Klause. Klause is different. He’s an exception to that because Grandpa went to Estonia on business and brought him back, or something like that,”

“Cooool,” Auggie grinned.

“Where’s your grandfather?”

“Out on business like always. Aviation companies never sleep,”

“Is that why you didn’t ask for him?” Regina nodded.

“We’ll probably see him in a couple of days- tomorrow if we’re lucky.”

They all shower, and as predicted by absolutely no one, the three teens end up in the exact same room watching scary movies and eating junk food that Regina’s grandmother in some cases, loathed buying for the children. Zelena was surely still glued to her phone and glued to googly eyeing Wade’s consistent gooey words that made Regina gag on a regular basis. Eventually the young teens fall asleep and Emma and Regina end up balled up together like they used to sleep when they were younger. Regina’s grandmother had walked into the room and stopped at the door, eyeing the two young girls curled up in each other’s embrace and it never clicked to her in that moment that maybe.. Just maybe it meant more to her own granddaughter than it did to her best friend.

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There was a tinkle. It was not sunlight, it wasn’t rain and it wasn’t anyone on the potty. It was a tinkle of sound. An annoyingly blissful tinkle of sound that could only come from one thing- one instrument.. A triangle. It tittered, that sound. Controlled in four second intervals because it was a wake up call and somehow, only Emma heard it.

Tink

Tink

T-tink. T-tink.
“Ughhhh,” she groaned. “Shut it up. Shut it off- throw it away!” she pleaded after throwing a pillow over her face. Another one comes over her stomach, slapping the wind from her in seconds. She grunted and her offender muffled a rather...direct request.

“Shut that stupid triangle up- or so help me God!”

“Good morning my little cherubs.” Regina’s grandmother greeted very happily and very much awake. “It’s six o’clock. Rise and shine- we have things to do today,” she continued and someone groaned..probably Emma and Auggie, but Regina sat up and rubbed at her tired eyes.

“Mornin’ grandma,” she’d managed and she did it all with a smile. Her grandmother smiled, set the triangle down and brought her to her feet. She hugged her tightly.

“Good morning, anela,” she whispered. Anela meant angel in Italian and if her grandmother wanted to, she could riddle off in her native tongue if she pleased. Only problem was, neither of her grandchildren understood a lick of it. Granted, Regina knew some words, but Zelena hadn’t bothered.. or seemed interested enough in it to learn. Cora had not bothered to let them learn it, claiming it didn’t make much of a difference as to who they were and where they came from… but then that also came at the fact that she herself was never taught it. She had docked that in the back of her mind and made a mental note to ask her mother and grandmother about that later. “Come, everyone needs to get up. We have much to do.”

“We going out for those early morning jogs this summer?” she questioned with a knowing look and her grandmother smirked. At some point she’d sat, they both did, but Regina didn’t know why.

“You know me all too well,” the woman said before standing. For her age, Regina had never seen someone age so gracefully. Granted, after all the initial struggles when her grandparents had first started, it was safer way after that. Auburn and honey texture locks of hair had yet to have a trace of grey even remotely present. Her legs were freckled, but they’d always been freckled just as her skin was always sunkissed and glowing. That old time Hollywood glam face was not a proper description for someone like her grandmother. Nothing could define that state of mature features encased in her almost creastless face and now, Regina’s eyes flashed. Her grandmother was tall enough to still model the best of designer clothing. I see where Lena gets her legs from..and the hair.

“Grandma?”

“Yes doll?”

“Do you think we can go to the post office… I wanted to thank whoever it was that kept all my letters from Emma,” she’d said and at first, her grandmother looked sullen, like something was wrong- but she blinked.

“We’ll see about getting around to it,” she responded and now Regina was the one blinking. Her grandmother never settled for words like that. It was either a yes or a no- no in between. She nodded anyway because it seemed her grandmother was covering something and just wouldn’t say. Regina leans over and yanks Emma’s pillow from her face.

“Get up, Em! I know you’re awake!” she tells her friend and the blonde groans once more, but she opens her eyes.

“Mornin’,” she grunted.

“Good morning,” Reigna’s grandmother said with her still radiant smile. “Ten minutes- downstairs. Breakfast is ready,” she told them before exiting. Emma immediately collapsed on the floor once
again and huffed heavily.

“She knows it’s like way too early to be active, right?”

“She’s been doing this since mami was little. I doubt this is anything but abnormal to grandma. Come on, she really means ten minutes,”

“Ugghhh, if I wanted a drill sergeant for the summer, I’d have taken summer school,”

“As if you need summer school,” Regina says, both scoffing and rolling her eyes. Emma shrugs from her spot and somehow managed to skillfully kick Auggie right in the back.

“OW!”

“Get up, Aug. We’ve been summoned,”

“too early for a death sentence,” he muttered.

“I was just saying the same thing,” Emma agreed. “But… Misses Sorentini wants us down in ten-,”

“-seven,” Regina corrected.

“Seven,” Emma said. August rolled over and huffed but then he sat up quickly and then he stood. Emma looked at Regina who was also getting up.

“I’ll be back. Or I’ll meet you guys downstairs,” the young brunette said before disappearing. Emma stood and stretched.

“Well,” she began. “Let’s go.”

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Emma and Auggie make their way downstairs only to bump into Zelena.

“If that’s what bedhair is- thank God in heaven I don’t get that,” she’d whispered before following whoever, towards the kitchen. Regina’s already there and dressed… in a tracksuit with her camera.

“Why?”

“Tradition. And by tradition I mean she does this every morning- everyday. Seven days a week. Three hundred sixty five days a year,” Zelena managed sleepily before disappearing to get her own tracksuit.

“Even the leap year?” Emma asked, already sounded so out of it and hopeless. Zelena paused with sleep ridden eyes, turned and nodded. She responded with,

“Especially the leap year,” before turning and going back to doing what she was doing.

The blender kicked up out of nowhere, causing Emma and Auggie to jump. Regina was setting out to go cups for them all and after a few righteous pulses of the blender- her grandmother poured out the little protein shakes. Zelena returns and drops her tracksuit top on the counter before tossing Emma one and tossing one to Auggie as well. She shoves sneakers into their arms as well and Emma
gapes.

“How did s-,”

“-she probably asked your mom and dad for your sizes before you got here...put those on and drink that protein shake. You’re gonna need it,”

“Why?” Auggie finds himself asking still because he wasn’t really paying attention and Emma turns to him before she huffs.

“We’re going on a jog.”

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After they all pretty much horsebacked the shakes and settled, Emma found herself getting somewhat used to the tracksuit. At least it was black and didn’t make noise-thank God. Emma followed the group and noticed that there were markers.

“Ummm... misses Sorentini, how far are we jogging?”

“Two and a half miles. We jog that, have breakfast, settle for a little and jog back,”

“.....so five miles all up?” Auggie asked and she nodded with a grin.

“Yes indeed. Are we ready?”

“Can we be anything else but ready, grandma?” Zelena muttered. Regina just nodded, the quicker they started, the quicker they got it done. She’s been somewhat mute since she’d gone for her own tracksuit and camera earlier. Zelena sighs, Auggie looks prepared and Emma looks like she’s ready to puke. The blonde has more hope that her uncoordination doesn’t kick up this time around and screw up the jog. Uncoordinated and uninclined was her physical attitude as it related to being active. She was praying she just made it through the five miles. She had a reason for the first two and a half, but the other two and a half.. Dear God.

“Come along children,” Rose said before she began jogging and like little ducks, the children surely followed behind her and onto the trail that thankfully, was perfectly even. Regina pulled the strap for her camera tighter around her wrist and kept her head down. Emma noticed this because she was behind the brunette and decided to pick up the pace just a little so she could figure out what the issue was..

“hey,” she whispered with a soft smile as she bumped Regina’s shoulder lightly. The young girl flinched and looked up. She took notice that she was a good distance behind the rest of the group.

“hey,”

“You okay?”

“mhm,” she muttered.

“Sure?” Emma pushes and Regina sighs.

“Yeah,” Regina responds. Emma rolls her eyes.
“I don’t believe you,”

“I know,” she tells her, clearly not affected in the slightest.

“So, why lie?”

“Because, you’re happy and I didn’t want you to worry about me,” she said easily. That made Emma pause her jog. Regina however, she kept moving.

“Well, I’m not gonna be okay if you’re not,” Emma tells her after she put her feet back in motion. Regina said nothing and Emma grabbed hold of her arm. “Regina, you bes’ tell me what’s the matter,” Emma says to her, that country accent somehow finding its way out of her lips. Regina slips her arm from Emma’s almost painful hold and spoke.

“I’m just thinking,” she answers flatly.

“About what?” Emma pushes and Regina sighs again, but the look the blonde gives her makes her roll her eyes and talk.

“It’s not a what.. It’s a who,”

“Well, who then?” Emma switches her question. She’s clearly annoyed by the way Regina’s just half-assing their conversation, but she can’t really do much about the way the young girl acts, just about how she handles it and so far… she may have been doing a crap job if she was honest. She watches as Regina begins to walk and follows her slow pace.

“Nori,” Regina admits and Emma just stops walking altogether. It takes a few seconds for Regina to realize this and when she does, she turns around, her face already etched into that stance where she feels she’s going to have to tell Emma something in defense of the young teen she’s so concerned about.

Emma’s features are… impassive at best. Nothing is given away with this one, but then she begins to jog again and passes Regina, clear indication that she either needed something to distract her as she had this conversation, or she was being fuelled solely by her need to eat food. Regina is now following her, nearly matching Emma’s pace because she figures this will be a long talk. There is silence among them for a moment.

“What’s the matter with Nori?” Emma finally asks and Regina says,

“He’s supposed to call on my birthday, but I’m scared he won’t.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know, but he promised he would,”

“Then I guess he will,” Emma tells her, not trying to make her feel better, just saying it because she knew it was the right thing to say. The tone behind her words seemed a little intimidated as well.

“But, Nori’s in college now, and some colleges start in August. They have to do orientation and all of that. Nori told me it was and still is hectic because orientations take two weeks and then she has to be advised and then immediately after that, she starts classes.. She said if that happens, she may not be able to talk to me for a while because she’ll be too busy…. I just.. I don’t wanna miss his call,” she admits sullenly and Emma inhales deeply.

“Regina, he’ll call,” Emma finds herself actually saying this time..Still, her tone is clearly not as
happy as Regina would have hoped when you’re trying to cheer someone up.

“But what if-,”

“-can I ask you somethin’?” Emma interrupts and the girl nods. “Are ya’ll datin’- like..are you and Nori together?” Emma asked, surprisingly without giving away any jealousy. Regina shook her head and sighed.

“No, we’re not together...we never dated, but we talked about it. She already knows I’d cry if we’re that far apart…. Basically, I’m too sensitive for long distance and she’s afraid she won’t be able to make me feel better if she’s states away...that, and papi’s not too keen on our age gap,”

“It’s two years,”

“It’s closer to three than it is to two,” Regina says.

“No it’s not. I did the math..”

“And what does the math say?”

“Two years and some change,”

“And how do you know that?”

“Because, Nori was born like two years and what- five months before you…” Emma trailed off and soon heard Regina laugh softly.

“You pay better attention than daddy does,” she congratulates and Emma takes that as a compliment. She’ll take anything she can get at that point.

“.So, you would’ve dated her?” she questions and Regina shrugs very honestly.

“I don’t know, but we talked about it a lot and agreed on everything. Right person, wrong time and we don’t belong to each other…. He already told me I’m not his to have and that he has to find his person who is just like me, but…” she stops and trails off.

“But what?” Emma pushes because, this is all news to her. All of this information is making her both confused and sick.

“I don’t know.. In another life, definitely. And - you know, maybe I am hers in another life, but she knows better than I do that I’m just...not. Not this time around, at least. Not right now,” she finds herself saying almost sadly and it’s not okay. It’s not okay for the simple reason- or rather, reasons that Emma cannot even begin to list.

It’s always been because Nori has been and continues to be the person Emma damn well knows she should be when it comes to Regina and she just half-asses it, or doesn’t do it at all, for whatever purpose she’s trying to create. Regina hears Emma sigh and looks over at her. The blonde’s face is very perplexed and it’s understandable to an extent as to why in most cases. However, this time around- Regina has absolutely no clue why. As far as Emma has let her believe, she’s just a very possessive and ‘protective’ best friend. She never tried explaining or clearing anything up to Regina so that the young girl knew exactly where they stood.

“Well,” Emma starts only to stop shortly after. There’s always the question of what do you say in a time like this. It’s her best option to say nothing, but she never listens to her logical thoughts. Surprisingly though, what she says, is of actual substance.. Or a little less intimidated at least. “She’ll
“call.” It’s her only option right then and there when her mouth opens and even she wasn’t sure what she’d have said if given free range. Regina nods and Emma knows she’s managed to save her ass just now. “Soooo, what exactly are we supposed to do with your grandma and grandpa all summer?”

“Well, nana’s probably going to take us to church-,”

“- Great,” Emma mutters. Regina’s eyes dart to Emma’s face before she speaks.

“Once or twice though,” Regina continues. “After that, if we go- we go,”

“And if we don’t?”

“Just be prepared to hear her mutter the youth of today over and over,” Regina said and found that she was grinning just thinking of it. Emma smirked. “Grandpa’s probably just going to get the pilots to take us around a couple of times on a few practice runs and out of state once or twice. Maine’s not that big- well, Story Haven isn’t at least. You can pretty much walk anywhere you can think of and anywhere you please. Klaus is only here if you wanna be lazy and to take grandma around when she has to deal with business… and then, knowing my grandmother, she’ll probably pick up a lot- and by a lot I literally mean a lot of new clothes,”

“Please tell me she won’t pick out dresses and pink stuff with those nasty frills and other.. ungodly, girly things,” Emma groaned and Regina laughed at her.

“She won’t. Grandma hates patterns, well- floral.. and pink. She stays with the trend. She owns more pantsuits than anything else and everything is tailoured,”

“She sounds like she runs for office,” Emma jokes and Regina goes silent on that one. Emma bawkes. “Aww, come on! NO freaking way!” She says loudly and Regina can’t tell if that’s happiness, confusion, anger or all of the above.

“Hey, your grandparents are insanely rich,” Regina combats.

“Yes, but that’s because it’s the south. That’s old money. No one knows why the hell my grandparents are rich, not even momma- and she works for them,”

“Isn’t it hotels or something?”

“Hell if I know. I never asked because it didn’t matter. All I knew was that my family was rich. Both sides.. But like I said, hell if I know. It’s a ‘so they say’ kind of thing, but I don’t think my grandaddy owns them.. Just, parts or somethin’,”

“Em.. his last name’s on them. I think he owns them,” Regina tells her completely one note as if the blonde should have put that part together at least.

“Maybe, but your grandparents own aviation companies and run for congress- come on- how do you beat that?”

“Grandad owns one aviation company and he doesn’t own all of it. He and some of his friends put money together and put it on the map. He’s been friends with them for over fifty years and they just decided on it. Nana’s in office, but not congress. She’s right hand to the mayor though. Besides- Maine isn’t even expensive. It’s easy to get a good chunk of land and a really big backyard or lawn. That’s why ours was so big too. Since Maine stuck to those old town traditions and export more fish than almost anywhere else, it’s stayed.. Consistent as adults put it,”

“Where’d you even learn all of this?”
“When your parents and grandparents are as old as ours are.. And know more about stock market and real estate than the agents for both fields.. You tend to pick up on some of that good ole knowledge.. Lena and I were prone to little history lessons when our parents started talking in the car..and it just stuck,” she admits and Emma shakes her head with a soft grin.

“Walkin’ excyclopedia,” she teased and Regina laughed.

“Whatever Em...before I forget, nana asked about special calls,”

“Special calls?”

“Mhm. She means like a boyfriend.. Or girlfriend,” Regina said, slightly hitching her words and guaging Emma’s facial expressions. Emma almost chokes.

“Wait- she thinks-,”

“-no, no. It was for the four of us. You know- you, Lena, Auggie and me. If my nana even smells a stitch of gay, you’d be in a chapel getting cleansed right now.” *It’s a wonder I made it without being crucified*. 

“Oh...well, what did you tell her?”

“I told her I only knew that Lena would have ‘special’ calls because of Wade. I said Auggie was too young and I told her I didn’t know if you had anyone, but I guess that if you did, you’d tell me because.. You tell me everything, right?”

“Yes... and you tell me everything..so, what about you? Any special calls for you?”

“Nope, just my birthday and Nori’s supposed to call my cell, not nana’s house. But it’s not like she has *that* number anyway,”

“Well, good,” Emma smiled before putting an arm around Regina. She brought Regina into her and hugged her tight. “You’re my Gina forever, right?” she asks and it doesn’t even sound like a friendly question. It sounds like some offputting possession, but Regina just melts into the hug instead of focusing on the clear cut jealousy by nodding and whispering a yes to Emma. “Forever?”

“Yeah...forever.”

When they finally manage to first two and a half miles, they sit to eat, but Regina finds that there are no breathtaking morning moments worth using her camera for. It’s probably just the timing or the lighting, but nothing in that moment is photo worthy. She ends up just taking some very random ones that are clearly not ones she will be keeping. Some of them have parts of her sister in it. That of course means Zelena will complain and when she complains, it’s about how her hair is a mess and Auggie cracks a joke that she didn’t have enough time to prep. Emma takes that one step further saying Zelena looks a little like death without her face on. It takes alot of convincing and Zelena running through the camera roll for Regina to prove to her that she was in fact, barely noticeable in the pictures.. That’s how she took it with all the people there to begin with. Besides, she proved that she only went for the good angles anyway and Zelena had given her back her camera.
Regina never saw herself as photogenic and that’s why she never actually took pictures of herself. Her reason was unknown, all most of them knew, was that she barely saw herself as anything much to begin with. Emma used to tell her she was perfect, but that stopped and it took Nori’s maturity and obvious awareness of the situation to continue where Emma dropped the ball. All the things Emma envied, Nori gave without wanting anything in return and Regina appreciated that. Caring, concerned, giving, hopeful, strong, considerate. Nori said the exact same words Emma used to say to her, only better and it took some time, but Regina had started to believe it once again, even if it was only for a moment in time.

She then goes off on a random thought that had she met friends like Emma and Nori, she may have been better adjusted to life. They all head back to the house and it’s a surgery sweet surprise for the girls.

“Grandpa!” Regina belts happily, and like the little girl she used to be, she makes a dash for him and expects him to catch her when she jumps in his arms. He does, albeit a little more shakily than he used to, but that was a thing to pardon when the man was as old as he was. That child-like love came out as he whispered,

“little star,” in her ear. Regina grins as she squeezes her grandfather tighter. “You’re getting stronger and more beautiful each year… still a little short spitfire, though,” he teased her and she blushed.

“Missed you too, grandpa,” Regina answered with that sass known only as playful banter she usually reserved solely for the man. He runs his fingers through her hair before he moves onto Zelena. She’s much less the child at heart and more so the hormone induced, model body goddess with the overly mature attitude to match.

“Not so little star,” Santiago smirked in adoring humour. Zelena and he embraced.

“Hi grandad,” she grinned and his face brightened, even though it was barely possible his usual light demeanor could become even more angelic.

“My God do you look like your grandmother when she was your age,” he compliments and Zelena blushes.

“I hope that’s a good thing,” Zelena admits and her grandfather laughs.

“Good- it’s great. I married her two years later and never regretted a day of it since,” he tells her happily and Zelena seems more interested than usual.

“Well, lets hope Wade’s on the right track to doing the same thing,”

“Wade-there’s a boy? Honey, there’s a boy?” he asked his wife. Zelena slapped her forehead. Shit.

“Seems so.. She refers to him as what the others have been teasing her with… what is it? Honey bear?” the woman answers and Santiago busts a gut laughing at that one.

“Well, names do seem to become more creative as the time passes. At least you don’t call him sugar plum. That one over there, without a shadow of a doubt called me every embarrassingly stupid pet name she could find...she put everyone else and every other embarrassing pet name to shame...still, I’m married to her,”

“Must be love,” Regina smiles.

“It’s love.. And food...and sex-,”
“-Grandpa!” Zelena yells and he shrugs.

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“Your grandparents are insane, you know that right?” Emma asks Regina as they set up their floorbed. Auggie went missing a while back, more than likely to talk to Santiago about some things, or have one of those late night adventures because Auggie could appreciate the outdoors. Regina shook her head with a smile as she spoke.

“I’m well aware, no need to tell me twice,” Regina had said before dropping one of the fluffy blankets on top of some pillows. She crashes on top and Emma follows behind.

“Today was.. alright,” the blonde admits.

“That’s because summer hasn’t started yet,” Regina reminds her. “Give it a week and you’ll be wishing KeWe had this much,”

“It’s not that bad,” Emma tries defending and Regina eyes her seriously.

“Emma, we live on a tourist attraction, 24/7. If cruise ships aren’t docking there all the time, we have people driving over just for the hell of it. Maine’s.. Quiet and it’s fun,”

“I didn’t even know you went anywhere.. You were always sooo.. shy,”

“This is home. Here, I know. I know everywhere and everyone. I may have been shy, but it was for good reason,”

“Mmm. okay, what are we doing tomorrow?”

“Klauser’ll probably come to take us out and drive us around tomorrow, and that’s after he takes grandma wherever she needs to be.. After that, we’re free to do whatever we want, but that only happens after- after we go out with grandma for the jog,” Regina recalled and Emma groaned deeply.

“Good, I forgot about that.. Your sister told me it was an everyday thing,”

“It is,”

“Guess that’s why she looks as young as she does still,”

“If it helps you sleep better, you can think of it that way,” Regina laughs and Emma squints.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” she asks but Regina just shakes her head.

“Nothing… good night Em,” she tells her friend and Emma scoots over before wrapping herself around the young brunette and hugging her tight.

“Night, Gina.. one day down- a crap ton more to go,” she grumbled and Regina shushed her.

“Go to sleep,” she’d said and the blonde huffed before she murmured,

“fine,” very quietly. “Love you,” Emma admits to her and in that moment, Regina feels that the once
It’s been a week, and Emma still wasn’t used to getting up early enough to go and jog with Rose and everyone else at seven in the morning. She groaned more often than not, and complained every spare second she could afford; but what she wasn’t so angry about was the fact that at least Regina was there suffering with her, and she could laugh at Zelena’s consistent complaints about her not looking her absolute best because she had bed hair and literally had to wear her glasses early in the mornings. This time though, today was just a tad bit different. After they managed the five miles all up, Rose had said something to the extent of—

“-decreasing the distance..” and at first, Emma was not only confused, but the words had barely registered in her mind.

“Pardon?” she asked, surprised even her manners were cooperating at that point. Rose turned around with a smile. The same smile she was always known to have. Emma was hunched over, breathing deeply and pretty much trying not to crop out right then and there.

“Oh, sweet girl- I was saying that I think it’s time that I decrease the distance we jog every morning. That was just to get you acclimated to staying healthy,” she’d told the young blonde and Emma fell over, happily onto the grass and started laughing.

“Thank God!” she smiled as she lay there and caught her breath. Regina sat down next to her and wrapped her arms around her legs.

“Feel better now?” she’d questioned and Emma huffed out a laugh.

“Better- I feel great! Misses Sorentini- how much are we jogging now?” Emma found herself asking because what if she rejoiced too early in something that might still be just as bad.

“Two miles, Emma,” the woman answered with a bit of a nod.

“Just two miles- all up?”

“All up, yes,” Rose said and Emma fell back once again, laughing loudly this time. Regina shook her head as she took her own breathing rest and waited until her grandmother told them to go take their showers and get dressed.

“So, where exactly is she takin’ us?” Emma questioned as she was shoving her feet into her shoes. She’d taken a rather quick shower and just thrown on something for the time being until she figured out what it was she wanted to wear.

“Shopping,” Zelena said as she walked into the room with a towel, drying her long hair. She had another one wrapped around her body and put a romper on the bed that she’d already had ironed.

“Didn’t know you liked denim,” Emma teased and Zelena rolled her eyes.
“I don’t… I just like this one, and it’s either wear this or wear running shorts and sneakers,”

“Why don’t you just wear what you- I don’t know want to wear instead of wearing something that looks like it might end up with all your buttcheeks hanging out?”

“Because, Wade bought it for me and said it would look nice on me and I told him I’d wear it at least one time. I’m doing that now, because I don’t wanna do it later,”

“Whatever,” Emma answered. “You’re gonna be cold in that thing, just a heads up,” she’d remembered telling Zelena and the tall girl groaned. She walked over to the closet and pulled out a long sleeved white shirt with a button up collar and some sperry’s.

“There, problem solved… I think,”

“Pfft, yeah ,” Emma said sarcastically.

“Why are you even in here? Shouldn’t you be glued to Regina or something?” Zelena had finally asked the young blonde because she was confused by it.

“She’s taking a shower, you finished yours and Auggie is once again missing. I think he likes your grandparents more than he likes ours,”

“I’ll be sure to tell grandma and grandpa that…” Zelena muttered and Emma huffed.

“Can I ask you somethin’?” Emma then pushed and Zelena stopped moving. She turned to regard the young girl before she sat on the bed. She began moisturizing her skin and spoke

“What’s the issue this time?” she questioned and Emma faltered for a moment.

“There isn’t an issue.. It’s just.. Okay- ummm,”

“Emma,”

“yeah?”

“Just spit it out. You annoy me when you do that,” Zelena told her honestly and she inhaled deeply.

“Whaddaya think about Nori?” she blurs. Zelena squints for a moment as she looks at the blonde before she shrugs.

“I dunno. Didn’t know him.. Or her, that well,” she admits, still confused on how the teen identifies themself.

“But she.. He, was in your class,”

“No- in my grade. Big difference and doesn’t mean I knew ‘em,” Zelena tells her. “Listen, if you’ve got some big thing against Nori, don’t ask me about it- or ask for my help with it. From what I heard, she.. he was pretty nice,”

“Yeah, Regina won’t stop talking about how nice he is. That’s why I was asking,”

“What do you care for? Are you jealous of him or something?”

“What! No!”

“Right ,” Zelena rolled her eyes. “You think Regina’s gonna date Nori or something?”
“No. She told me she wouldn’t,” Emma lied, but Zelena didn’t know that. “She said they’d never end up together. Not in this life, not in any other life either,” she continued to lie, and that gave way to something in Zelena sensing it.

“Whatever you say. You’re paranoid and you’re jealous, for whatever reason- you are jealous…” she trails off. “Listen, if you’re so bent out of shape over it, why not just talk to Regina and Nori about it, together,”

“How the hell am I supposed to do that when he’s not here?” Emma asked, clearly agitated and Zelena laughed.

“Ah- ah.. I thought you said you weren’t jealous-”

“I’m not!”

“Sure you’re not,” Zelena pushed. Emma ground her teeth roughly.

“Why are the two of you arguing?” Regina asks from the doorway as she’s clearly heard Emma and her sister go at it. Both girls stop but Zelena has the perfect cover for it.

“Emma’s upset because I keep teasing her about being a dwarf,” she says and at first Regina doesn’t buy it because Emma’s getting pretty tall, but she supposes it may have to do with the comparison to her sister who is in fact… very tall. Regina nods, still not necessarily believing it.

“Then why is she so red like it wasn’t about that?” Regina asks and this time Emma answers.

“Because she said I’d never get married being this short and…other things,” Emma muttered. Zelena smirked and that’s what pretty much made Regina believe it only could have been that.

“Whatever. You two, are strange,” she tells them and Zelena snorts.

“Oh, I know I’m strange. I embrace that. But you two.. Odd pairings I say,” Regina sang before she left the room to get dressed. Emma sighed deeply as Zelena went back to doing what she was doing.

“Don’t thank me. I didn’t do anything,” Zelena told her but Emma shook her head.

“You did.. Thank you, for covering for me,”

“I only did it because I am not for hearing you two argue all day about something as childish as this,”

“Could you just say the words you did it because you cared?”

“No, because I don’t. Listen, whatever happens between you and my sister, I don’t care. You two are hopeless,” Zelena mutters as she stands and pulls the romper up under the towel. She turns around and drops it before pulling the rest of the fabric up and around her top half.

“Why would you say that?” Emma asked and Zelena both sighed heavily and sucked her teeth.

“Oh My God! Do I have to tell you everything?”

“No-,”
“-okay then. Figure it out for yourself,”

“Alright! Jeez!” Emma answered, visibly wounded and agitated by Zelena’s attitude. Emma mutters something nasty as she leaves the room and slams the door on her way out. She walks into the room where Regina is and falls onto the bed with a huff. She covers her eyes and breathes deeply.

“When are you going to learn that my sister is like a viper?” Regina asks the blonde as she brushes her teeth. She’s already dressed in jeans and sandals with a hoodie. Predictable. Emma huffs again as she turns on her side.

“She’s a pain in the ass,” the young girl grumbles and Regina smirks just slightly as she returns to the sink to spit.

“Stop trying to have conversations with her. Lena’s… being Lena,”

“And what version of her is that?”

“One that has a very choice word as the title… Em, you and my sister are two different walks of life, in every single way. She’s like the popular girl that’s got everything going for her and a stink attitude to match. I love her, but she can be a little less than loving when she’s in her moods,” Regina informs but Emma sighs.

“She can’t miss Wade that much that she turns into.. this,” Emma complains and Regina shakes her head.

“She doesn’t.. It isn’t about Wade, never has been…”

“Then..what is it?”

“Something she won’t tell us,”

“If she won’t tell you, how do you know it’s not about Wade?”

“Because Zelena and Wade weren’t speaking before we left. She’s been lying about it because she doesn’t want anyone to ask her questions…”

“So, what about the whole special calls thing?”

“Our mom and dad probably already let it slip and if Lena had said no, or ‘that’s not the case’ or something like that..they’d have known something was wrong,” Regina tells her and for a moment, Emma is silent. “That and I had to cover for her to. She may get on my nerves, but she’s my sister.”

“Well...but, how do you know that?”

“She did something that gave it away...or rather, didn’t do anything that gave it away,” Regina corrects and Emma looks rightfully confused. “I can’t tell you,”

“But you tell me everything,” Emma reminds her and Regina nods.

“Yeah, but not this one, Em.”

“Why nooooot?” Emma whines and Regina sighed.

“Because.. It’s not my business.”

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“August, am I to be concerned that you do not wish to spend time with your sister and friends?” Rose had questioned the young boy, but he shook his head.

“No ma’am.. Momma and daddy always said I had an old soul or somethin’. I just like talkin’ to you and Mister Sorentini because my sister’s always mad these days and Lena’s always with Wade and Regina gets sad a lot now, too,” Auggie had admitted as best he could articulate and Rose paused for a moment.

“Why is Emma always angry and Regina’s always sad?” she’d questioned him carefully and Auggie shrugged.

“I dunno, but it started happenin’ after Emma got asked to go to prom with some other girl and she didn’t tell Regina. She made me swear not to tell or she’d beat me up but that just hurt Regina a lot and it made her really sad. Regina had to go with someone else… and then they left,”

“Would that person be Nori by any chance?”

“Yes ma’am, that’s him,” Auggie nodded. Rose rubbed her chin for a second.

“That still doesn’t explain why Emma would be mad,” Rose mumbles but Auggie hears her.

“I think she’s jealous cuz she messed up,” August tell her truthfully.

“You believe that to be the reason?”

“I think it is. She’s scared Regina’s gonna leave or somethin’;”

“She shouldn’t be afraid if she apologised and was honest about why she did it,” Rose tells him but August goes quiet. “August?”

“Yes ma’am?”

“Was Emma honest with Regina about it?”

“I think so,” the child answered truthfully. The old woman leaned back into her comfortable study chair and sighed as she rubbed her eyes. “Misses Sorentini, can you not tell ‘em I told you?” he’d somewhat asked but clearly was begging and she nodded.

“I won’t, August. This will be our secret… Could you do me a favour and check on the girls. We need to get going, I have other important errands to run today,” she tells him and he nods eagerly before he gets up and goes to find them. Rose shuts her eyes once more and huffs.

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“Klaus happy to see you again,” Klaus informed the teens as he smiled and opened the doors for them. Regina being the sweetheart she was, hugged the man and he hugged her back, rather tight.

“Klaus- Klaus.. You’re crushing me,” she groans out, still smiling and he releases her immediately-checking her over to make sure he didn’t harm her for real. She smiles at him once more as she gets into the limo and all the other teens file in. Rose opts to sit up front so that she can talk with Klaus.
She usually rode in the front when it was just her and him anyway. At first it was to teach the man to speak proper English, but after a while, she’d just let him be and found that talking about other things and learning his native language was more fun and enjoyable to say the least.

Auggie sat closer to Regina than he did to anyone else and laid his head on her shoulder.

“You tired already, Auggie?” she’d asked him but he shook his head.

“Nahhh, Lena’s only worried about Wade now, so I can’t lay on her like I used to,” he admits and Regina doesn’t feel the least bit insulted by his preference. Instead, she asks him,

“You really think she’d give your spot to Wade?”

“She already did. She doesn’t even teach me soccer tricks that much anymore… I only wanted to play because she did,” Regina had heard the young boy mutter before shifting his face and burying it in her shoulder. She puts a hand to his head and sighs. She usually steers clear of commenting on any situation she’s not involved in, but August always seems to come to her and tell her what’s wrong if Zelena’s not available and as of late, that’s been very frequent. She knows she’s owes it to him to at least be a shoulder.

“I’m sorry, Auggie,” Regina apologises for her sister but he shakes his head violently.

“I’m gonna quit when we go back to school,” Auggie says and that causes Regina to pull him from his little hiding spot and shake his shoulders.

“You can’t quit,” she tells him and he looks away from her.

“Why not?”

“Because.. Because- because, Auggie listen.. You joined soccer because you said Lena played soccer, but I don’t see it that way. You look like you really like soccer and you look like you really liked playing it. So what if Lena doesn’t teach you that many tricks anymore.. She still plays, and yeah- it kinda sucks that she’s all about Wade now, but I realized something and I want you to know what it is,”

“What?”

“She really likes him.. She’s not trying to hurt you when she hangs out with Wade, but that’s how relationships work. You have to make time for the person you’re with and sometimes that means spending more time with them than your friends, and your family… I think Lena’s in love and just won’t say it, but that doesn’t make her any less of your friend, she’s just… distracted. I had to get used to not always being able to talk to her after she started dating Wade. I missed fighting with her and just hanging out in her room to watch movies and all that other stuff, but she’s changed..and she’s still changing, with me more than anyone else- but that’s for a different reason. It’s not really because of Wade… She won’t just drop you, though. You’re the only person she can bond over soccer with.. I think you should tell her how you feel.. She’ll listen, she loves you Auggie, she’s just- ,”

“-distracted.. yeah,” he answers and Regina nods.

“Exactly, just give her some time and she’ll come around,”

“Alright.. Hey, Regina?”

“Yeah, Auggie?”
“Thanks,”
“What for?”

“Just stuff,” he grins and she smiles back at him. She hugs him and he laughs, “I don’t think you’re gonna grow anymore,” he tells her and she pouts.

“I’m only 5’2,”

“Yeah, and I’m taller than you,” he teases and she shakes her head.

“Thanks, Aug,” she groans but he hugs her tighter.

On the other side of the limo, Zelena is glued to her phone and Emma has her eyes shut, listening to music. Neither of them had heard the conversation that went on between the two teens which was a plus. When they reach to one of the clothing stores that Rose had picked out, they’re surprised to see Santiago standing there, waiting on them.

“Grandpa?” Regina questions curiously as she steps closer to the man who pushes himself off of the wall and walks over to her.

“Little star,” he acknowledges with a soft smile and she smirks.

“What are you doing here? I thought you’d be busy today,” she’d said but he shook his head.

“Nahhh, I called in. Told them I was going to spend some time with you all, even if that means I have to shop for six hours,” he exaggerates and Regina makes one of those faces that clearly shows him she’s not for it either.

“You, Auggie and me- we’ll suffer together,” she’d told him and he’d laughed alongside her when she said that.

“Emma likes to shop?” Santiago queries and Regina groans.

“Like you wouldn’t believe,” she tells him and he laughs.

“Dresses and frilly things?”

“Thankfully, no,” Regina smiles. “She’s not that girly,”

“Well then.. Let’s get to it shall we. The quicker we start, the quicker we finish.. The less time we have to worry about dying whilst they buy out the store.”

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Two- maybe three hours later and Zelena had six bags whilst Emma had eight and Auggie had four. Regina had one because all she wanted to make sure she had were long and short sleeves. Maine had trippy weather and she couldn’t afford to get sick considering she weighed only so much. Her grandmother left with none because the shopping trip wasn’t for her. Her grandfather was holding onto three bags, and that was because Emma and Zelena couldn’t carry the other three that belonged
to the two of them. Regina opted to go with Santiago because he wasn’t going straight back to the mansion, but the others were hungry and Rose had said she was going to make lunch before she needed to go out and do more of her errands. The two groups split up and Santiago takes his youngest granddaughter with him to the aviation company he and his friends owned. Emma finally takes an actual walk around the mansion and gets lost, easily. She’s not cry for your mom kind of lost, she’s more, enamoured with everything she sees that she continuously drifts into another room without bothering to keep track of where she is. August helps Rose make lunch and Zelena’s walking around on her phone having a full blown argument.

“I didn’t call you? You didn’t call me!” she argued back and heard the person practically yell over the phone. Rose had turned around, both worried and slightly annoyed that Zelena was near shouting to begin with. Auggie kept cutting up tomatoes for their sandwiches because it was none of his business and it’s not like Zelena wanted to hang out with him anymore, anyway. So, he ignored how she argued back and forth with whoever it was because Rose would deal with it, or Zelena would leave the kitchen.

“You were the one who was mad at me!” she hissed through the line and Wade groaned.

“I wasn’t mad at you. I was tired of you talking about some drama you’re not even involved in… it was supposed to be our last night to talk about stuff before you left for Maine and you just wouldn’t stop talking about who Crystal’s dating- as if I know a Crystal!”

“Fine, Wade… I’m sorry,” she muttered but she didn’t actually mean that apology. She exits the kitchen and heads out onto the back step of the house. She walks around aimlessly and Rose just watches for a moment before she decides to leave Zelena to deal with it.

“I’m not looking for you to apologise. I just missed when we would talk about us and plan things. My birthday’s coming up just before your sister’s and I don’t get to see you. I don’t wanna argue with you, Lena. I just missed my girlfriend…” he admits before going silent. Zelena sighed softly.

“Wade.. I’m sorry,” she apologises, and this time- she means it. “I didn’t know,”

“It’s okay.. I didn’t say anything. I just.. It sucks - you know. I can’t spend my birthday with you and we just barely managed yours. We argue before you leave and we’re arguing now. I don’t care about anyone else. I don’t care what anyone else does. I just want us to be us. Leave everyone else’s drama alone and just focus on what we’re doing. We’re not perfect, but I want us to come as close as possible. I wanna marry you someday and I can’t do that if all we ever talk about is other people who I couldn’t care any less for than I already do now. I love you, Lena.” Wade whispers that last part to her and it takes all of Zelena to stay standing.

“I...I-I,”

“You don’t have to say it. I just wanted you to know, I’m for real about this,” he tells her honestly and she nods with slightly wet eyes. She sniffs and shakes her head.

“You actually want to marry me?” she finds herself questioning and Wade laughs.

“I do.. I just have to wait for the right time to propose,”

“Anytime is a right time,”

“So you say, but I’m waiting… just promise you’ll say yes when I ask, yeah?” he hopes and she smirks.

“As long as the ring you get me matches my birthstone,” she combats and he grins.
“So that’s what it’ll take...I gotta go. I have to leave for work, I’ll be in late today but I’ll call you when I get a break,”

“Alright.. Come back in one piece,”

“Oh- I will. I have a girlfriend I wanna marry someday.”

Rose walks back into the kitchen with her arms folded and her face clearly in thought mode. She would like to ask Zelena about the outburst earlier, but there are two reasons why she won’t. One-she’s too old to help her granddaughter deal with her relationship problems. Two- she didn’t want Zelena to be upset and think she was eavesdropping when she wasn’t.

“-Sorentini,” she heard a little muffled as her eyes flashed a few times. “Misses Sorentini?” the voice repeated, this time in question and Rose blinked slightly.

“Yes?” She had answered.

“Tomatoes are done,” Auggie had told her and blindly, the woman managed to pat him on the shoulder.

“T-thank you August... you can go, I’ll call you all when lunch is ready,” she tells him and for a moment he looks at her a tad bit worried.

“Misses Sorentini? Are you okay?” the child asks her and she nods, albeit a little distracted once again. But she does nod.

“For the most part,” she admits honestly and unaware of whether or not he should push that question, August said nothing and just nodded back. He begins to walk out of the kitchen before turning around sharply and running towards the woman, grabbing hold of her and hugging her tightly. That action jerks Rose from her stupor as she hugs the young teen back before patting his back and letting him go. August heads for the same area where Zelena is leaving and they bump each other at the door.

“Sorry,” he mutters to her as he tries to dodge her, but she sees the way he’s acting and follows behind him, grabbing hold of his arm and stopping him immediately.

“Auggie- are you okay?” Zelena questioned. August pulled from her hold and shifted his shirt before shrugging.

“Fine,” he had answered but Zelena pushed.

“You’re not fine.. Come on Auggie, you used to tell me stuff. What’s wrong?” she questions him but he shakes his head and begins to walk away from her.

“What does it matter,” he says to her as he kicks up one of the soccer balls that was just laying there aimlessly. “You have Wade now. What do you care?”

“I always cared,” she tells him but he scoffs.

“No you didn’t. Go talk to Wade. Leave me alone- I’m trying to practice,” he grumbles and at first,
Zelena gave in, but then she turned around and stalked straight over to him and swiped the ball from up under him with her own foot. Zelena began to dribble the ball between her feet and August in his anger, tried getting it back- failing as he did so because he wasn’t focused on the ball anymore. Just at the fact that he didn’t want Zelena to have it. To take away what was left.

“If you can get this ball from me and score.. I will leave you alone. If you don’t and I score- you have to tell me what’s wrong,” she challenged him and he scowled at her.

“Why?”

“Because you’re like my brother and you’re upset about something,” she reminds him. “Now, are you gonna do it or not?” she challenged again and August accepts that challenge. They battle back and forth with the ball, swiping it from each other and nearly scoring on one another; the only difference was- Zelena was letting August get the ball as many times as she was so he could get his anger out. By the time she’s taken the ball from him the last time and scored, she claps for herself, smiles as if it were a good game and says. “You’re getting a little rusty again, but you’ve still got some skill..now- tell me what’s the issue,” she says but August begins to walk away.

“It’s none of your business,”

“Seriously?” she questions him. “I just played a round with you and you can’t even tell me what’s wrong! I shouldn’t have played if that’s the case-”

“-Then why the heck did you?!” he shouts at her and she freezes. “If you only played so you could find out information- don’t play soccer with me anymore! If that’s all that matters to you is knowin’ stuff just so you know- don’t play soccer with me ever again!” August screeches at her and Zelena’s face pinches into hurt or something that looks unreadable. “Why’d ya play it with me in the first place if ya didn’t wanna?” he asks her but he’s not looking for an answer. “ All you care about is Wade- GO BACK TO WADE!” he belts loudly. “Leave me alone! You don’t like playing soccer with me anymore- then go! If it’s that much trouble- leave. Me. alone- Zelena!” he commands before he walks around her and aims to go inside. In all his anger, he kicks hard at the soccer ball and it smashes through one of the windows. Zelena can say nothing to him and nothing loud enough to make him stop, but she tries anyway, only to have it fall on deaf ears. Rose runs out shortly after and Zelena turns to meet her grandmother’s eyes. Rose looks between her granddaughter and the broken window and remembers that there was a soccer ball somewhere in all of this. She also remembers seeing August storm inside, fuming. She doesn’t even ask what happened, all she tells Zelena to do is to get inside and she would call her when lunch was ready. Zelena holes up in the room that she’s staying in as August is in his, face buried in the pillows, crying from his own anger. When lunch rolls around, only Emma and Rose are eating because Auggie fell asleep so hard and Zelena just wouldn’t move to eat at all for the better half of one hour. When she finally does eat, she’s silent for most of it until Wade calls and she disappears to talk to him. Emma helps Rose clean up and about two more hours later, Regina and Santiago are back and Regina’s smiling solemnly, clearly from the thought of something. She has a rose in her hand and heads upstairs to rest it on the table near her bed before she takes a shower and heads back downstairs to eat a late lunch. Rose makes herself sparse to go run errands after she’s made sure her husband has something to eat and is alright. Regina hums to herself as she fixes a sandwich and Emma just watches her as she sits at the island.

“What’s got you so smiley all of a sudden?” the blonde questions and Regina stops.

“Nothing.. I was just thinking about some things,” Regina admits and Emma is once again, confused.

“What things?”
“Just things, Em,” she tells her, but that just makes Emma upset.

“Whatever,” she mutters and Regina stops. The young brunette sighs and drops her sandwich on the plate, a sharp eyebrow raised in question.

“What did I do now?” she asks honestly and innocently and that grates on Emma’s nerves, but it doesn’t show when she speaks.

“Auggie and your sister broke a window or something. Your grandma had to get the window guys here to repair it and now your sister is acting like someone cut out her tongue and Auggie’s asleep.. He only sleeps in the afternoon when he’s mad about something.”

“What does that have to do with me, though?” Regina asks her and Emma can’t answer, that. She once again avoids Regina’s question.

I’m gonna go for a walk,” she says and Regina huffs but leaves it be. She’s not about to start stressing over it. So, she’ll leave it alone.

“Fine,” she agrees before she turns back to start eating her sandwich again. Emma stops short of the exit and turns back to Regina.

“Could you stop doing that?” she questioned slightly agitated and Regina threw her sandwich down on the plate.


“How am I acting like everything is fine when I have no idea what’s going on, but oh- look! You won’t tell me because you expect me to read your mind. How am I acting like everything’s fine when I have to force my depression back down just to please you because it makes Emma mad! How am I acting like everything is fine when my best friend couldn’t even support me enough a week ago to actually sound like she genuinely cared about something that I was upset over?! So- Auggie and Lena broke a window- so what! Auggie sleeps when he’s mad, how about you go ask him what’s wrong and stop trying to drop hints that I should. He’s your brother. Lena not talking is a miracle! I’m not here to solve problems, Emma. I don’t get involved in other people’s problems. It’s not my place and it’s not yours. But if it bothers you so much- go ask them what’s wrong. If they don’t tell you, that’s because they don’t want to. I don’t have to ask Lena why she’s so quiet. It’s her mouth- her voice. Auggie doesn’t have to tell you anything. His sleep schedule- his problem… leave me out of it,”

“FINE !” Emma shouts at her and Regina throws up her hands and spins back before she pretty much mashes her sandwich in the process of picking it up. She shoves it into her mouth angrily and munches on it, her grandmother and grandfather both enter the kitchen after that. Rose looks at Regina’s etched eyebrows and Emma’s disappearance and huffs deeply.

“What in heaven’s name has gotten into the four of you?” she questions but she’s not looking for an answer.

“In my defense. I was fine ,” Regina mutters and her grandfather takes a seat at the island, he waves her over and she takes her sandwich with her. She sits directly next to him and they eat their food.

“So…” he starts as he chews with a mouth full of food. Very calmly, as if nothing even happened and Rose just watches because Santiago has this thing about him in getting information out of children.

“What’s the big tiff about?” he asks his granddaughter and she shrugs honestly.
“I dunno,” Regina manages with her own mouth full of food. “Emma just kicked up out of nowhere and accused me of pretending everything is fine and because I was smiling just because Lena and Auggie are grumpy and she can’t fix it,”

“They’re mad at you?” he questions her as he sucks his teeth, trying to clear them of bread debris; Regina rests her sandwich down with a little thump as she huffs and leans back. She steadies her hands on the granite and shakes her head.

“Dunno, grandpa. I don’t know what’s going on and why everyone’s upset, but I’m tired of feeling so down and Emma’s not helping….she’s making me feel guilty for having a window of happiness and I hate it.” she admits. “I hate that I feel bad -that I feel ….”

“...good?”

“Yeah, good,” she had said and he nodded. “It just doesn’t add up though,” she then finds herself whispering after silence has passed for a while.

“What doesn’t add up?”

“Lena and Auggie breaking a window and being upset about it.. It can’t be the window,” Regina says strongly and her grandfather looks interested.

“I don’t follow, sweetheart. What exactly do you mean?”

“Well,” she began and stopped immediately. She huffed once again before she shook her head. “Auggie was upset that Lena pretty much ignored him after she started dating Wade. He and Lena used to play soccer together everyday after school and after she got with Wade, she just stopped doing it so much.. Or at all, really. Auggie said she doesn’t teach him tricks anymore and they don’t kick the ball around in the backyard like they used to.. I told him Lena wasn’t dropping him but it’s because she’s in a relationship where most…. all of her attention is on Wade. We don’t even talk anymore and I live with her. She just stays in her room and talks to Wade and when Wade comes over, she goes out with him. I don’t see her that much and mami and papi don’t act bothered by it… but it hurts Auggie a lot because he said Lena was the reason he wanted to play soccer to begin with. He was going to quit after we got back home because she’s not really playing anymore and he doesn’t have anyone else to bond over it with…. I guess he wouldn’t tell her why he was mad and just… broke the window,” Regina shook her head.

“With the soccer ball,” Rose added and Regina bobbed her head and waved her hand.

“Yeah nana, with the soccer ball…” Santiago looked back at Rose, but as soon as he spotted her, he also spotted Zelena and at first, Regina didn’t bother turning around; however, when she noticed her grandfather’s prolonged staring, she too turned around.

Zelena just stood there, frozen and silent. Her breathing was light, but it was clear she was having a serious war happen in her mind. She walked into the room almost as if she were floating on air and then just stopped...right in the front of Regina. The young brunette swallowed as Santiago turned back around and put a couple chips into his mouth.

“w-why didn’t you….says something?” Zelena had asked her after gulping through a couple of breaths and at first, Regina just looked at her before she managed to speak.

“Not my business to tell,”
“But you told granddad,” she combats.

“Because you’re all stressing me out and he won’t get involved in your issues with Auggie, Lena,” Regina told her almost flatly and Zelena felt the slight bit of steam she had, dissipate. “I had to tell Auggie you weren’t dropping him because he’s right- you’ve been ignoring him the same way you’ve been ignoring me and everyone else. I had to give him hope because he had none left. Everything is Wade this and Wade that and no one else matters to you. We get it, Lena. You like him. You love him, but you can’t expect Auggie to sit on his hands and wait for you to come back, knowing you won’t unless he said something. He stayed quiet because Wade makes you happy. He knows that and because he knows that, he was willing to lose you.

“I was willing to lose you…”

“He wouldn’t tell me what was wrong. I played a game with him, but he wouldn’t tell me,”

“Because he doesn’t trust you not to drop him like you did this time- again,” Regina informs her, but Zelena just rambles on, realization dawning on her.

“And then I told him I just shouldn’t have played with him in the first place...and then he just- lost it,”

“And because of your little argument earlier- Emma started yelling at me like I did it,”

“I’m sorry, Regina,” Zelena apologized but her little sister shook her head.

“It’s not me you need to apologise to… Go talk to Auggie, he needs to hear it more than I do,” she tells her and Zelena nods, hesitant for a moment before she turns around and hugs her sister.

“Can you just promise to tell me when I’m being horrible,” Zelena had laughed tearily as Regina had hugged her back.

“No.. because regardless, I love you, Lena. It’s whatever makes you happy, but you have to know for yourself when you’re being horrible,”

“You’re right,” Zelena nods and Regina smirks.

“I know. I tend to be that sometimes,” she says smartly and Zelena just ruffles her hair before she turns and heads up the stairs. Regina looks on for a moment and catches the eyes of her grandmother, a soft smile playing at Rose’s lips as she walks over and hugs the young teen. Santiago rubs her shoulder before he speaks.

“Now that you played therapist with Zelena and August, how about you figure out what’s got Emma so upset,” Santiago suggests and Regina rolls her eyes.

“Grandpa.. The reason Emma’s as upset as she is - is because she doesn’t know what’s going on and because she doesn’t know what’s going on and can’t control it, she’s throwing a fit…. She didn’t even have a reason for being mad at me- she just got mad at me like it was normal,”

“And you told me you didn’t know why any of them were mad because?” he queries and she shrugs.

“I wasn’t thinking then. I was distracted and.. Depressed about the situation. I shut down and stop trying to focus on it because your granddaughter and our friends are… unpredictable.”
Emma doesn’t know where in the hell she was and still is going, but she stormed out of the mansion in a haste to be as far away from Regina as possible. She managed that, but now she was royally lost, without her phone and in a desperate need to get inside before night fell completely.

“Stupid Regina,” she had muttered, still angry as she stomped around one of the suburban areas in Maine. Her eyebrows were etched in that signature pissed formation and her lips were pretty much gone because of how pinched they were. “Actin’ like everything’s fine- nothin’s fine!” Emma bursts as she keeps walking, now shoving her hands into the pockets of her boyfriend jeans. She keeps her head down as she continues to stomp around the area and right into someone’s moving bicycle. Both her and the now injured human were distracted, Emma with her little half-assed ranting fest and the cyclist with their surroundings. Both of them fell back with thuds, the cyclist’s fall to the ground outdoing Emma’s as the bike wrenched and screeched before collapsing atop the poor kid’s leg.

“Crap!” they groaned loudly, but Emma was still dizzy from her own fall that she barely managed to focus on the person. She heard a hiss and hollow groan come out and immediately snapped to it. “Oh Jeez,- oh jeez!” she began like a mantra, completely panicking and slightly flailing. Her eyes managed to settle on a boy who looked like he may have been her age or just slightly older. She quickly went over to him and pushed his bike off his leg and bent to see the damage. Nothing was broken, but how the bike itself fell on him, cracked him square in the femur and the tibia. Only some of his skin came off but it’d scab over before he could remember it was there. Other than that, he seemed fine, but Emma was still freaking out.

“I’m really sorry,” she apologised immediately but the boy was so busy holding onto his leg he could barely tell her not to worry about it. “Does it hurt really bad?” she asks and he huffs and puffs before he shakes his head as best as possible.

“It’s just- it’s just…. “ he trails off, wiggling his leg back and forth and stiffening the muscles to get the uncomfortable feeling off of him. “bruised,” he had said and Emma nodded. She stood and stretched out a hand to help him up, watching him hop as he took the offered help and skipped twice before steadying himself. He shook his leg once more and flexed it. He looked at Emma with a smile that pretty much made the blonde doe eyed and gooey in that moment. “Are you okay?” he then asks her and she nods dumbly. “You sure?” he asks again and she nods once again. He nods before picking his bike up and steadying it. “I’m sorry,” he apologises and Emma snaps from her dreamy daze.

“No-no, it was me. I was just walking ’round. Wasn’t lookin’ where I was goin’,” she admits and he laughs as he rubs the back of his head.

“I was distracted too.. Was looking at the houses.. Chris,” he says before stretching his hand out and Emma shakes it.

“Emma,”

“Hi Emma… listen, I gotta get going. Maybe I’ll see you around,” he tells her and she finds herself asking him what she knows is just about the dumbest question in the moment, but she already likes him too much to just let him ride away.

“Around where?”

“Around Town ;” he clarifies with a soft laugh and she blushes from the neck up.
“Oh- yeah..right… So, you live here?” she asks him which makes him put his foot down and rest the bike on his inner thigh. He shakes his head as he speaks.

“Nahhh, just visiting my grandparents and some aunts and uncles for the summer,” he admits and Emma perks up.

“Oh, us too,” she says and he gets that interested but confused look. Emma calms down and waves her hand. “Well, me and my brother flew over with our friends and we’re visitin’ their grandparents.. It’s our first time here,”

“Ahhh, gotcha. I’ve been coming here since I was six, so I know the place pretty well,” he informs and Emma brightens once again.

“Has it changed?”

“Not even close.. Where are you staying, maybe I could walk you back if you want,” he offered and at first, Emma was about to tell him no, but she was lost as hell and she’d be stupid to not get help.

“Sure.. 180 Mifflin,”

“Oh! You’re staying with the Sorentini’s,” he acknowledges and at first Emma is ready to hesitantly downplay and diss Regina’s grandparents, but she thinks better of it.

“Yeah,” she nods. “Is that a problem?”

“Not even, they’re a really nice people. My grandparents are always talking about them. Says they helped them keep their house…” he trailed off and Emma smiled at him before she nodded. “Where are you from?”

“Huh?”

“Which.. state are you from? You don’t sound like you lived in the city,” he tells her and she blushes once again.


“The home of country music,” he jokes and Emma nods with a smile.

“That it is,” she says and before they both realize it with all their talking and laughing, they arrive at the mansion and the bike stops rolling. Chris juts his chin in the direction of the mansion.

“This is your stop,” he tells her and she nods.

“It is.. Thanks Chris, see you around,”

“No problem Emma,” he grins before picking up to ride his bike again. Emma doesn’t stop him. She has no reason to, unless she wanted to look like an absolute creep by keeping the boy longer than he clearly wanted to.. Or was that just in her head. Shit!

She makes her way up the walkway and back into the mansion before she aims for the stairs and heads into the room that was assigned to her from over a week ago. That room hasn’t seen Emma once, but it would see her today. All of her clothes and everything she had was in Regina’s room. That room just looked like every other beautifully decorated and well kept hotel room she’s never seen. No one bothers her and that’s probably because no one knew she was back in the house. Night falls to the degree that she’s so confused as to what time it could be, she assumes she’s already
slept into the wee hours of the next morning. Sadly it’s just a little after ten when she rolls over and
pulls herself up to stretch her legs and stretch her back. Drags her feet down the stairs and everyone is
sat at the table eating. Her space is empty, save for the plate and utensils set out, but they were always
set out, so she had no clue whether to feel any form of special or just stand there and stare.


“I’m not really hungry Mister Sorentini,” she tries to convince him but her stomach fails her
immediately on that lie and he gives her a look that makes her sit. Directly after that, food is being
passed towards her and she takes helpings of everything offered.

“Tell me if it tastes strange. I haven’t cooked in over a week. I think I’ve lost my touch…” he tells
her, trying to both lighten the mood and kick away Emma’s draining depressive state she was clearly
in. Emma nibbles on everything and can’t help but light up at the food that tastes beyond amazing.
Just by her eyes he can tell she’s sold on that and leaves her alone after. All it took was some good
food to bring her back to life… now her talking would be a different thing, but he already did his
part. Zelena and Auggie were sat next to each other, and though they said absolutely nothing to one
another, it was clear that at least they both had calmed down enough to at least eat within each
other’s presence. Zelena’s phone went off but instead of immediately answering it, she looked out
the corner of her eye as Auggie slowed his eating and was gearing up to excuse himself. She pushed
her phone away and continued to eat. She knew it was Wade or Katherine or someone back home,
but she wanted to respect the rules her grandmother had set...at least for tonight. She watched him
relax just slightly and continue eating. Rose was doing work at the table. She’d gotten ninety percent
of her errands done- however, “had the children not ripped into one another, I could have been
done earlier..tsk.”

Thankfully Emma wasn’t there to hear that and Santiago had laughed and told his wife she works
more than she sleeps and that it’s not surprising because she hates change in most manners. She
handles it well, but she hates it just the same. And then there was Regina. Poor thing had just sat
there, her plate clearly only sported the little amount of food she’d bothered to eat. Emma
remembered she had a sandwich but was wondering if Regina had even finished it or if she threw it
away. Was their argument enough to cause her to lose her appetite. Yes- yes it was. But, she’s
stubborn and probably won’t apologise even though she knows she has to. She always has to-
because she’s always the one causing the uproar to begin with. She’s always yelling at Regina and
attacking Regina and never once has the brunette done it to her. Emma takes advantage of that fact.
She takes advantage of the fact that Regina pretty much just quits on their arguments after she makes
her point. She revels in the fact that she can blow up on Regina and have control over their
arguments and that if she doesn’t apologise- it’s totally cool because whenever she decides to,
Regina just forgives her. She always forgives her… she’s so damn confident she never questions if it
will run out.. When will Regina’s granted grace period to Emma Swan, run dry? So, Emma doesn’t
worry as she sits at that table. She doesn’t bother worrying, she’ll crawl up under Regina and hug her
and the brunette will forgive her like that because Regina loves her more than life itself. Regina puts
Emma before everything. If Emma so much as winked, Regina put her first. She has her wrapped
around her finger and can afford to just be anybody because at the end of the day- once again,
Regina’s there. She’s always going to be there-

“That type of mindset has never left you- has it?” her therapist had asked her and she shook her
head.

“No.. I was so focused on myself and how it all fell around me that I didn’t care what happened. I
literally had her as my moral support and punching bag whenever I needed and it sounds so
disgusting to say, but that’s what always made me feel better… I never hit her- EVER, but my words were enough to destroy and I watched over and over and over again as I did that,” she admitted and her therapist made a hmm sound.

“You are a terrible person,” she says and the young woman can sense that it’s literally off the record. She doesn’t fight back because it’s true. She is a terrible person. “You… are detrimental to good people.. That one good person in your life.. You decided to tear apart and leave for the crows,” the woman tells her and Emma nods. “Why are you nodding, you came to therapy- for what? To what? Admit something to someone that you already know and sounds like you still don’t feel sorry about it? You’re a terrible person. You didn’t need therapy to admit the idiotic, hurtful and quite literally- shitty things you’ve done, Emma….if you wanted therapy sessions to make yourself feel better, that’s not the purpose of it. It is to acknowledge and live with the fact that there are some things you cannot fix, things you should not fix and some very messed up situations you get no second chances on. Not every therapy session will give you hopeful glimpses of the future, and in your case.. You destroyed her enough to completely make her question the person she was and is. You don’t need therapy… you need to apologize.”

Dinner ends just as quietly as it quite possibly began and the teens split off into their own directions. Regina dawns a hoodie and long sweatpants and sits out on the back patio as Zelena finally answers her phone. Auggie showers and goes straight to sleep and Emma watches some tv. By the time they head to bed, Regina heads into her room and locks it, preventing Emma from entering, or anyone for that matter. Auggie sleeps in his room and Zelena to hers, but Emma’s a little annoyed to sleep by herself. Her room still looks like no one lives in it and she hopes to leave it that way because she does not want to sleep without Regina. When the house goes quiet with the telltale sign that everyone is or at least- should be asleep, Emma creeps over to Regina’s room and jiggles the door handle. When it doesn’t give way, she knocks as loudly but as quietly as she can. She does this for the better half of a minute until Regina opens the door just slightly and regards whoever it is with a soft, “what?”

“You locked the door.. I’m sleeping in here,” Emma had mumbled and at first she saw Regina’s eyes flit open wider before she huffed and walked away from the door. Emma took that as invitation to go in, so she did and when Regina climbs onto her bed, Emma thinks she has another clear invitation to sleep there with her, but then Regina’s tossing two pillows and a blanket on the floor and Emma stops. She picks them up and shoves them back onto the bed. “I’m not sleeping on the floor, Regina,” Emma tells her petulantly, but Regina once again, does not respond. She instead takes the exact same pillows and blanket and tosses them back on the floor. She spreads it out and flops down on top before rolling over in her blanket burrito and attempting to sleep. Emma looks at her friend for a moment and shakes her head before she groans and follows behind the young brunette and attempts to wrap herself around Regina. Regina rolls over again.

“What are you doing?” she asks her, both annoyed and aggravated with the blonde.

“Sleeping with you, what’s it look like?”

“Emma, get off of me. I’m trying to sleep,” Regina tells her, having no room to entertain Emma at that point.

“But we always sleep like this,”

“Not tonight. You’re making me hot, just… go sleep on the bed or something,”
“I can’t.. I can’t sleep without you next to me,”

“I’m not sleeping with you tonight.. Go sleep on the bed…” Regina tells her flatly and Emma lets go.

“What’s your deal?” she asks. She’s now upset she hasn’t gotten her way and Regina doesn’t answer. Emma sucks her teeth and stands before she gets into the bed and gets under the covers.

“You’re being weird,” Emma comments and she hears the blatant for fucks sake version of a sigh.

“Go to sleep, Emma. Seriously,” she tells her and she’s so close to reprimanding her, but she’s too sleepy to care. However, if Emma keeps it up and pulls her from that feeling of sleepiness, she just might snap. Emma huffs loudly at her comment and angrily turns over before slapping the bed and yanking the covers over herself completely. When the blonde thinks the young brunette has fallen asleep, she tries to again only to have Regina growl and almost roast her once again about sleeping on her own, but she’s hardheaded as fuck and when Regina is actually sleeping the next time she tries it, Emma gets into the burrito with Regina and wraps herself around the young girl. Somewhere into their sleep time Regina turns over and feels the tightness around her and groans quietly. She opens her eyes wide enough to realize that it’s Emma, somehow in her burrito and she rolls her eyes before moving the blonde’s arm from around her and getting out of it. She climbs into the bed and gets under the covers before she feels cool air wrap around her and allow her to breathe properly. She shakes her head as she burrows into the plush mattress and keeps her back turned to Emma. The night turns into morning and when Regina wakes, she sits up against the headboard and looks down at the blonde, sprawled out on the ground like she’d been shot. Regina steps over her after fixing her bed and leaves the room. She heads into the kitchen and types out a message on her phone.

Morning.

*Hey, morning.. You okay?*

No… we had another fight and then she just started acting like nothing happened… I miss you. You’d know how to help me deal with her..

*I miss you too, but classes are gonna start soon and Kevin’s stressing about me being on campus by myself… What’d she do this time?*

Same thing she does everytime… hurt me for no reason.

*Do you want me to call you? I can talk to you for a bit if that helps*

please

Her phone rings and she picks up immediately.

“Hey sunshine,” Nori whispers, still groggy and Regina manages a soft smile.

“You were still sleeping?” she asks and Nori laughs.

“Just a little. Pulled an all nighter gaming with Kevin so, I’m busted. How come you two had a fight?” Nori questions and Regina shrugs in all honesty.

“I don’t know. She was just mad that I was.. Happy,”

“That’s.. Bad.. Your birthday’s coming up soon,” Nori said hoping to distract the young brunette and Regina could sense the smile.

“Yeah, two days before school,” she smirked and Nori laughed.
“You exaggerate the truth, Your birthday’s in August,” Nori says and Regina begins to laugh. “but I promised I’d call. I have it marked on all my calendars. I labelled you as munchkin,” the older teen had grinned and Regina groaned.

“You’re an idiot,” she sasses and Nori gasps.

“Regina! Such words!”

“Sorry - not sorry… thank you,”

“Anytime, munchkin,”

“Munchkin will not become a thing, Nori,”

“Whatever you say… munchkin,”

“Go back to sleep, you’re delirious,”

“Fine, but.. Let me know if it gets better, okay, and remember what I told you. You deserve better.. Demand better, Regina,”

“I’m trying but it’s hard.. I get so depressed so easy that I just quit trying to demand better from the people I care about.. You’re the only friend who actually doesn’t do this to me…”

“Regina. You only have.. Like- three friends.. Maybe you need a little more,”

“I’m shy, you know this,”

“Well, how about you find other shy people to hang with.. You’re in Maine for the summer, right?”

“Yeah,”

“Okay- so frequent places where the quiet and shy people like to hang out. Like the library or the park that’s got those little sanctuary sections or I dunno, a pottery place,” Nori said randomly and Regina laughed.

“A pottery place?”

“I went stupid for a second there, lay off me,” Nori jokes and Regina grinned.

“I get the sentiment. I’ll try.. Go back to sleep, I’ll text you, or you can text me whenever you’re free,”

“Of course.. Remember, you deserve better-,”

“- and demand it.. I got it, Nor.. or should I say Ori?”

“Whichever floats your boat,”

“I like both,”

“Me too… you go back to sleep too, it’s literally five in the morning,“

“Sorry,” she blushed sheepishly but Nori shook his head.

“Just make sure you get some sleep, okay?”
“I will.. Good morning, Nor,”

“Morning, beautiful girl,” he complimented before they quietly hung up. Regina went back into her room and decided against sleeping in it at the last second, so she went into the living room and slept under the throw blanket that was there. She drifted off a little bit more peacefully after that.

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Another morning run down and breakfast was being cooked by Regina because her grandfather had left for the morning already and her grandmother surprisingly fell asleep. Like ducks in a line, the four teens jogged one right after the other, none of them speaking to one another. Rose and Santiago had just let it be because it made no sense trying to force them to speak to one another when it was clear they had no intentions of doing so. Who wasn’t stubborn was just flat out not going to speak because they were too hurt to speak. So, the young brunette had decided to cook because knowing her sister and their friends, they’d complain about not eating a hot meal in the morning. Thankfully, no one had entered the kitchen when they realized that Regina went straight for the fridge and started to pull food out. She didn’t know exactly what she was going to cook, but she was just going to make sure there was food there in case one of them were insane enough to wake her grandmother and act as if their hands didn’t work. Eggs, toast and-

“-bacon,” she’d finally decided to cook that and hadn’t hesitated on her decision since. By the time she’s done cooking and setting a plate aside for her grandmother and grandfather, Regina calls Auggie and Auggie understands why. Neither of them are speaking to the other two of their group for their own personal reasons. Regina realizes that Emma and Zelena notice that and still follow the young boy to the kitchen. She walks out the second they walk in and it’s obvious she’s not about to eat and that if they asked her why, she wouldn’t respond anyway. They leave her alone. She leaves the room and them, alone. She decides to head into her room and shuts the door before she locks it and climbs onto the bed before turning over and swiping through her phone. She dials out and waits for the person to answer.

“Hello,”

“daddy,” she whispers. She hears the immediate shift on the other end of the line as if he was moving- but can sense her father’s worry and his soft smile that creases just around the edges and cause his eyes to form the shape of almonds.

“Mija, is something the matter?” he questions and at first, she’s not so sure she wants to tell him, but the huff she lets out and turning of her body on the bed indicates otherwise.

“Kind of,” she admits, but even that she knows is just a bit of a lie.

“Okay, what’s ‘kind of’ the matter?”

“I’m feeling depressed again,” she tells him. Something sounds like a guttural swallow before Henry speaks.

“How bad is it?”

“Pretty bad,” Regina informs only to hear her father sigh deeply. Ever since Regina’s first encounter with depression, Henry had been persistent on monitoring her as it was highly likely she’d be susceptible to it later on in life and as of late, it’s been rampaging inside of her without even a bit of possibility to letting up.
“You know how I feel about you being on any form of medication,” he tells her and she sighs.

“I know, papi.. That’s not why I called. I don’t wanna be on meds either, but.. I don’t know how to deal with it. Grandpa and Grandma already have to deal with Auggie and Lena arguing and not talking to each other, and then Emma started yelling at me for no reason, but I don’t want them to have to deal with my depression on top of that.. It’s only a matter of time before they notice-,”

“-Regina, wait, hold on.. Why are the four of you arguing so much?” Henry queries and Regina takes a deep breath before she speaks.

“Long story short. Auggie’s jealous of Wade and the fact that Lena just stopped bothering to care about it him because of Wade, and Emma got mad because she can’t control any of the problems or something.. Daddy, I don’t know. I’m not involved, I just understand certain things and observe enough…”

“But that’s what’s affecting you negatively, mija,”

“I know.. I’m trying to stay away from it, but I know too much apparently.. Either that or I don’t know enough and I still get yelled at because of it…..”

“What do you need me to do, sweetheart,” he questions and Regina has to think.

“Do you think you could sing to me like when Lena and I were younger?”

“Of course,” he agrees easily before riddling off in a solemn voice, an old spanish lullaby. Regina puts him on speaker and lets his voice ease her until she hears her mother chime in on the singing as well and that makes her smile. She doesn’t realize that she’s tearing up just a little bit when they finish and she opens her eyes. She sniffs and laughs at her own emotional demeanor. “Better?” she hears him ask and she can’t lie, she does feel so much better.

“Better, thank you papi..”

“Wasn’t just me with the angels choir voice,”

“Thank you mami…” she adds. “How’s the vacation going?” she then finds herself asking to steer the conversation away from the impending. It works, her father bites at the question.

“Hot as a freshly laid tarmac road,” he says with a bit of a grumble to his words. “Your mother has a sun tan whilst I sport a sun burn,” he then emphasizes and she can’ help but laugh.

“How did you manage such bad luck already?”

“I don’t know, but I bruise easy and everything hurts. Your mother says I’ll be peeling in the next two days so I might look like a freshly burnt soldier. Demon, Vitamin giver;” he mutters under his breath. Regina shakes her head.

“Minus you burning your precious skin, what else have you guys done?”

“Shop, bird watch- literally, not figuratively. Party-,”

“-wait! What?” Regina cuts him off and he laughs.

“Ohhh, you didn’t know your parents partied in their days?” he asks her, still laughing and Regina shakes away the embarrassing thought of her father and mother- ‘gettin’ jiggy with it’.

“Moving on!” she says loudly and Henry hears Cora laugh because he too has Regina on speaker on
“Where are the doting Nolan’s?” she queries and Henry clears his throat.

“Right next to me actually,” Henry clarifies before he pushes his phone over. “Hold on Regina,” he tells her and she waits.

“Howdy lil pumpkin,” she hears David greet her and can already imagine his adoring smile.

“Hi uncle David,” she says with a soft smile.

“I heard Emma wasn’t treatin’ you right again. Gonna have to have a talk with her when we get a hold of her,” he promises Regina but she shakes her head violently.

“No- no.. You don’t have to. I’m sure she didn’t mean it,” the young girl said, sounding more and more like an abused wife than anything else. David tsks.

“No.. can’t have that. We didn’t raise Emma to be disrespectful to anyone, especially someone she claims to care so much for. We’ll have a talk with her and Auggie when we can. Besides, I think it might be time to explain to August how life works when it comes to girls and boys who date people they’re jealous of,” he tells her before he trails off. She says nothing for a moment before sighing.

“It’s really okay, uncle David. Everyone’s just, on edge,”

“From what? You’re still kids, you’re off the entire three months and it’s not as if the school you go to gives you a crap ton of work-,”

“-David!” she hears the hiss from Mary Margaret and actually smirks.

“I’m just sayin’,” he clarifies and Regina nods because she gets it.

“I understand… it’s not school. We’re just, at that age where everything and everyone annoys us and we’re frustrated with how life’s going for us…some more than others,” she adds where he can’t hear her. She hears David click something, almost like gum and then he throws his hands up.

“Alright.. Alright. Still gone have that talk with them though. They’re in someone else’s home and I do not need to get report of them being trouble, or anything else..” he once again trails off and Regina has to respond to him.

“It’ll be alright,” she tries to tell him and he makes a noise as if he believes her.

“Alright then, talk to you later baby doll,” he says and she tells him goodbye before the phone slides over once more. “Oh! And Mary Margaret says hi!” he tells her happily and she grins.

“Hiiiiii,” she sings back before hearing the telltale sign of laughter from the woman. Regina climbs off the bed and heads over to the window seat in the room before climbing in and getting comfortable. She hears another shift and the voice that makes her heart jump with joy comes sailing through the line.

“Guess who!” her mother says happily and Regina grins.

“Mami.. I miss you,” she admits with a heartfelt sigh and Cora returns the sigh.

“Me too, sweetheart. I heard your father say something about medication earlier. Has your depression gotten worse?” she queries and the young girl answers her quickly.

“Yeah.. sometimes I can’t handle it and other times I’m fine with it, but since we’ve been with nana and grandpa, it’s flaring up and getting worse because of what’s happening,”
“Us singing to you might help, but what of when you’re alone?”

“I’ll just have to bear with it like I always do,”

“I commend your strength, but I should warn you against overextending just to manage with something that shouldn’t be taking such a grappling hold of you,”

“I know, but that’s how I am. You and daddy both know that,”

“This is true.. Just promise me that you will try to rest when it becomes stressful,”

“I promise I’ll rest.. I’m too tired most times not to pass out anyway.. Either that or lose my appetite,”

“Let’s hope that improves.. I love you my sweet little girl,”

“I love you too, mom,”

“Mmmm, do not refer to me as such until you’re old and married,”

“Sorry mami,” Regina apologises with a soft laugh and Cora clearly has her own laugh for it as well considering she sees that it makes her fear growing old.. But she was literally fourty, no younger, but certainly getting older.. Her and Henry were. “I love you.. Bye,”

“Goodbye my sweet little girl,” she said before they hung up. Regina sat in the window seat for a while longer until she pulled her camera from behind the pillow that was on top of it. She put the lense to her mouth and blew on it before shining it and then putting the camera to her eye after turning it on. This one was a Nikon. Something she cherished like it was gold. She adjusted and readjusted the zoom on the camera and it fixated and focused on some kid outside the gate. He was on his bike and had stopped to talk to one of the men guarding it. Regina’s camera settled as she continued to adjust the focus on it. He was talking to the man almost animatedly..as if he were giving a description of something and then the man nodded before walking into the booth and dialling out. Regina could hear the house phone ring considering her grandmother had a cordless at just about every point in the house. Her head snaps away from both the camera and her view towards the door. Her ears strained just a little to hear mutterings or something and then it stopped. She looked at the door for a moment longer before turning her face back and focusing once more on the young boy. Her finger slipped and ended up with her taking a picture of him. Her eye twitched slightly and refocused itself. She waited with baited breath, almost as if she knew what was about to happen..and then it did. Emma came strolling out rather quickly, pulling her hair up into a ponytail and then making a jog for the young boy. She stopped just shy of his face and they waved awkwardly at each other. Regina’s finger didn’t slip this time when she took another photo. Emma and whoever this kid was were talking as if they were old friends and then, they hugged. Her finger pressed down as she took another and another and another. It was almost panoramic how her finger jammed the shutter button multiple times in that short space of time. They had pulled apart and then waved awkwardly at one another before he climbed back on his bike and left. Emma stood there until he was out of view before she jumped up and down repeatedly, clearly squealing. Regina took another photo and yet another photo before she paused and just.. stared at Emma through the lens. She watched as Emma looked down at her hand and then started skipping and squealing again.. What was so exciting that it had her jumping up and down like she was on hot coal?

Regina pulled the camera away from her face and dropped it in her lap before tilting her head back and heaving out a sigh. She kept her eyes closed for a moment until she looked out the window once more and saw that Emma seemed to be looking directly at her window. She looked away and then down at her camera, not realizing that the blonde was moving away right that second to come into the room. Regina flicked through her camera roll and started from the top. She had few photos of
Nori because her previous camera had been a disposable—still. Her first digital camera had gotten crushed by something that was in the back of her father’s car and that broke her. Thankfully her memory stick was still in tact, but the poor camera was gone. By last Christmas, she had that one—and surprisingly enough… it came from Emma when she had learned of it. Nori had almost bought it for her, but what she didn’t know was that Nori had given Emma the money to replace it because Emma said she’d wanted to do something nice for her… that was the odd spec in time when Emma used to talk to Nori before the teen had graduated and left. Her parents had bought her a new one, but because of the one she got from Emma meant a hell of a lot to her, she didn’t take it. Her mother decided to keep the other one, claiming she may as well use it for her own job to take better pictures of the houses than the people before her.

What had shocked her even more was when Emma admitted that she wouldn’t have been able to get it if Nori hadn’t helped her out… a lot. Regina didn’t care about all of that. The simple fact that they both thought of her enough was all that mattered. Nori had given her a charm bracelet instead and it was something she could tell that she had made her.

Her hand fidgeted to touch the bracelet now. Pawing and keying it, almost with the pressure to make sure what she was feeling was real. Her knees come up just slightly as she continues to fidget and fidget with it. Her head stays leant against the wall in the window seat. That little alcove felt more comfortable than the bed most times. It was somewhere she could be without having to be concerned, or forced to feel happy. That alcove was her depression spot. She could sleep there, eat there, watch the earth give light and take it away there.. Everything. And then she hears thumping and the inevitable is about to happen. It gets closer, slows to a stop and then the doorhandle is jigged. When that doesn’t work, it’s jigged yet again, almost as if whoever is at the door doesn’t believe it is locked. After the second jiggle, the person realizes it’s locked, so— they knock. Regina lazily lets her head fall to the side where the door is in her view. She sighs and looks away from it and back out the window.. Emma is gone.. Oh well. The knocking continues for the better part of a minute and then just stops out of nowhere. She hears the footsteps recede and shuts her eyes, inhaling deeply and barely breathing any of the air back out. The footsteps return and this time, the person doesn’t even knock. The doorknob jiggles slightly before it unlocks and the door opens completely. There, in the doorway is Regina’s grandmother, just staring at her—clearly relieved that the girl wasn’t passed out or something.

“Regina darling,” she calls and at first her grandchild doesn’t respond, but when she calls her again, Regina’s eyes jump just slightly before opening. “Oh thank heaven’s you’re okay!” the woman praised lightly before making her way over to her youngest grandchild. She sits in the window alcove and tilts her head.

“Anela?” she calls her but Regina doesn’t respond because her eyes are once again focused on the outside world. Rose sighs but she doesn’t quit. She never quits. “Regina… thank you for cooking breakfast,” she says and the slight dip of the child’s head lets her know she’s heard her and is basically telling her it was no problem. “I see you put a plate away for your grandfather,” she starts again and the slight nod of the child’s head indicates a yes. “I’m sure he’ll love it.. Did you plan on taking it to him?” she had asked and at first Regina doesn’t respond, but then— she turns her head and looks at her grandmother with an almost dead look in her eyes.

“Yes ma’am,” she actually manages, but it’s a whisper before she turns her head back to the window once again.

“Would you like for me to go with you?” she questions and Regina nods. “How about now, hmm?” Rose asks her with a soft smile and Regina nods again. “Okay, I’ll go get dressed and I will take you to him.. I believe he’s playing golf today.. Would you like to play?” she asks carefully and Regina gives her yet another nod. Rose smiles a little more before she stands and goes to kiss Regina on the
head. Just before she can turn to leave properly, Regina grabs hold of her arm and it makes her stop. She at first believes the child will explode with a tantrum, but none of that comes. Regina just holds her there, a silent thank you- a silent plea maybe? “We’ll get you something to wear so that you’re comfortable.. Or you can wear whatever you like and some comfortable running shoes. There’s a good bit of walking,” she manages and then Regina lets her go and looks at her for a moment. Right in that moment, Rose swears she can see the smallest of smiles on her granddaughter’s face before it disappears completely by doe eyes and an innocent look. She speaks once more before she leaves. “You don’t have to tell me what’s wrong, but do know I wish you did not have to go through such damaging experiences, Regina.. I love you and so does your grandfather, and should you choose to tell either of us what’s bothering you, it will never get past our lips and to another’s ears...there were times I did not understand why your mother and father coddled you and your sister until I realized that you are a child that says nothing much when she’s in pain.. You bury it all in hopes that no one will notice until it all becomes too much- and even still, you hold it all in until you’re alone and you breakdown.. I commend you, dear girl. You are strong. You have always been strong- even when you cried, you were always strong….I’ll go get dressed. I’m sure your grandfather would appreciate breakfast,” she ends before she actually does move to walk out the door. Rose leaves Regina’s room and heads for her own to get ready like she said. She had left Regina’s door cracked instead of closed completely. Regina shuts her eyes and drowns in her thoughts until Auggie comes to her door and pushes it open.

“Regina- oh.. you’re sleeping,” he concludes until she cracks one eye open and Auggie corrects himself. “You’re not sleeping,” he says before walking over and settling into the alcove. He puts his feet up and snuggles in some more as he just stares at her.. Literally everyone is staring today for some reason. “You’re sad,” he comments and the way he says it isn’t anything short of observation. “Why?” he then asks because August pretty much knows how Regina works. She won’t talk very much, but if she does- it’ll be important. So, he sits there and waits for her to speak.

“Depressed,” she mutters and August remains silent. He knows she may say something else, it’s just a matter of when. She shifts in her spot and sighs. “Depressed and possibly jealous,” she adds and he now sits up and pushes to his next question.

“Of what?”

“Not a what.. A who,” she corrects. “And I don’t know.. I don’t even know if it’s something I should care about or not. I just find myself fixated with it because of everything that’s been happening…”

“Who’s hurting you?” he asks her and it sounds like a therapist is trying to prod her brain, but this is August, she remembers. He won’t hurt her or pry. He just wants to help fix it.

“Emma,” she whispers which in all honesty doesn’t surprise her that it doesn’t surprise Auggie.

“What did you do with the pictures you took?” the man questions her and she shrugs.

“I got rid of them,” she admits and he taps his pen against the notepad, garnering her attention.

“How exactly did you dispose of the pictures, Regina?” the man asks her in another format and she shifts.

“I deleted a few at first.. The ones that were repetitive at least... and then I printed off the rest at some point after my birthday and I ripped them up and threw them away before I deleted them on
my camera,” she explains and he nods slightly. He jots something down on the pad and sets it aside before leaning forward and clasping his hands together with his fingers. He brings them up to his chin and rests it atop his fingers. His thumbs rub at his mustache before he clicks his tongue and leans back.

“You said the camera was a gift, right?” he asks and she nods. “What happened to it. Who gave you the camera?”

“Emma did.. Nori had given her the money to get it for me, but she picked it out and wrapped it and gave it to me. I disposed of that camera as well,”

“Just recently?” he asks and she shakes her head violently.

“Along with the photos. I claimed it was stolen when in reality I’d given it away to someone else…”

“Who all did you tell this lie to?”

“Anyone who asked. Anyone except-,”

“-August and Nori I suppose?” he questions and she nods.

“Why those two? Why be truthful with those two?”

“Because Nori was the one who bought it and August knew I was going to do something drastic. He’s kept my secret to this day. I don’t know why, but he was more my little brother than he was Emma’s. He always took my side. Always. I always took his. It was always just me and Auggie. Lena never really existed after a while because after she went off for college, we stopped hearing from her so much. Emma… changed. But Auggie- he never forgot me and I never forgot him,”

“And Nori?”

“What about Nori?”

“I asked you why be truthful with them and no one else. Why just those two- not just about the camera, but about- as it appears, just about everything,”

“I kept one secret from my parents. One and only one- it was that camera and I don’t regret it. They know and always knew everything that went on and goes on in my life. I was always truthful with them. And my grandparents, but that was only to a certain degree. As it relates to my friends. I had few and I made a promise to always tell them everything- regardless of what it was or if it hurt. I was honest with Nori because I could trust Nori more than I could trust Emma even though I knew her longer. Emma let me down in more ways than one and I held out hope like an idiot because I loved her. Because I cared. I cared so damn much that I didn’t even know who I was after it all. I gave her everything I had- stupidly. She just. didn’t appreciate it.”

“And if you could say one thing to her right now. What would that be. If you could ask her anything- what would it be?”

“I would ask her what was the question Nori had asked her all those years ago that she wouldn’t answer and told me was ‘no big deal’ and I would tell her… she’s made me lose all hope she will ever change and be my Emma again.”
“What did she do now?” August asked, clearly annoyed, not by Regina, but by how his sister is acting with Regina.

“So much and yet still, so little, Auggie. It’s hard to explain… it doesn’t matter,”

“It does matter-,”

“…not if it has no chance of changing… I need to get dressed. My grandmother’s taking me to see my granddad and I’m going golfing,” she sidetracks and begins to get out of the window alcove before she’s going over to the closet and pulling out some comfortable pants that stop at the knees. They’re cargo pants. Boy’s cargo pants. Auggie shakes his head before he heads for the door and pauses. He turns back and speaks.


“For what?”

“Talking to Lena...or whatever you did,” he whispers and she is so confused at first until it clicks and her eyes widen just slightly with a happiness that Auggie can sense is genuine.

“You two are talking again?” she asks just to be sure and he nods eagerly.

“We apologised and I told her that as long as I still get to play soccer with her through the week, I’ll be happy, but she said she’d make more time for me cus she misses me. We’re gonna play a game later and go find birds to throw rocks at or somethin’,” he smiles and Regina manages to smile back at him.

“I’m happy for you Auggie,”

“I’m only happy because you helped,” he tells her but she shakes her head.

“I didn’t do anything,”

“But you did.. You fixed it, Gina,” he tells her seriously before he moves to hug her and she’s hesitant, but she hugs him back. He lets go and leaves. The second that he’s out of earshot, she sighs and goes back to picking clothes out. She finds a black t-shirt and scrambles through for some black flip flops. She changes into that and throws her hair into a ponytail. Her curls are thicker this time of year and soon it’ll be hard to get the brush through it, but she’ll manage. She grabs hold of her backpack and walks downstairs where her grandmother is already waiting in a pair of jeans and sandals with a button up on. Her hair is always perfect, even when she claims it’s not, which means it’s always wavy and manageable. It lays against her shoulders with ease and still so alive. She spots Regina and looks at her for a moment before leaving the words to die on her lips about why her granddaughter thinks that flipflops is suitable for golf. She neglects that Regina looks like a literal tomboy because it doesn’t matter to her how Regina dresses, it matters more when the girl has to dress appropriately for a specific thing or event that Regina just goes gung-ho, and says fuck it, and throws caution to the wind on them. So, it doesn’t bother her that Regina just looks like a very very pretty little boy. It confuses her more that Regina wanted to play golf and still has on flipflops out of all things.

“Sweetheart, are you ready?” she asks because if she asks why the young teen is wearing what she’s wearing, Regina may change her mind about going altogether. Regina nods. Everyone else except August look at her confused.

“Where you guys goin’?” Emma questions. She’s not concerned so much as she’s being nosy.
“Regina and I are going to run a few errands,” Rose lies easily. Regina never felt so grateful for that lie. Her grandmother noticed something. If she let slip what they were doing it would be like breaking the trust of a puppy. And it is technically an errand, just not multiple errands. Actually, maybe a few things will get done, but for the most part, she just wants to get the young girl out of the house. “How is Christopher?” she then asks the young blonde girl and Emma is confused at first.

“Who?”

“Your friend.. His name is Christopher,” Rose tells her and she remembers.

“Ohh.. he’s fine,”

“He’s supposed to come over later to show you around, right?” Rose questions and Emma must’ve forgotten or didn’t care that Regina was there because she just went off on a ramble.

“Yes ma’am, and we’re gonna go to the theatre. He said he has a friend who performs there and that maybe they’d put on a show for us,”

“Emma’s got a daaaaaate,” Zelena teased and Emma scrunched up her face but the blush gave it away. She liked the fact that Zelena called it a date.

“Do not,” she weakly fought but Zelena scoffed.

“Yeah right.. You have a date. What guy do you know shows you the city and then takes you to a play.. Common white drama movies. He even wrote his number on your arm,” she points and something on Regina’s face twitches. The young brunette has no idea if it’s her eye itself or her eyebrow. That’s why she was jumping up and down. Emma yanked her arm back and hid it behind her back, but Regina just turned and got the plate of food before walking out the kitchen. Only then is when Emma notices that Regina’s walked away and for some reason, she feels she has to defend herself- or explain the situation. A situation which she will end up lying about if she so much as tells Regina it’s not a date when even she knows it more than likely is. Still, she rushes after Regina and stops her at the door with a hand on her shoulder. Regina pauses, on autopilot.

“Don’t listen to Zelena.. She’s just bein’ stupid,” Emma tries to say instead and it gives no indication that she’s prepared to cover a lie, so she halfassess her sentences to sound like they’re referring to it and not at the same time. Regina- even on autopilot, pulls out of her hold and continues walking which means that Emma has to follow behind her. “I’m serious.. Don’t listen to her, okay.. I mean it. She’s just talkin’ to hear herself. It’s not true-,” And there’s the lie. “-it’s not a date-,” oohoho..keep it coming. “-we’re just gonna hang out and stuff. That’s all,” she says as if she needed to convince Regina- the girl that was nowhere being her girlfriend.. That she wouldn’t cheat on her even though she was meeting up with her ex. It felt like one of those stupid dramatic moments in life when the person you care the most about is the most insensitive asshole in the most unpleasantly ‘innocent’ way. Regina doesn’t respond. She walks out of the door and towards the gate. Klause spots her and his usual happy smile fades immediately when he sees her face.

“Ju no happy?” he questions her and she manages to look up at him for a split second and then back down at the plate. She holds it up to his face and mutters something that he can’t hear at first. “I no hear properly.. Ju say?”

“Put it in the front seat, please,” she repeats louder and Klause nods. He begins to walk away but turns around and looks at her for a moment. He smiles sadly before turning back and doing what she asked him to. Regina opens the door for herself and climbs in before she shuts it. She looks through the window and sees that Emma is still standing there as if she expects the girl to come back to her or something. Shortly after, her grandmother gets in and the ride is silent. Rose doesn’t bother her and
she doesn’t say anything to her grandmother either. When they arrive, Regina’s the first out and first to her grandfather’s office. She didn’t need to be told where to go, she just went there. She was nice to the receptionist of course. But that’s because that Receptionist- Aliya- was nice. All the time. Regina only knew about Aliya because when she was younger, Aliya would watch her and Zelena when they stayed with their grandfather and he had meetings or had to leave spontaneously. Aliya didn’t miss the lack of sparkle to Regina’s oh so soft and almost unnoticeable smile.

Regina knocked and waited patiently until her grandfather pulled the door open and looked down at her, surprised at first, but then he was smiling at her.

“Little star.. What brings you here?” he questions. She walks in slowly and sits on the couch before she holds up the plate towards him. He takes it and takes the lid off the top before he smirks. “You made me breakfast,” he comments and she nods slightly. “Thank you, anela.. I haven’t eaten as yet,” he tells her as he walks over to his desk and sets it down. He then sits in his chair and leans back before sighing.

“Grandma’s coming inside soon,”

“She is?” he asks and she nods again.

“She’s talking to Klause about something,”

“Mmm, alright. Now tell me- why are you really here?” he asks her after fixing his chin atop his fingers.

“Grandma said you were going to be playing golf and asked if I wanted to play,” she said offhandedly and he laughed.

“You’re going to play in flip flops?” he asks her, clearly not buying it. She shrugs again and he sighs, but he continues to smile at her. “Alright..Alright. You look like something’s on your mind.. I would ask but I’m nearly positive you won’t tell me, so I’ll guess and you just nod…Emma?” he questions her immediately and she nods. She doesn’t even care about it anymore. She nods because- why the hell not. It’s not as if her life didn’t revolve around Emma- all day, every day. “I don’t need to know anymore than that… so, do you want to play golf?”

“Not really,”

“I figured.. Would you rather walk the field?” he then questions and she tilts her head at the offer before nodding. “There we go.. Come on then,” he tells her and she follows him. Santiago opens the office closet where he keeps his change of clothing and changes into his own pair of flip flops before opening an arm out and allowing her to go ahead of him and outside.

During their walk, Santiago asks Regina certain questions that in all honesty, have nothing to do with anything but the young teen herself.

“I haven’t seen you light up this much about Nori as I have when it was you and Emma… you seem taken with him.. Her,” he tries correcting and she smiles.

“Nori’s really sweet,” she defends, but she doesn’t need to. He understands.

“Sounds so… I know you don’t really want to talk about what’s happening with you and Emma, but it’s not healthy what you’re both doing,”
“Grandpa, I don’t know anything else,”

“And that’s detrimental to you, sweetheart. You and her both,”

“Guess we still have one thing in common,” Regina mutters. Santiago becomes even more interested.

“What do you mean by that, anela?”

“Nothing, grandpa.. Absolutely-,” she sighs heavily. “-nothing.”

So, you’ll be here all summer?” Chris asked Emma as they walked the pathway from the Sorentini’s. She nodded.

“Yup, allll summer,”

“Oh, cool- so that means we can hang out more then,” he suggests and she smirks before she smiles at him.

“I guess we can,” she flirts and it’s freeing to her. At least, it is until she thinks of Regina. Chris notices some strange look on her face.

“Hey, you okay?”

“Y-yeah, I’m okay,”

“Sure?”

“Yeah, I was just thinkin’ about somethin’. It’s no big deal,” she tries telling him and he buys it.

“Okay.. well, I have a surprise for you,” he tell her and she brightens.

“What is it?” she queries and he laughs.

“You have to follow me and I’ll show you,” he answers. Emma bumps his shoulder and they walk onward until she notices an abandoned theatre. She runs ahead of Chris for a moment until she’s close enough to the building, turning back around to smile at him and waiting for him to come closer. He walks up with his hands in his pockets and pauses before looking up at her and jutting his chin out with a dimpled grin. “Go in,”

“But it’s abandoned,” she claimed and he laughed.

“How do you know that?”
“Because he and my grandad are friends,” the boy shrugs. “They put on shows three days a week.. Today’s one of em.”

“Where are they?” she asks- clearly trying to figure out why the building was in darkness and why he brought her there if they weren’t ready.

“They’re behind the curtains,” he tells her and she thinks he’s pulling her leg but he’s not. “I’m serious.. Sit down and they’ll come out,”

“I’ll believe it when I see it,” Emma sasses and Chris grins.

“Then sit and you will.”

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“How about you and I go get your sister and August and do something today? Your grandmother told me that Emma is out with Christopher?”

“She is,” is all Regina responds to. Santiago tilts his head in acknowledgement. “But, if you want to, we can get Auggie and Lena. He said they apologised to each other,”

“So they’re friends again?” Santiago questions and Regina nods.

“He says I fixed it, but I didn’t do anything,”

“Maybe you just don’t see what you’ve done to help, anela,” he says and she shrugs.

“Still,” she mutters but her grandfather smirks. He bends down to where Regina is and pats her shoulder.

“You should really start believing in the positive things you’ve done Regina,” he tells her and at first she’s ready to argue, but it’s something in her grandfather’s eyes that make her calm, and then she’s nodding before she’s hugging him. He takes that hug with joy and holds onto her until he asks her where they should go and she asks to go for a ride around in the private plane he has. He cracks because she’s his little star- always has been.

They walk back to his office where Rose is just sitting there like an expecting mother. She gives them both scolding looks because they’d forgotten her but Regina blushes and leaves them be in the office to go and talk to Aliya. Aliya puts her work away to hang out and Regina has her walking all over the place. She asks Aliya how long she thinks she’ll work for her grandfather and the woman looking at her late twenties with a bit of scorn says- “for as long he’ll have me,” with more joy than she has about anything for a long while.

“It’s really good working for your grandfather. He’s an amazing boss and I love my job,” she says and the young teen smiles.

“Aliya?”

“Yes, Regina?”

“Are you still with Jeremy?” Regina questions and Aliya laughs.
“You remember Jeremy?” she questions because Jeremy was… a good while back. Regina nodded. Aliya fidgets slightly to face the young girl and talk to her. “I’m not with him anymore,” she says with a soft shake of her head.

“Why? You said he was the sweetest guy you ever met.. You wanted to get married,” Regina reminds her of all these things and Aliya laughs softly.

“Yes, I did and I did, but..things happen and people change,” she says a bit sorely and Regina looks like she’s saddened by those words.

“Did he do something?” she asks and Aliya pauses. She looks away from Regina and down at her hands.

“We both did, Regina,” she informs and the young brunette takes a moment before she asks her next question.

“What..what did you two do?”

“He hurt me.. I hurt him. He broke a promise and I left,”

“I’m sorry, Aliya,” Regina apologised to her but the woman shook her head.

“It’s okay.. It really is. He said I was everything he ever wnated and that I would be his forever.. I didn’t realize that meant he was everyone else’s.. He hurt me- so, I hurt him back. I went out and found the most cutest guy I could and I slept with him,” she admits, but Regina doesn’t respond, she just looks at Aliya’s fidgeting hands. After a moment of silence for Regina who was thinking about what to say next, Aliya ended up breaking a nail in the process.

“What did he do?”

“He did it right back...continuously, but because I loved him. Because I cared, I forgave him every single time and I watched it all fall apart,” she recalls. She then looks back at Regina again before she speaks again. “We had a little boy, you know,” she smiled and Regina brightened.

“You did?”

“Mhm!” Aliya grins. She pulls her phone out and flips through until she finds a picture of her little boy. “That’s Oliver,” she says softly and Regina takes the phone gently into her hands and looks at the picture for a good while before looking back at Aliya.

“He looks like Jeremy,”

“He really does… and that’s part of the reason why we aren’t together…. We didn’t want Oliver to watch us fall apart anymore than we already did. So, we parted ways,”

“And you’re okay with that?” Regina questions her seriously and she pauses once more before she looks up at the roof and sighs.

“Most days I am...sometimes I’m not, but most times I am. I may not be with Jeremy, but Oliver is the closest thing to his father that I will have,” she says solemnly and Regina nods.

“How old is Oliver?”

“How old are you?” Aliya asks with a smirk that has Regina blushing.

“I’m going to be fifteen,”
“Well, guess what,”

“What?”

“Oli’s birthday is the same day as yours. He’ll be five when you turn fifteen,” Aliya tells her and the young brunette grins.

“Seriously?”

“Seriously,” Aliya nods with soft smirk. “He’s been excited to meet you ever since I told him he shares a birthday with someone that was super special,” Aliya complimented and Regina blushed again.

“I’m not, though,” Regina tried to deny but Aliya made a pfft sound and nudged her shoulder.

“Pretty sure I remember how special you were when I watched you and your sister… speaking of-how is Zelena?”

“Tall and with boyfriend,” Regina recalls with a roll of her eyes and Aliya laughs.

“You don’t like him?”

“Oh no!” Regina responds, eyes wide in defense. “Wade’s actually really nice- to Lena and me.. It’s just Lena that’s not cooperating with actually being my sister anymore. Guess that just comes with age,” Regina said almost matter of factly and Aliya giggled at her.

“I don’t think that’s how it works,” the older woman had responded.

“I’m hoping it is,” Regina responds.

“Why?”

“Because, then I would have a reason to conclude that my sister is a righteous….mean person for a reason,” Regina settles for saying and Aliya nods in understanding. “I don’t think I can stay in my grandparents’ place with a ‘best friend’ who doesn’t even act like a best friend and a sister that attacks me because she can,”

“What do you mean?”

“It’s a long story, but it just means that my sister and I are on odd ends as always -lately and my best friend sounds like the Jeremy of our situation,” Regina clarifies and Aliya has to take pause for a moment. She thinks for a moment until it clicks.

“Hey… I’ve been looking for some help lately-,” she begins and Regina looks at her.

“-Help for what?”

“How would you like to babysit Oli for me… Ever since school closed, I haven’t been able to find a babysitter for him. My mom moved just after you guys did and Jeremy’s parents want nothing to do with Oliver- so.. If you’re up for it..maybe you’d want to babysit him,” she offered and Regina’s eyes lit up.

“That would be so great,” she says. “But, why do I get the feeling you feel sorry for me and that’s why you’re asking me to babysit,” Regina comments and Aliya shrugs.

“I don’t feel sorry for you.. I just think you could use it. You sound like you need time away from
everything and everyone who you almost always see. You’re fighting with your best friend and can’t find a rhythm with your sister,”

“Yeah, and in the process I’m telling any and everyone else about it and making it worse because that’s making me think about it every five seconds,”

“Maybe it’s how you function.. You’re always there for someone else, so maybe you need people to listen to you.. But ask yourself, how many of them hear you?”

“I guess, not very many,” Regina admits and Aliya nods. “Okay.. I’ll do it,” Regina decides immediately after. Aliya extends her hand and Regina shakes it.

“Good.. now I might need you to work a full shift like I do,”

“So, eight hours?” Regina questions. Aliya nods.

“Eight full hours. There’s two days out of the week that Jeremy does get to see him, and sometimes on the weekends- but he doesn’t come and get him I usually take Oli to him,”

“So I’ll have to walk Oli to meet Jeremy?”

“If you’re not comfortable doing that, I could call him and I’ll take Oli to him,”

“No, it’s fine, “Regina tells her. “I didn’t know you had to go through all of that,”

“It’s complicated..so, you’re taking the job?”

“I’m taking the job,” Regina tells her and she nods again. “But I want five dollars an hour,” Regina then says and Aliya laugh.

“I can afford five dollars an hour.. And if you want to invite friends over, you can, just..make sure none of them are sticky fingered- would you?” Aliya requests and Regina nods.

“Lucky for you, I only have two friends and one is in college as we speak,” Regina jokes and Aliya shakes her head.

“More friends than me, I’ll tell you that much. Thanks, Regina,”

“I should be thanking you.. Oliver looks like he’s a handful of fun,”

“Ohhh, he’s a handful alright. I just don’t know how much of that you would consider fun. But at least you’ll have a distraction for most of the time.”

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By the time the entire day is done and Regina has pretty much narrowly avoided everyone after the plane ride, she heads into her room and lies on the bed. Her phone rings immediately after and at first- she groans, but when she looks at the number, she answers.

“I got a job for the summer,” is the first thing she said and the smile can be heard on the next line, but her smile fades when she hears sniffles come from Nori.
“That’s so good,” Nori congratulates and sniffs wetly.

“That’s so good,” Nori congratulates and sniffs wetly.

“Nori?” Regina calls.

“Yeah?”

“What’s wrong, babe?” she asks only to hear Nori laugh wetly. Regina’s never used any form of endearment to refer to Nori. This is a first and it makes the older teen breakdown. Sputtering of tears come out and wet sniffs increase as Nori tells Regina,

“Kevin’s being deployed.” Regina flinches. She flinches drastically, but she says nothing. “He’s being deployed in two days and I haven’t even started college yet... I have to live alone! I have to do everything by myself! Regina, I don’t know what to do! I just want to come home!” she shouted through the line and Regina reacted immediately at the distress.

“Nori-Nori! Hey, listen to me okay. Listen to me. You are going to be okay. You are going to be fine. Kevin’s deployment is not going to push you to quit something you worked so hard to get to. I need you to breathe for me and focus okay,” she says in command, but doesn’t hear Nori. “Nori, sweetie- please, I need you to breathe for me. Breathe and focus hard on something that’s important to you,” she repeats and finally hears the heaving gasp of breath come out and Nori’s focus shift. “Good, good,” Regina eases as she hears Nori’s gasping continue. “Just keep breathing, sweetheart. You’re doing fine,” Regina coos, and after a good bit of time, Nori calms down.

“I’m so-rry,” Nori apologises with a staccato of a tone, but Regina shakes her head.

“You’re okay, sweetheart. You are okay,”

“But Regina, I’m not. I’m not okay... I’m not ever going to be okay. My brother is leaving- and I have no one here...” Nori reminds her and she huffs.

“I’m sorry, Nori,” Regina apologises. “I’m so sorry this is happening, but you have to be strong-,” she tries and Nori snaps.

“-I’m tired of BEING STRONG!” she shrieks but collapses into a puddle of tears. Regina’s face falls into a pout and she knows she can’t say she understands and that she knows. She doesn’t know. She doesn’t struggle with the things Nori struggles with. She doesn’t go through the pain that Nori goes through.. All Regina can say she understands is Nori’s shriek of being tired of being strong. She knows how that feels without a shadow of a doubt; how enraging it is to be the punching bag for everyone else and no one is there for you. She knows and she relates to that on a serious level.

“Let me be strong with you,” she says softly. It is a whisper that Nori does not miss.

“You c-c-an’t do that,”

“I want to, Nori.. please just let me be strong with you. You need somebody. Let me be your somebody. Let me support you the way you’ve supported me,”

“You’re so far away,” Nori whispers very broken and Regina sighs.

“I know.. I know I am, but whenever you call- whatever time you call, it doesn’t matter, Nori I will be here for you,”

“But you’re not here now, Regina. You’re not here, near me. You’re nowhere near me. I need you near me and I can’t even get that....”
...I’m sorry….When you fall asleep,” Regina began to sing in a whisper. “With your head Upon my shoul-der. When you’re in my arms, but you’ve gone somewhere dee-per. Are you going to age with Grace? Are you going to age without mistakes? Are you going to age with Grace? Only to wake and hide your face?” she continues to sing and Nori sputters a wet laugh.

“When O-oblivion. Is calling out your name, you always take it further..than I ever can,” the teen finishes. “Thank you,” Nori says and Regina laughs.

“There’s no need. We’re friends aren’t we?”

“Yeah, but I’m a mess and you had good news to tell me and I wrecked it,” Nori expressed.

“At least I got to tell you.. You know now, besides- I wanna know why Kevin got called in,”

“He doesn’t know either.. Even if he did, he wouldn’t tell me,” Nori fidgets and says, clearly ready to roll his eyes.

“How long is he supposed to be on tour for?”

“A year,”

“Now I see why you’re so upset,” Regina commented and Nori hummed.

“Tell me about your job,” Nori says in subject change and Regina sighs.

“I got a job babysitting my grandad’s, receptionist’s son,”

“Well that was a mouthful,” Nori laughed.

“Sorry,” she blushed.

“No, it’s cute… So, whose little, demon spawn of Satan are you babysitting?”

“What do you have against kids?” Regina asked with a laugh.

“My own siblings proved that they’re just...not angels. Children are devils. Living spawns of Lucifer himself,” Nori grumbled and Regina lost it laughing.

“Well, this little guy is different.. His name’s Oliver and he’s all of four years old...and he has the same birthday as me.. Do you really think he’s still evil?” Regina asks sweetly and Nori groans.

“Okay, no.. no I don’t, but still. So, his name’s Oliver,”

“Yeah- Oli for short..”

“And his mom is your granddad’s receptionist?”

“Yep.. that’s Aliya,” she adds and Nori hums.

“When do you start?”

“Whenever she calls for me, I guess,” Regina says. They both fall silent and then Regina sighs.

“What did you do today?”

“Cry,” Nori admits dryly and Regina pouts.

“Nor,” she whispers.
“I can’t help it, okay. I got these stupid girl emotions and the bleeding from the uterus thing—,”

“-you mean your period,” Regina says, just shy of making it sound like a question.

“Yes! That thing!” Nori growls. “I get emotional and I can’t deal with it… I didn’t eat anything either. I’ve just been a mess,”

“You need to eat,”

“I know.. Would you, stay on the line with me until I do?”

“Of course.”

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“I had a really good time, Chris,” Emma commented as she and he paused at the dock. He smirked and leaned over before nudging her shoulder.

“Glad I could make it worth your while… did you really have fun?” he finds himself asking almost as if he can’t believe it himself. She nods eagerly.

“Yeah, totally,”

“Cool. Listen, if you ever wanna go out again.. Call me,” he tells her and she blushes before nodding again. He looks at her for about a moment more and then inches closer to her.

“W-what are you doing?” she asks him and finds her heart rate speeding up and making her expect him to do something she’s kind of been waiting all day. He freezes and swallows a little thickly before he speaks.

“My jacket,” he says quietly and Emma’s eyes widen. “I was gonna give it to you. You look cold,” he smiled softly at her and her cheeks went rosy with embarrassment she was happy he couldn’t fathom.

“oh,” she had said back, barely audible to the young man. Chris took his jacket off and handed to her before he watched her put it on and pull it closer to her body, clearly savouring the feel and the scent on it. He says nothing in that moment, instead- he turns his vision back to the ocean. It’s beyond salty smelling and salty tasting, but the wind isn’t rough and the night sky is beautiful. He takes joy in that at least.

“Hey, you ever wish you could breathe underwater?” he asks randomly and Emma looks over at him.

“Huh?”

“You know, breathe underwater so you could see what’s on the ocean floor, or I dunno- talk to fish and all that cool stuff,”

“I mean, no.. not really,” Emma admits honestly and Chris goes silent again. “Is that something you dream of doing?” Emma then asks him. He looks at her for a split second before looking back at the ocean and shaking his head.
“No.. never.. I was just wondering,” he says but she thinks he’s lying.

“You can tell me if you were,” Emma tells him but he shakes his head. He’s serious when he says it more clearly this time.

“I really was just wondering. I get really curious about things and I ask whoever’s with me if they’ve ever,” he admits. She smiles.

“I think that’s really cool,” she says and he laughs.

“No you don’t-,”

“-I do!” Emma argues back and they push one another, still laughing. When the high of it dissipates Chris and Emma somehow still have their hands on one another, in a slightly more compromising position of his hands on her waist and her hands on his shoulders. She breathes heavily and he fidgets against her. His hands itch to move, but he has no idea exactly where they are, just that they’re on Emma. And then,

It happens.

They kiss and they kiss clumsily and that snowballs. It snowballs into something that Emma allows to happen and when it happens... both she and Chris are awkward and laughing, but it’s as if they agreed to do it a long time ago. The movements are alright at best, but she can’t not kiss him and he can’t not kiss her back. They do what teens do and fiddle around with lips touching parts of skin above the collarbone, but other than that. It happens and she lets it. She doesn’t think about Regina. She doesn’t think about how this will hurt her. She thinks about none of that because it doesn’t even matter. She doesn’t bother thinking that what she said to Regina about being each other’s only-forever, meant that it didn’t apply when she so felt it didn’t.

None of it matters. No one else matters because to her, Chris is cute and all of that extra crap you hear. Chris is something new. And besides, she’s kissed a girl already, now she’s kissing a boy.

It’s for experience. That’s what she’ll say to herself. That’s how she’ll convince herself. That it was all just for the experience. She’ll say it again and again and again until the lie becomes the truth in her ears and she can say it to Regina without fidgeting and giving away the lie. She will say it again and again and again if only she could keep kissing him. She wants to keep kissing him. He’s making her feel things she didn’t know existed and it frightens her but excites her just the same. She will hold onto that, and she will hold onto that lie until that lie is the only truth left.

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She gets back to the mansion and stumbles through the darkness, bumping into things because she still doesn’t know the house as well as she probably should after over a week. Someone finds her and questions her but she’s so dazed by her experience, she’s smiling like an idiot and just going on and on about how happy she was. They leave her be and she makes her way upstairs and into the bedroom she thinks is hers before falling onto the bed and groaning. There’s another groan and it comes from Regina who is pushing Emma off of her. Emma shakes her head before she gets back up and goes into the bathroom. She manages to wake herself by splashing her face with cold water and then she sees it. She sees the mark and curses.
“Shit!” she hisses loudly. She panics for all of five minutes until she walks out and back into the bedroom where Regina’s sitting up in the dark...waiting. She’s so close to asking that question of, “Where were you?” but she doesn’t. She realizes it makes no sense. It’s fifty-fifty that Emma would either lie to her, or she might actually tell her the truth. At this point, she doesn’t even think it’s her business, and she’s drifting from caring about it as well. She rolls her eyes softly before she turns over and pulls the covers up and over her head. Emma remains standing in the doorway for about a moment more and then she moves to go lie down. She looks between the bed and the floor and decides on the bed. She climbs in, careful not to fall on Regina and then she lies down completely. She turns on her back and sighs.

“Regina,” she whispers almost too quietly and the young brunette shifts before tugging the blankets off her face.

“What?” she queries and Emma huffs before turning on her side and regarding her.

“Are you mad at me?” she asks and Regina sighs. She looks at Emma for a good minute before responding.

“I don’t know, Emma,” she responds. Emma’s eyes water.

“But, you’re my best friend Regina,” she whispers and the brunette immediately responds.

“And I’m beginning to wonder what version of that applies to me….Go to sleep, Emma,” she commands and Emma looks at her with that fear she’s only felt once before. That’s the fear that has plagued her when Nori was in the picture.. Literally in the picture. Now Nori’s not in the picture, but Chris is and she wonders if Regina would feel threatened by him. She wonders if Regina would even vocalize that to her.. She wonders and she wonders about that for a while longer until Regina’s shifting pulls her from her trance.

“Can I tell you somethin’?” she queries. She hears nothing from her friend in a good moment of time, but then- Regina talks.

“Sure,” is all she says and Emma breathes in deeply.

“I dunno how you’re gonna feel, but umm. I went out with Chris today and he took me around town…” she trailed off.

“Annnnd?” Regina urges, both from her sleep deprivation and impatience with what she’s almost certain is the inevitable..

“We went to the theater and saw a show and all that good stuff,” she says a little stupidly, in all honesty.

“Emma, get to the point,”

“Sorry… when we went out to the docks, we kinda..sorta….we kissed,” she had said.

The room was silent. Deathly so. Emma heard the exhale from Regina that sounded like she physically quit life itself.

“Good for you,” Regina said to her before she pulled the blanket back up and covered herself once more. “Good night.”
“I really like him,” Emma admitted. “I mean, I know I just met him, but he’s real sweet, honest,” she says- sounding as if she needed to convince Regina of it more than herself. Chris honestly was and is a sweet guy, but that’s not what was Regina’s concern. None of it was. “We’re gonna hang out more.. Well, he said if I wanna… I was just wonderin’ if you wanted to hang out with us,” she then offered, but Regina said nothing to her in response. Emma said nothing back and just turned over and went to sleep.
Just..great. Not their biggest fan. Slowly drifting

He was there again. Chris..

Or Christopher.

Whatever, it didn’t matter. Point was, he was there again- no doubt, to see Emma. It was barely into the next day and he’d already found himself at the gate to Regina’s grandparents’ home, but she realized, she couldn’t be any less nonchalant about what Emma had told her the night before than she already felt about the situation right then and there, and appreently- no one else was bothering either. Emma hadn’t told anyone where she was going, they all just knew she was going with Chris. Well, except Regina- but that was because Emma had been avoiding her and Regina was outside. Rose had spoken to the young boy for a moment, warning him that should anything happen to Emma- he will be held responsible, but- Chris being some little angel that fell from the sky flat out held up to his protective nature over his.. What was she to him again? Whatever, he just made sure he’d protect Emma with everything he had. That seemed to suffice as an answer as Rose let them leave before she left shortly after. She’d let the rest of them know she might be late to dinner, but that she loved them and that they really needed to get out of the house as well.. Most specifically- Zelena, and not to shop either.

Regina had gone into the backyard just to catch some fresh air and because she wanted to distract herself until she felt need to leave and do something a little bit more ‘active’ but how much more active could she get? She was already trying to reacquaint herself with the soccer ball that just lay there. She hadn’t realized how long she’d just been kicking it around until Auggie had asked her if she was okay and she’d, in her confusion, asked him why he asked her that. When he told her she’d been outside dribbling the ball for nearly three hours, Regina didn’t believe him until he showed her the time. She’d then paused her actions and looked at the ball before she looked at Auggie and admitted she wasn’t sure she was alright. He’d smiled sadly at her and offered to play a round or two which she was grateful for until Zelena came and challenged them both. Regina knew there was no way in hell she would win against her sister, alone- or with Auggie for the simple fact that Zelena made soccer look all too easy and Regina hadn’t played with her in years. And then she had to take into consideration that they were both so athletically competitive, she wouldn’t exist in the game within the first five minutes of it. So, instead of possibly embarrassing herself, she offered to keep score and they let her. Her grandfather had joined them somewhere in there and Regina was impressed that he was as good as soccer as she’d thought. He gave both Auggie and Zelena a run for their money, even in his age category and Regina, for her part laughed at the fact that these two sports junkies were tired by the end of it all. Usually Zelena could play a game and not register any form of pain or exhaustion and Auggie was much the same, but right then and there, they looked like they’d gotten their asses handed to them. When they call the game done, It’s surprising that Zelena and Auggie only managed to win by one point and Regina has a sneaking suspicion it’s because her grandfather let them. Zelena had told Regina she wanted to teach her something in relation to handling the soccer ball better but she had asked Auggie to help her show her the differences in the way some people dribble. Most people use their instep to help control the ball, some people their heel and others- their toes. The instep usually helps better because that particular curve of the foot allows it to mould to the ball better. She tells Regina to watch what Auggie does and what she does, both of them proving that no matter how they handled the ball, it all came down to the force and knowing just where you want it to go. She’d then kicked it towards Regina and told her to dribble with what’s comfortable and Regina realized, she’d no idea which was better or worse for her. When she was younger, she just knew that kicking the ball and not losing it was important, so she’d adjusted with rotating between the three, not realizing she hadn’t quite found what worked for her, and then in all of that- the topic of Emma comes up and she checks out.
She’s not sure who starts the conversation, but they were recalling that time Emma took the soccer ball and figured it was hers because she found it.

“Where is she anyway?”

“She left.. I thought you knew that,” Zelena told him and he shook his head.

“I didn’t.. I don’t really watch what Emma does anymore,” Auggie admits and Zelena nods.

“Yeah, she left with.. Christopher,” she says, nearly forgetting the boy’s name right then and there. August just tilts his head back before sighing and shaking it. “What?”

“Nothing. I just hope she knows what she’s doing,” he says and Zelena’s rightfully confused.

“Doing? What do you mean?” she asks only to follow Auggie’s line of sight. When her eyes settle on her little sister, still dribbling and practicing with the soccer ball, Zelena’s face turns almost too sad to look at. She sighs before she hangs her head and for as much as she fights with Regina, sometimes intentional and sometimes with intent to harm, she loves her beyond words. And even when she’s just looking at her, all she sees is the Regina she knows is in love with a girl who doesn’t even realize she exists that way.

And that hurts.

It hurts to know that she hadn’t even bothered to talk to her little sister about something like this because she was too busy judging her to bother caring past that point. And it hurts even more because Zelena knows better than anybody that Regina will hold on to it until it dies. Until she loses herself.. Just because she cares. Because her heart makes her vulnerable.

“What?” Regina asks her sister and Zelena jumps slightly.

“Huh?”

“You were staring, what did I do wrong?” Regina queries but Zelena shakes her head and says.

“Nothing... you never could,” she finds herself whispering after a moment of staring. “Auggie was just asking about where Emma is, that’s all,” she admits and she’s not lying, but she’s not telling the entire truth.

“Oh?”

“Yeah.. she left with Chris a while ago- so,” is what she quickly mutters out just to skip that topic. She sees Regina tense for a second before her shoulders relax. Regina looks back down at the soccer ball before shrugging lightly and beginning to dribble it again. Zelena breathes out in relief and Auggie eyes her. They share a moment of understanding before they find something else to keep their attention, because if Regina stops caring, then they will too.

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“You look distracted,” Chris tells Emma as they walk through the suburbs. Emma shakes her head softly before she says,

“I’m not though. I’m just.. Enjoying the air,”
“And that’s all?”

“Yeah, that’s all,”

“Okay,”

“Yeah, so- what’d you do today?”

“Besides have breakfast..nothing. I just came straight over to come get you and see if you wanted me to show you around town,” he’d told her and she smiled. Granted, she was supposed to be shown around town by Regina and Zelena, but Emma’s been avoiding her since the night before and texting Chris enough times that she didn’t really have to look at anyone much for the morning that was now rolling over into afternoon.

“I’d like that,” Emma responds, finding that she hadn’t told him a yes or a no, and by the look he’d been giving her, he wasn’t too convinced she had ‘nothing’ on her mind.

“You sure you’re okay?”

“Yeah, I’m sure. Things here are just different, you know?”

“I get you.. So, where do you wanna start. In town or out of town?”

“What’s out of town?”

“Well, it’s the outer part of Mifflin and all the other suburbs. The town’s not that big, but it’s not as small as people think either... but how it’s set up is that everything shopping wise or work wise is in the center,” he informs and she nods.

“How big are the suburbs?”

“If I’m being honest.. I don’t know, but my grandparents said they’re pretty big.. That and Mifflin is the biggest suburb of the five,”

“There’s five?”

“Yeah. Mifflin, Donnel, Whilten, Shannon aaaaaand Harem,”

“Hmm.. well, we’re in Mifflin, may as well start here,” she tells him and he grins.

“Alright.. Do you know how to ride on the handlebars?” he’d then found himself asking her and she shook her head.

“Not really. I did it a couple of times when I was younger with Regina, but we were both too scared I’d hurt myself or worse, ride into traffic,” Emma laughs and Chris just grins.

“Well, I’ll keep you safe. I’m pretty good with a bike.. Minus the time you ended up crushing my leg with it,” he teases and Emma punches his shoulder. “And, who knows, maybe handlebars can be our thing,” he offers and Emma’s too gone to tell him no. He tells her just how to get on the handlebars, warning her it’s gonna hurt for a bit until her but goes numb on the metal. She laughs and does as she’s told before she allows herself to slide back more and lay against his chest as he rides. Clearly he doesn’t mind it in the slightest because he still can tell her who lives where and what was there before some of the houses.

And then, they hit 108 Mifflin and Chris is asked to stop so he stops. Emma hops off the bike and walks up to the lot before she stares on at it and seems to get lost in what she’s seeing. Christ parks
his bike and goes up next to her before he speaks.

“The Mills’s used to live there,” he tells her and she nods. Dumbly, but she nods.

“I know.. That’s where Regina used to live,” she says almost too quietly and Christopher is now interested.

“Regina?”

“Yeah.. my best friend,” she says softly and he nods.

“She’s Mister and Misses Sorentini’s granddaughter right?”

“Yeah,”

“And she has a sister.. Zelena?” he’d further questioned and Emma nodded this time before turning to him and asking,

“How do you know that?” for which he shakes his head.

“Doesn’t matter… I don’t remember who it is who lives here now, but they don’t really bother much,” he then says, steering the conversation away and Emma looks at him for a split second more before turning her head and sighing. She sees the mailbox and walks over to it before she opens it and looks inside. Emma can see the telltale sign of a rectangular imprint in the mailbox from where the letter had been all those years ago. The envelope for it had gotten dirty, molded slightly and ended up staining the inside of the mailbox, and somehow- Emma knew it had to be from that exact letter. She shuts it and walks back over to Chris’s bike before she tells him she wants to see the rest of the town and he goes without questioning her.

The second suburb they end up in is where his grandparents are and Chris decides he may as well introduce Emma to them considering they’ve been asking him about why he’s so happy all of a sudden. She’s awkward to say the least, but she manages not to pass out or make an ass of herself as she politely carries out conversation with his grandmother and laughs at the jokes his grandfather makes. They talk of the Sorentini’s and sing praises to their name as they recall how much Rose and Santiago had helped them. Chris’s grandparents told Emma of stories from their childhood and his grandfather showed her pictures of the war. To say she became enamoured was an understatement and before they realized it, time had just slipped on by.

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Regina had been talking to Nori for the better part of an hour and as it was nearing four in the evening. Another call had come through, disrupting their conversation.

“Hold on Nor, someone’s calling,” she said before clicking over. “Hello?”

“Regina, hi- It’s Aliya. Listen, I know this is short notice and you probably won’t be able to do this, but do you think you can come watch Oli for me. Jeremy got called in and he can’t take him with him and I’m stuck here at the office right now,” she’d rambled and Regina immediately answered with a smile.

“Yeah, that’s perfectly fine. I can watch him, I wasn’t really doing anything.. Where is Jeremy?”
Regina asked and Aliya riddled off some location that Regina remembered, vaguely.

“I just need you to bring Oli here and you can watch him until I’m done… does that sound alright?”

“It’s perfectly fine, besides, it’ll give me some time to see what Oli’s like. So, I’ll go get him from Jeremy and we’ll see you in a while?”

“That’s good. Listen, thank you so much for doing this on such short notice,”

“It’s really okay, and I should be thanking you for the summer job,” she then tells the woman and Aliya laughs.

“Alright then. I’ll see you both later,” the woman tells her and Regina nods before hanging up and clicking back over. “Nori?”

“I’m still here,” Nori had said as Regina was getting off of the bed and beginning to dress herself.

“Hey, I gotta head out. Aliya just called, Oli’s dad can’t watch him because he got called into work and Aliya’s still at the office so I’m gonna go get him and watch him til she’s done,”

“That was the quickest I’ve ever heard of someone being accepted for a job,” Nori laughs.

“Well, she did offer it to me..and I did say yes,” Regina managed as she wrestled to get into her shoes, somehow tripping and falling with a thud.

“What was that?”

“Nothing- nothing,” she tried and Nori laughed.

“Please tell me you’re without injury,” Nori said and Regina smirked.

“For the most part, though, my pride took a pretty big hit,” she admits, also laughing now.

“I’m sorry, kiddo,”

“Don’t be, this’ll teach me not to talk and dress… I gotta go, I’ll talk to you later,”

“Alright, just let me know you got there safe,” Nori tells her and she hums. Regina hangs up her phone and rushes downstairs, only to be stopped by her sister and Auggie.

“Is someone dead?” he asks a little bit too morbidly and Regina can’t help but laugh.

“No, I just got called in to watch Aliya’s little boy,”

“Aiya?” Auggie asked and Zelena looked away from her phone long enough to speak.

“She’s our grandad’s assistant,” the teen said and Auggie looked away from Regina long enough to look at Zelena and then back at the younger Mills girl.

“Oh.. well, I was gonna ask if you and Lena would show me around town today, but I guess you can’t…” he’d trailed off and Regina’s face softened as she rubbed his shoulder.

“I gotta go pick Oli up from his dad’s and then take him to the office until Aliya’s done with work,” Regina says.

“Can I come. I’m kinda bored around here..” he’d asked and Regina looked at Zelena who looked
back at her and shrugged.

“I don’t mind, but I won’t be able to show you everywhere, maybe Lena could show you the rest?” she’d then found herself asking her sister who nodded.

“Yeah, that’s a good idea, I’m getting bored here too,” Zelena admitted and Regina smirked.

“Alright, well we need to go now, Jeremy can’t keep Oli for much longer,” Regina told them and Auggie just ran to throw on some sneakers as Zelena switched her shirt for a t-shirt and her own sneakers. For the first time in a while, Zelena looked like the soccer girl she used to be. She had even pulled her hair up and out of her face before she’d told them they needed to go. Once they were out the door, they’d ran to the bike rental shop and managed to snag three bikes before they were off.

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“Yeah.. yeah I know, someone’s coming to get him in a minute and then you can go to your job,” Aliya told Jeremy as she paced around in the main hall. “Trust me, you’ll remember her when you see her,” she told him and heard him laugh. Jeremy had rambled on about something related to knowing no one Aliya knew and Aliya shook her head before saying, “Trust me when I say you will know this one… yeah, okay.. Bye Jeremy;” she hung up. Aliya paced for but a moment more before she turned around and went back to her work. She trusted that Regina would get there in time and safely bring Oliver back with her.

Through their rushed ride, Zelena had done most of the tour guide style thing with Auggie because Regina was busy trying to spot Jeremy. He was supposed to either be outside with Oliver or somewhere near where she’d been told to meet with him. It took about ten minutes for them to get there and for Regina to somewhat immediately spot Oliver and Jeremy before she practically hopped off the bike whilst it was still moving. Regina brought it to a stop and dropped it to the ground, making a sprint for them. Jeremy had heard a sound that caught his attention and as he squinted at the oncoming body, he smiled. Aliya was right… he would remember.

“Regina?” he questioned with a smile and saw the young girl look at him before she smiled back.

“Hi Jeremy,” she greeted before she looked down at the little boy staring right back at her with the most stunning grey eyes. “Is this Oliver?” she asked with a soft smile before she bent down and Jeremy nodded.

“That’s Oli,” he answered before he gently nudged his son forward. Regina smiled at the little boy and spoke.

“Hi Oli, my name is Regina,” she told him and at first, he was still skeptical until the name really hit him and his eyes widened. He began grinning and biting his bottom lip with excitement.

“Mommy says you have the same birthday as me,” he tells Regina and she nods with a grin.

“I do!” she laughs and Oliver immediately lets go of his father’s hand and walks towards Regina. She lifts him up and they’re too busy smiling at each other to notice Jeremy handing her Oliver’s bag. That is until Zelena comes over and she squints.
“Jeremy?” she asks and he gapes at her.

“Oh My God.. you both grew up so much!” he says in shock and Zelena laughs.

“Yeah.. you kinda look old now,” she teases and Jeremy playfully scowls at her.

“I’ve come to accept the grey hairs in my life,” he tells her and she shares a laugh with him before he notices Auggie. “Who’s that?” he asks, jutting his chin out and Regina speaks.

“That’s Auggie. Auggie that’s Jeremy, Oliver’s dad,” she says and Auggie nods before he sees Jeremy stick his hand out to shake. Auggie shakes his hand and speaks.

“He’s really cute,” the young boy says, clearly in reference to Oliver.

“Yeah, he is. Gets it all from his mom though, even the eyes,” Jeremy says but someone interrupts that Oliver looks a lot like him too, which in turn has him laughing and telling them thank you, but he really only sees Aliya in that little boy’s features. Regina then introduces Oliver to her sister and Auggie before they take his bag and say goodbye to Jeremy. He calls Aliya and lets her know they have Oliver and that she can breathe easy and they’ll talk about the next time he comes for Oliver. Before he hangs up she asks him if he remembered and he laughs gently before he nods and admits he did remember and it’s insane how much they grew up from the last time he saw them.

Regina sets Oliver on her bike and walks with him, keeping her arms protectively around the little boy as she slowly pushes the bike towards the aviation company. Auggie and Zelena continue their tour activities, the two of them aimlessly riding around in the road, not really following the rules because.. They’re teens who tend to do things like that. Oli asks Regina a million and one questions that she has no problem answering and one in particular has her thinking he’s just the cutest kid on the planet when he asks her if she’ll stay in Maine to babysit him forever. She was honest when she told him she’ll just be there for the summer but that she’ll also be there to celebrate his birthday with him and that has him looking forward to that day sooner than any other.

They arrive at the office and park their bikes before heading inside and Zelena finally manages to see Aliya since they first got there. Aliya and Zelena bicker like they’re sisters and not her and Regina as Regina sets Oliver up with some crayons and paper before she introduces Auggie to her.. And they lose Auggie in that moment. He is flat out enamoured with her and crushing on her and it’s so obvious because he just won’t stop staring. Though she would love to tell him she’s just the cutest kid on the planet when he asks her if she’ll stay in Maine to babysit him forever. She was honest when she told him she’ll just be there for the summer but that she’ll also be there to celebrate his birthday with him and that has him looking forward to that day sooner than any other.

“Mommy, Gina’s gonna be here for my birthday!”

“That’s really good, baby. Maybe you could ask her to help you plan it,” she suggests.

“I’d love to,” Regina says with a grin after Oliver looks at her expectantly. They watch him for a moment longer until Aliya asks to speak to Regina in private.

“So, it wasn’t too much trouble?” she’d asked Regina as they both looked at Oliver and Regina shook her head.
“No, we just had to get some bikes before we went up for him. It would’ve taken longer if we ran,” Regina admits and Aliya sighs.

“I am so sorry I did that to you. I just couldn’t figure anything else out,”

“It’s fine.. Really. I wasn’t doing anything important and you needed someone to watch Oli.. besides, it’ll keep me distracted for a while,” she admits with a soft, almost solemn look on her face. Aliya nudges her gently as she speaks quietly.

“Still going through hell with your sister and friends?”

“..not really my sister so much as it is with Emma.. Lena and Auggie are talking again so that’s good, but…”

“.but what? You can tell me, Regina,” Aliya says but Regina shakes her head before she speaks.

“Emma kissed Chris last night. He took her on a date or something and they kissed and she decided to tell me that last night. I don’t know why and I don’t really care why, but she seemed to think it was important and then she left with him this morning,” the young brunette said and Aliya took a moment’s pause.

“Well, that’s …..odd,” she commented and Regina laughed a little loudly before shaking her head.

“I guess.. But it’s her summer, she can do whatever she wants-,”

“- and so can you.. And just a head’s up, but I may need you to stay the night, if that’s okay, if not- I’ll drop you back to your grandparents p-,”

“- I’ll do it.. I’d do that more than I’d do anything else. I don’t mind.. Besides, it’ll give me time to see what Oli’s like at night… just, tell me you’re not doing this because you feel sorry for me?” Regina finds herself asking and Aliya smiles all too sadly at her before she speaks.

“I’m not doing this because I feel sorry for you, Regina,” she tells her honestly and the gaze is a bit too intense for Regina who blushes. “Are you okay?” she asks and Regina swallows before she nods a little dizzily.

“I’m good.. Just a little lightheaded,”

“Well, you can go hang out with Oliver until it’s time to go.. Do you want me to ask your sister to get you a change of clothes or anything?”

“Ummm, if I’m watching Oli from tomorrow morning then yeah, but if not, I can always just go back by grandma’s and change,”

“I may just need you tomorrow by twelve if you’re up for it?” Aliya offers and Regina grins.

“I’m up for it.”

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Before Zelena and Auggie had left, Auggie asked if they’d show him where they used to live over
the weekend and Regina and Zelena had agreed they could. Zelena had also told her little sister she’d let their grandparents know where she was and who she was staying with when they got in and Regina had thanked her. They’d gotten to play with Oliver for a little bit before they decided to leave, Zelena claiming she wanted to show Auggie the ice cream store that gives you an extra scoop if you buy two scoops and he was all for it. She’d hugged them and let them leave before she turned back and went to get to know Oliver a little bit more. Aliya was too distracted by work to realize just how well Regina did with her little boy, but she pretty much noticed after she realized he hadn’t cried once or come to her because he didn’t like something Regina did or because he wasn’t getting his way. In some ways, Aliya assumes it’s because Oliver may be able to read that he’s much like Regina in some ways. Very quiet, very sweet and very much so too respectful to hurt someone or be rude to them.

By the time Zelena and August are back at the mansion, Emma is already back from her day out with Chris and staring at them as they laugh and talk about how good their day was.

“Since when did you two start talkin’?”

“Since it never was any of your business,” Zelena tells her in that oh so sassy attitude. Emma rolls her eyes.

“Whatever.. Where’s Regina?” she then asked, noticing the girl was missing.

“Didn’t know you cared,” Zelena muttered and Auggie nudged her hard which made her scowl at him.

“Ease up,” he tells her and she rolls her eyes,

“Alright,” she gives. “She’s out doing something,” Zelena says with a roll of her eyes.

“With who?” Emma questions, clearly she’s interested now… or just jealous.

“*That’s* none of your business,” Zelena says flatly and Emma flares.

“She’s my best friend, so it is my business,”

“Obviously not if she didn’t tell you,”


“She’s out doing something-,”

“-I know that.. Amazon warrior over here already said that.. But where is she?”

“I can’t tell you that,” he admits and she flares.

“Why?”

“Not my business to tell…” he says before trailing off and now Emma’s huffing.

“Seriously?” Emma asks nearly offended and Auggie shrugs. Zelena smirks as she speaks.

“I told you it’s none of your business,”

“It is my business if she’s out with some random guy,” Emma argues and it’s getting so obvious it is
jealousy and not worry. Zelena rolls her eyes again as she thinks, *What makes you think it’s a guy?*

“What do you care.. Didn’t you just up and leave with Chris today and didn’t tell *anyone* ,” Auggie reminds her and Emma growls.

“I can do what I want-,”

“And so can Regina,” he then combats and she knows she dug her own hole there. He shakes his head at her. Zelena’s too busy squinting at Emma’s neck to warrant their conversation of much importance. She reaches out and moves Emma’s hair from her neck before asking,

“Is that a hickey?” and Emma goes completely still for almost too long until she thinks of something. That’s swatting Zelena’s arm away and pulling her hair back.

“No, idiot. It’s a flat iron burn,” Emma bites out but Zelena jsut rolls her eyes at the young girl.

“No it’s not, that’s a hickey,” Zelena says and now Auggie’s looking at it too. He steps closer to her and she steps away from him.

“Why are you trying to hide it?” her brother asks.

“I’m not, you two are just crowding me,”

“Because it’s a hickey and you’re lying about it,” Zelena says. Auggie looks between them.

“And how would you know what a hickey looks like?”

“Umm, earth to numbnut, I have a boyfriend.. Have been had a boyfriend, how would I not know what a hickey looks like,”

“Well, it ain’t a hickey, and Chris didn’t put it there,”

“I never mentioned Chris did,” Zelena told her and she froze. “Look, I don’t care if you have a hickey or not, but you can’t just walk around with it so obvious to everyone else. You didn’t have it yesterday before you left with Chris and you have it now.. But whatever.. Your body,” Zelena tells her and Emma huffs before changing the subject.

“Why are you two coverin’ for her?” she asks them and they seem so confused by her question.

“You two are only comin’ after me because you’re coverin’ for Regina,” Emma concludes. Auggie groans and Zelena just sighs.

“We’re not, Regina never told us we could tell you, so we’re not gonna tell you,” Zelena said and Emma sighed.

“Fine, whatever,” the blonde let up before she stomped away and left two sets of eyes just watching her before they both shook their heads and went back to what they were doing, which was to find more food to eat.

Emma decides that since her brother and Zelena won’t tell her where Regina is, she’ll just spend her time with Chris instead. She contemplates the logic of that for a moment and notices her displacement of anger for maybe a second before she’s shaking the thought away and finding justification to be with Chris. If Regina didn’t want them telling Emma anything, then Emma was just going to see Chris for the rest of their summer. *That’ll teach ‘em,* she’d thought to herself, not
concluding who the lesson was intended for in the first place. But Emma’s logic was only half-way decent on a good day. She didn’t know if she was more angry at her brother or more angry at Regina and Zelena, but she was upset… pretty freakin’ upset.

Sometime after nine, almost ten, once they’ve all eaten dinner- she texts him, asking him to come over and being the kind of guy he is, Chris comes over. Whatever tale he’d weaved to his grandparents, didn’t matter because they’d have let Chris go anywhere at anytime of the day. Maine wasn’t dangerous...besides, his grandparents were usually asleep by ten anyway. He grabs his bike and rides through the night towards the Mifflin suburb and screeches to a light halt. Usually the guards would be out, but what came at his and Emma’s advantages was what Regina said.. Rose only put on the grande gesture for the children to enjoy, so the guards were no more. All Chris had to do was use the phone outside of the gate and press a line, but knowing he’d probably get into trouble beyond his own comprehension, he’d just texted Emma and told her he was outside. Emma tries making the bed look as slept in and inhabited as possible before she grabs her shoes and sneaks down the stairs and out the house. She makes a dead sprint for Chris before she’s quickly rushing him from the house and they’re off into the night to go wherever the hell it is that wasn’t near the Manor.

She attempts to distract both him and herself by talking about anything and everything that isn’t about Regina. Granted, Chris does read that something is specifically wrong and Emma just won’t tell him, but then she kisses him and he completely loses the thought to ask her what’s wrong. He’s in his own awkward stage where any girl kissing him feels like gold. Any reason for Emma to kiss him is very much welcomed...because he thinks he might have a really big crush on her now.

Since Maine is so quiet in the evening, Chris can show Emma what the place looks like when it’s lit up at night, only the streetlights there to illuminate the almost homey town. She holds onto him as he piggybacks her throughout the place, taking into account that Emma was beyond beautiful in the night light. Chris sets her down somewhere through their walk and pulls Emma to him to hug her close, something she’s not so sure of but gives into anyway. It doesn’t feel complete to her and she supposes it’s because she’s still upset that noone will tell her where Regina is, or who she’s with, and considering the only thing she can control right in that moment is everything that happens between her and Chris.. Emma distracts herself, because her intention is to forget, and the only way she forgets, is when she’s kissing him. So, she puts her lips to use and kisses him for maybe the fourth time that evening.

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Regina had offered to help Aliya cook dinner because she felt she was just useless if she wasn’t doing something constructive. At first, Aliya had told her it was okay and that she was a guest, but by the way Regina seemed to be so.. Not herself, she’d crakced. Aliya had accepted her offer and asked Regina what exactly was the matter. The young teen wanted to answer, she just didn’t know how. She wanted to tell Aliya that things with her best friend are very much so falling apart, and she just wishes it would stop, but just before they were getting into the neck of it all, Jeremy had come over to apologise about just dropping Oli like that earlier. ALiya had whispered, “later,” to her and Regina had nodded, though she was nearly positive they wouldn’t talk about it later. Jeremy had stayed for dinner and Aliya figured it was as good a time as any to tell Regina exactly how their schedules worked. Most of the time. There will be times where she can’t come home the time she indicates because she’s helping Regina’s grandfather do work and there will be
times Jeremy can’t come get Oliver at all. There will be days that Aliya may ask Regina to take Oliver out and about so that the teen knew it was okay to have activities outside of her apartment, they just needed to be careful and as warm as the weather required. Jeremy informed Regina that on the weekends he comes to get Oliver and sometimes that weekend with his son gets cut short, but he’d extended that to the young brunette and told her if she wanted to, she could come with them as well, but Regina had turned him down and reminded him, that was his bonding time with Oli and as much as she’d love to see the little boy more, that was their father/son time. Regina couldn’t very well make a schedule because it was when Aliya called for her or when the short notice things happened.. It could be at any stage of the day, but it wouldn’t be around the times where it was impeding on her nightly sleep. And the most important part of it all would be when Aliya needed Regina to stay the night, just in case. It was a lot, but it wasn’t at the same time. Regina understood that a job demands a lot of you and even on some of the most cushiest of jobs, there’s still those hectic moments in time.

After dinner and after Jeremy had left, Aliya showed Regina the products she used as it related to Oliver’s sensitive skin. The child wasn’t allergic to anything, thank God. But he was very sensitive skin-wise. She’d let Regina practice with his bath to ensure that she wasn’t too rough with rubbing his skin, but that she wasn’t too soft that he wasn’t clean enough. She’d then showed Regina Oliver’s room and then his playroom, both set up almost exactly alike. Oliver had one very favourite pair of pajamas that he loved to wear. He’d wear his other ones, but this pair in particular were his absolute favourites. Some neon green and orange dinosaur pjs. And then she showed Regina her room which was where she’d told the young girl she’d be sleeping because Aliya didn’t have a spare bedroom. Oliver’s playroom used to be an office and it was too small to consider it a bedroom. So, the young brunette would be sleeping in Aliya’s room as Aliya would sleep on the couch when it suited their situation. To say Regina felt bad about it, was an understatement. She felt horrible about it and tried convincing Aliya that the bed really was big enough. Both of them could sleep in it without much of a problem. And truth be told, she was right, but Aliya’s thoughts weren’t there.. She was more concerned that someone might say what she did was inappropriate.. Sleeping in the same bed as a minor, even if there was nothing happening between them.. She didn’t want someone to criminalize her because she didn’t have that many beds in her house. She didn’t want someone say she did something to Regina if anyone ended up seeing them sleep in the same bed. God knows she was not tough enough to bare accusations levelled against her. But most importantly, she didn’t want any part of Regina’s innocent teenaged years to be stripped from her.

“Just for the night though,” Aliya had reluctantly agreed when Oliver begged her to stay up and watch a movie.

“Can Gina watch it too?” he then asked and Regina nodded with a soft smile.

“I do get to watch it.. I’m staying the night,” she tells him and he laughs excitedly.

“Kay! But can we watch Toy Story?”

“Is that your favourite?” Regina asks and Oli nods.

“Mhm, and mommy’s,” he says and his mother has to hide a blush. Regina doesn’t miss that blush and smiles reassuringly at Aliya.

“Sure, Oli.. let’s watch Toy Story.”
“I think I can get used to this,” he admits to her as they pull apart only so much, grinning at one another as they look over the pier before they share eye contact once again.

“Me too,” Emma blushes and Chris smirks. He pulls his backpack forward as they sit on one of the benches and Emma laughs when she sees he’s brought food. He claims it’s because he gets hungry a lot, but she knows it’s because he cares about her enough already to be prepared. So, they eat whatever Chris had managed to take from the kitchen and they actually talk about something other than random topics. He asks her about where she grew up and responds in kind when she’s curious about him. Turns out, he lives doesn’t live in Key West, but he does live in Florida. His mother’s a lawyer, his father, a judge. Two things Emma hated more than anything else, but could she tell him that?? No. He tells her of the different places he’s travelled because his parents wanted him to have that experience and he tells her about their first road trip that almost didn’t end so well. But what shocked her most was when he told her that his parents were no longer married, they just continued to live together. Emma had genuinely wanted to ask why, but had refrained from doing so, considering she was still just getting to know him and felt it may have not been her place to do that. Chris however, eases them out of that conversation and into another, asking Emma what he should have asked her from the beginning, and that was about Regina. Emma was honest in the beginning when she said her brother and their friend wouldn’t tell her where Regina is and that usually Regina would tell her everything, but that was as far as her truth went... Chris, being as naive as he was about the situation just absorbed everything Emma said that wasn’t even remotely true, they were just her fears and accusations. Regina was with some guy and she knew she shouldn’t have been. She knows her curfew at her grandparents place meant she shouldn’t be out this late by herself with someone she didn’t really know and blah blah. The lies went on, some very stretched to the nose and others, Chris had come to believe. And then Chris said the most dumbest thing he could’ve ever said about the whole thing,

“At least she has a good friend like you who cares about her and worries about her so much,” because those words gave Emma justification.

He looks at his watch in that moment, eyes wide with fear.

“Crap! It’s really late!”

“Don’t you mean really early,” Emma jokes and Chris managed to laugh before trying to have a very serious face again.

“Seriously, we gotta get you back it’s after two in the morning,” he says and she nods before they toss their trash and make a bolt for the manor. They’re nearly a good half an hour out of their way considering where he took her and that’s still by bike ride. But, they get her back and she kisses him goodbye before she sneaks back inside, only to be caught by Zelena and Auggie who’d managed to wake somewhere in the time she was gone. Emma challengingly stares at them, but neither bother to ask, neither bother to comment and truth be told, she was more than relieved they hadn’t. She gets upstairs and checks around, only to notice that Regina still isn’t back yet. So, the blonde takes herself a shower and flops down on the bed, texting Chris to make sure he got in safe. She rolls over and eventually falls asleep.

Well into the next morning, Emma finally wakes up. When she wouldn’t answer to Rose’s attempt, or Santiago’s attempt or really anyone’s attempt at waking her up, they’d left her to sleep. She’d questioned why the child was as dead to the world as she is, but none of them told her Emma had
decided she was woman and went out until the wee hours of the morning to be with some boy.

When Regina got in, it was at least an hour to when Emma would soon get up. She’d gone into her room and showered before she changed her clothes and headed into the kitchen to talk with her sister and Auggie. They hadn’t realized how much time got away from them until Zelena’s phone went off and Regina’s had rung. Aliya was making sure Regina had gotten in safely and wanted to ask Regina if she was good to babysit Oli at around twelve. Cue, Emma’s arrival and need to be nosey.

“Where’ve you been?” is Emma’s question to Regina, not noticing that the girl was on the phone. Regina just spins around, quickly responds with,

“Out,” and turns back before she’s grinning on the phone. “I got in fine Aliya, thanks for asking,” Regina says before she’s aimlessly walking through the kitchen. Auggie’s playing a video game on his PSP but, he’s also keeping an eye on Emma, just to see her reactions. Zelena may be texting Wade, but she’s watching them too. “Yeah, I had fun too,” Regina admits before her face tints pink and Emma sees that.

Aliya? Who the heck is that? Probably some new gi-

“The movie was a good choice...dinner? Dinner was amazing....” Emma hears her compliment and now her blood is boiling. It’s clear whoever this Aliya was, she made Regina happy. And that irked Emma.”You didn’t need my help to make it taste good. It was good before I helped-,” Regina had said before Aliya cut her off, telling her it would’ve been average. Regina giggles as she shakes her head. Aliya then asks her if she would be free for twelve to come see Oliver again and Regina’s surprised. “… already?” she then asks with a soft laugh and then she’s blushing again. Aliya informs Regina that Oliver misses her already and that’s why it’s come so soon. “I miss him too, he was so much fun last night,” she tells her, only to laugh at the next sentence. “No, it was fine. It was just a kiss on the cheek. He said they’re supposed to be the best kisses on the planet…” she trails off and Emma’s sure something has managed to snap inside her head. “Yeah, I think he noticed I was sad, he’s such a sweetheart… How is Oliver doing anyway?” Regina queries and waits as Aliya tells her. “That’s good, and I don’t mind seeing him later today. He picked a really good movie. It’s a classic. That and his hugs were so warm,” she informs. That’s it for Emma. She’s ready to yell at Regina the second she’s done on the phone. But she wants enough evidence to convict Regina of keeping secrets from her. But then she’s guilty of eavesdropping and knows Regina would be more mad at her that she did that than accused her of something. “Of course I can stay the night, I’ll just tell my grandparents and me and Oli will do another movie night or something.”

The conversation goes on for a little while longer and Emma quits her attempts at trying to find anything out. She sighs and goes in search of something else to do.

By the time it’s time for Regina to leave, she’s already got her bag packed up for the night and somewhere in all fo that, Emma comes into the room before she sits on the bed. Regina pauses ever so slightly before she’s rearranging the inside of her duffel bag, waiting to see what Emma wants.

“Hey,’” Emma says and Regina responds.. Quietly.

“hi,” she says and Emma just manages to smile at her.. That smile was one of Emma’s ‘fake’ smiles where she really was just trying to weasel her way into or out of something. And Regina being her friend as long as she has been, knows that smile.

“Where are you going?” Emma asks and it clicks in Regina’s head. Just..great .
“Out,” she responds, not saying more, not saying less. Emma nods.

“Can I come? You look like you’re gonna spend the night,” Emma comments before motioning to the bag and Regina pauses to respond.

“I don’t think that’s such a good idea,”

“Why?” she pushes and Regina zips her duffel closed.

“Because you don’t know them,” Regina says. Emma squints.

“You could introduce me, you know,”

“I can’t,”

“Yes you can,” Emma argues and Regina sighs.

“No, I can’t. Not without permission anyway….” Regina tells her before trailing off and Emma wants to argue that Zelena and Auggie seem to know who these people are. “Why don’t you go along out with Chris or something… Jeremy said he saw you guys out after two this morning,” Regina lets her know without a hint of jealousy. Busted.

“That wasn’t us,” Emma tries to lie but Regina shrugs.

“If you say so,”

“I do say so. It wasn’t us,” Emma tries again, but Regina smirks.

“It’s fine. I’m not going to tell my grandparents or anything if that’s what you’re worried about,” Regina assures her. She pulls the strap of her duffel over her shoulder and picks up her phone and spare key.

“That’s not what this is about,” Emma says, hoping to steer the conversation in another direction, but Regina notices that mark on Emma’s neck and then her mind travels back to the night when Emma had gotten in late and stumbled into the bathroom. She remembers when she heard Emma hiss and had gotten up to go check. On sight, she’d seen the mark and knew Emma had a hickey. Regina had shut her eyes and made her way back into the bed before she just lay there, dazed by what she’d seen. Emma blinks a few times, unaware that Regina wasn’t looking at her, but rather the hickey on her neck. “Regina?”

“hmm?” the young girl answered, so out of it that she had to close her eyes and breathes.

“I was asking if I could go with you, again?” Emma queried but Regina shook her head.

“No. go hang out with Chris or something,” is all the bunette tells her before rushing from the room and heading out the manor and towards the office. Emma, just lets her leave, finding that she would do exactly what Regina suggested. She would hang out with Chris. Though her version and Regina’s version were two different scenarios.

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“Em, Regina and Zelena said we can go see where they grew up today- you comin’?” Auggie had
questioned his sister who’d sat at the island drinking a smoothie Zelena had made for them all. The day before seemed unreal. Regina brushed her off and pushed her out of her life and yet, she still didn’t feel as affected by it as she knows she should. “Em...Em?” Auggie questioned before shaking her shoulder.

“Huh?”

“I said, Regina and Zelena said they’d show us where they grew up today, I was asking if you’re in or not?”

“Uhh..no, I’m good,” she shook slightly.

“But you said you wanted to see it too,” Auggie told her. She shrugs as if it’s no big deal.

“I already have,”

“What?

“I already saw it.. Days ago,” she tells him and the group is listening. Regina’s nearly positive she knows who took Emma to see it, but she says nothing. Zelena walks away from the island and quite possibly out of the kitchen. “Chris showed me,” she shrugs.

“But we were supposed to go together,” Auggie complains.

“It was on our way. I asked him and he showed me. It’s no big deal, Auggie,” Emma had told her brother with all versions of nonchalant behaviour. Auggie rolled his eyes at her.

“It is to me…”

“Well...sorry, I guess,” Emma tells him with a clear indication that she didn’t care about it that much. “Besides, I’m going with Chris today. He’s gonna take me to a movie,”

“......whatever, Regina- you’ll still show me right?”

“Sure, Aug,” she smiled softly. “But we need to go now,” Regina then tells him after looking at her watch.

“Ohhh wait.. You’re gonna see Oliver again today, aren’t you?” he asks and Regina nods and smiles. “Can I come?”

“If you want,” she manages to tell him before Emma interrupts.

“I’ll come to,” she says and they pause. August looks at her before commenting.

“Aren’t you supposed to go with Chris?”

“I’ll just tell him to meet me there,” Emma combats but Regina speaks.

“You can’t invite him there?”

“Why not, he’s my friend,” Emma complains. Yeah...friend .

“Oliver doesn’t know him… or you,” Regina says and that bites into Emma deeply. The way Regina says it seems so dead and unforgiving.

“He doesn’t know Auggie either-,”
“Actually he does. Regina introduced him to me and Lena. But she’s right. He doesn’t do well with new people,” her brother tell her and Emma rolls her eyes.

“Fine, whatever.. Have fun with your boyfriend,” she mutters before leaving. Auggie looks at Regina and says.

“She does realize he’s like four, right?” But Regina’s too focused on Emma’s little outburst to respond, and instead- she sighs.

The three teens leave a little while later and ride through the Mifflin suburb. When they show Auggie the house they grew up in, he’s not surprised it’s as big as it is or looks as nice as it does. He’s more surprised they didn’t have a pool there and Zelena explained,

“When your grandparents have pretty much everything you want to use at their house, you kind of don’t need that stuff,”

“Cool.. So where’s your old school?”

“Remember that place Emma said looked like a church,”

“Yeah,”

“That was it.. Why?”

“I didn’t get to see it up close,”

“Oh?” Zelena laughed. “Well, we have about twenty minutes before Regina has to go to her ‘job’.. But I don’t think we’ll be able to show you it much.. We’re passing it when we go up, but you’ll be glancing by again. That and I kinda wanna see if any of my old friends still live here,” she admits and August seems interested.

“Where would they be?”

“I don’t know. I’d have to look for them, but I’ll do that after we make sure Regina’s there and say hi to Oliver. Deal?”

“.I don’t know what part of that is useful to me,” Auggie jokes and Regina smirks. It’s obvious ever since they got there, she hasn’t been 100, but she’s trying really damn hard to be okay and they have no idea how she’s been doing it for so long.

“Put it like this, you might find a girlfriend for the summer, or more friends for the summer or really, anything else but staying inside the house all summer,” Zelena tells him and Auggie bobs his head, interest peaking.

“Okay.. I can go with that. Deal,” he says and they shake on it before the three of them laugh like old friends.

As Zelena said, They do end up zipping by the school and heading up to the aviation company in town. Their grandfather is holding Oliver and talking with the child as Aliya watches, beyond impressed by how much her son really has opened up since he met Regina. They all say hi to Oliver, but he makes a bolt for Regina and holds onto her more than anyone else. Aliya hands over a bag and lets them know he wanted to go to the park and asks Regina if she wouldn’t mind taking Oliver
to the diner and getting him a sandwich or whatever it was he asked for. Regina’s more than happy to do so before she leaves with Oliver, her sister and Auggie. The park is a good bit of fun for Oliver, but for the older teens it’s even more exciting considering they haven’t been on the swings or the monkey bars or any of that stuff since hitting junior and senior high. They were no longer allowed to play with the ‘kids’ even though when it came to playground rules, they still felt like kids themselves. The few parents on the playground laugh in enjoyment as they see these teens turn into little children with the way they full on went for it. It was also because of that, that Oliver enjoyed himself even more, anyway. And then they were tired, but Oliver still had energy for days. He was still running circles around them within the hour, and that’s when they realized they were getting old.

After the entire group ran up an appetite, they headed towards the diner that Aliya had suggested. When they get inside, it’s exactly as it used to be. Homey. Smelling of goodness that was fried in grease that would probably give you cholesterol, but who cares! Food was amazing.

Zelena and Auggie head over to the counter as Regina finds them a table to sit at and realizes she doesn’t have to look very far for her old friends as they bump into a good few of them at the diner. Apparently it’s the teen hang out and summer job mecca. Most of them, Zelena knew and the few she didn’t happened because of the move. It’s like seeing your best friend for the first time in months because the way those girls squealed in excitement upon seeing one another made Auggie’s ears hurt. He noticed that none of the girls seemed to be as sporty as Zelena was, but then Auggie remembered that certain girls tended to throw on the dresses and curl their hair even if they did sports… Regina just wasn’t one of them and Zelena could be either/or. And then Auggie’s luck kicks in when one of the girl’s notices him and Regina’s nearly positive he’ll be disappearing soon enough after a few more outings with her. Zelena eats lunch with her sister and Auggie and Oli before letting them know she was leaving and then is when the girl who’d taken such a liking to Auggie invited him along. He had accepted that, but when they’d asked Regina, she’d turned it down after explaining Oliver was with her. Her sister and their friend had left shortly after that and Regina had taken Oliver back to the office around the time his mother was to be getting off. Regina didn’t have him for very long that day, but she and Aliya were still making sure Oliver was used to being around her even though it was beyond obvious Oliver was enamoured with her.

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Regina heads back to her grandparents’ place after a little bit more time with Oli and waits for the others to get back. Her grandmother is first and they start cooking dinner before her grandfather gets in and helps them finish up. Zelena and Auggie come in moments before Emma does, but that’s a good while after the rest of them already ate dinner. They meet Regina in the kitchen and she’s sitting at the island, staring at her camera and texting Nori. Nori was asking why Regina hadn’t taken any pictures lately when asked what she was doing and she’d admitted she was just staring at the damn thing. Regina didn’t really have an answer as to why she hadn’t taken any pictures, it was just that she didn’t. That’s all she could say. She didn’t know why, but she knew she just didn’t.

“Would you like to have the camera back?” the therapist had questioned and Regina shook her head before laughing lightly.

“I wouldn’t want that camera back even if it was the only thing that could make me happy again,”

“Is it just that particular camera.. Or is it any camera?” her therapist questioned and that made her
pause slightly. Regina had many cameras since the one she admitted to ‘throwing away’, but she never concluded if she held so much resentment towards all of the other ones just because of that particular one she had. But she’d also realized that those cameras are what got her where they did. They are what helped mould fifty percent of her life and actually made her remember dreams don’t stop existing because people do.

“Just that camera,” she responds and her therapist hums.

“So, Oliver became a roadblock in your relationship with Emma?” he’d then asked and she shook her head.

“Oliver didn’t... But Aliya did... but that wasn’t until later down the line and in all honesty, she was the best roadblock I could’ve asked for,”

“Why?”

“Because...” she begins and then trails off. He waits.

“Because?”

“Nothing. I’m skipping ahead. I babysat Oliver, for many summers. He was sweet and he was protective and he...”

“Wasn’t Emma’s biggest fan I suppose?”

“No, he wasn’t.”

"You haven’t been happy since we met up, what’s wrong?” Chris queried but Emma shrugged.

“Just best friend problems,” she admits and he nods.

“Regina’s still being difficult?” he asked and she nodded. It actually annoyed Emma a little that Chris was calling Regina difficult. Only she was allowed to say the not so nice things about Regina because even she wasn’t that bad to let someone dog her best friend... and yet, she doesn’t correct him on his accusation or tell him not to call her that.

“She wouldn’t let me meet this Oliver kid but she lets my brother and her sister go with her...”

“...maybe she’s just hiding something,” he suggests, giving Emma’s conspiracy theory, life.

“Well, then she’s breaking our promise to tell each other everything,” Emma says petulantly, completely ignoring the voice in her head that’s calling her and been calling her a hypocrite. “I don’t know why she won’t just let me meet him. She was on the phone with some Aliya girl and saying how he’s so cute and sweet and all tha other disgusting stuff,” Emma rambled on in complaint and Chris grinned.

“Speaking of... I know we’ve only known each other for a little while but there’s something I wanted to ask you,” he began in gentle interruption and she paused, looking at him with skepticism.
“Okaaayyy, what is it?” Emma questioned and Chris inhaled.

“Well.. I was wondering if you’d..you know- be my girlfriend?” he’d then asked and Emma.. well.

Dinner had rolled around and Emma was was finally back, grinning stupidly and it was annoying to her brother and Zelena. Regina was sat at the island talking with the two of them, not the eaest bit concerned with Emma’s giddy behaviour because the conclusion always came back to one person..Chris.

“What’s got you so happy?” Zelena asked and would later regret it because Emma, in the girliest way possible had admitted,

“Chris asked me to be his girlfriend!” At first, no one said anything until Zelena laughed and congratulated Emma just after she teased it would be one of those kinds of relationships.

“What do you mean?” Emma asked and Zelena’s eyebrow rose.

“Oh, you’ve never heard of a summer fling?” she questioned, not the least bit concerned in being gentle with Emma’s naive manner. Emma shook her head. Zelena huffed a sigh. “Look it up… but at least now you won’t have to lie about your hickeys,” the teen said and the blow was low, but Emma was too gone with being Chris’s girl, she didn’t care.

“Whatever, Zelena.. At least my boyfriend’s with me for the summer and I get to kiss him all the time,” she shot back and Regina’s choke turned into a snort. A very violent snort that sounded like she was laughing at Emma’s declaration. That in turn made Emma eye her weirdly. “What?”

“Nothing,” Regina admitted.

“Then why’d you snort?”

“I didn’t,” not voluntarily at least.

Are you jealous or something?” Emma asked. She figures she could use this to feel out where she and Regina were, but the brunette squashed her experiment.

“Of you and Chris.. Pfft, no,” Regina said easily.

“Riiiight, because you have Oliver, right?” Emma asked only to see Regina roll her eyes.

“Oliver’s got nothing to do with who you’re dating,”

“Says you,” Emma huffs with a shake of her head and before the conversation can get any further down the rabbit hole from hell, Zelena figures it all out.

“Emma- stop before you embarrass yourself,” she warns and the younger teen glares at her.
“And just how am I gonna do that?”

“Because it’s not what you think, numbnut! Regina please tell your jealous girlfriend who exactly Oliver is because clearly the boat didn’t dock at this port,”

“What?” Regina asks. Zelena grins because, this is stupid.

“Do clarify that Oliver is not your boyfriend for this one,” she points to Emma and Regina’s face scrunches up.

“Why would Oliver be my-wait- that’s what this is about? You thought I was dating Oliver! That’s what the attitude the other day was about?! Emma, I’m babysitting him! Oliver’s four years old! He’s my grandad’s- assistant’s son!” she yells at the girl and Emma’s face falls with the reality of her wrongful accusation.

“Seriously, Emma?” Auggie reprimands and as embarrassed as she is, Emma continues.

“No one wanted to tell me anything!”

“Because, ‘It’s not that big a deal’, ” Auggie throws back at her in reference to how she was with him the other day.

“Then why keep it a secret?”

“It wasn’t a secret. Regina’s been going to see him to make sure he’s used to her before she starts babysitting him for longer hours,” Zelena clarified. “That’s not information you go blabbing to people,”

“But why didn’t-,”

“-Emma...shhh,” Zelena cuts her off. “You really need to apologise,” she tells her, but Emma’s idiotically defiant.

“No I don’t!” And petulant.

“Petulant,” Zelena mutters. “You- are hopeless,”

“You guys didn’t tell me anything!”

“I guess now you see how it feels,” Auggie jabs and that’s it for Zelena who all but busts a gut laughing at that one.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” she asks angrily and Regina finally speaks.

“Guys, please stop. This really isn’t that important,” Regina says. Emma looks at her, hurt. Auggie holds his hands up and Zelena tells him they should leave.

“I thought you told me everything? You’re supposed to tell me everything,” Emma says, looking at Regina like the young girl had committed a crime. Regina folds her arms, the innocence never drifting from her face. “Is this still about the whole Kayla thing? I thought we got past that. I thought we got over all of that...I thought- I thought we were best friends,” the blonde continues but Regina doesn’t respond. And it hurts so much more when Regina walks away from her, causing Emma to roll her eyes, wipe at her tears and leave.
Regina is on the receiving end of hugs from Auggie and her sister, but she doesn’t know why they feel need to do that...she doesn’t feel guilty about anything at all. And in all honesty, she doesn’t even know why Emma’s so caught up when Emma’s been doing the exact same thing to her for so long. Later, when she calls Nori and tells Nori about it, Nori can’t help but be like Zelena and laugh, and soon, Regina finds herself laughing at it.. Breathing easy about a situation like that for the first time in a long time. She ends up passing by Emma and commenting, ‘she’s just being so immature about it’ not referencing the young blonde, but referencing one of Nori’s new dormmates or something like that. Emma, thinking the reference was made about her leaves in search of Chris.. Well, her boyfriend.

“So, you become upset when Regina gives you a taste of your own medicine because you felt it was only for you to do?” Emma’s therapist questions her and she doesn’t answer. “Listen, Emma, you may as well talk to me. We’ve already established that you destroyed her just by being the person you were and quite possibly still are, but I’m not understanding why you found justification in treating Regina that way when you yourself kept secret after secret from her… and more importantly used someone else in this mess of your life. Did you even have feelings for this young man?”

“Of course I did!” Emma snapped. “What kind of person do you think I am?” she nearly seethed.

“Well, based on what you’ve told me and admitted yourself.. Not a very good one,”

“You’re a therapist, you’re supposed to be middle ground,“

“Just so you could straddle the fence for the rest of your life and continue to justify your crap actions?” the woman challenged and Emma grinded her teeth. “Do answer me one question Emma…. Why? Why Regina of all people? Why would you treat someone who you knew loved you and was in love with you like the most dirtiest of scut on the bottom of your shoe...”

“..I didn’t know she was in love with me,” Emma lies.

“And that is absolute bull shit.. We both know this,” the therapist tells her before she throws Emma’s notepad at her. “ Do you remember that? This is what you wrote in your first session.. These are the words that came from you..in its exact state, you admitted you knew Regina loved you, you’d guessed she was in love with you and proved she had been when she kissed you on Christmas day. You also stated that you ‘just didn’t feel that way about her’ much like a teenaged child would and not someone that’s considered an adult.. Though, I suppose you’re not much of an adult as you are a lying coward,” the therapist pushed and Emma rolled her shoulders before swallowing. She then let out a sigh before she looked at her therapist and spoke.

“Okay.. I did it because… “ she trailed off before she sighed. This therapist was unconventional but she was the only one who’d managed to get Emma to talk.. At all. “She was perfect and I wasn’t,” she finally admits and the woman leans back into her chair, a smirk on her face.

“And finally, we’re getting something.”
It’s another day in and another dinner down for the large group, but Regina just can’t stay. She has to go see about Oliver later. She’s come to enjoy seeing him pretty much everyday, morning- noon and night.

Ever since that whole debacle with Emma and her assumptions, Regina had ended spending even more time with Oliver as Aliya had told her she was going to be full time in a few days.. Since Aliya told her that, it’d been about two weeks and Regina was in fact full time. She would spend most of her nights by Aliya and see everyone else somewhere throughout the day as she took Oliver out with her and around town. Regina would do little errands for the woman as well and she’d been shopping for her once already. Aliya didn’t stick to the pay of five dollars an hour. Most times, she paid Regina an extra ten just because the young girl was doing such an amazing job with Oliver, keeping the apartment clean and the errands she’d ask her to get done. Oliver saw more of Zelena and Auggie as the time had rolled on, but for the most part, he stuck to Regina and would ask her every once in a while to help him continue planning his birthday. It was surprising when Oliver- a week later, had settled into what he wanted to do. He didn’t want a birthday party. He didn’t want anything that you usually planned for kids. He just wanted to spend his birthday with his mommy and Regina. At first when Regina told Aliya, the woman seemed.. Well, she blushed, but then she was confused why Oliver only wanted the two of them and not even mention his father. But, when the mother of one asked why, Oliver made a clear enough response that his mommy’s his favourite person and Regina’s his second favourite. Something they couldn’t change even with Jeremy in the picture. Aliya had given in shortly after, letting her little boy know he can do whatever he wants to for his birthday and he was good with that.

So, with her bag packed for her to stay overnight as well as all day tomorrow, Regina tells everyone goodbye. It’s a general goodbye because everyone’s in one place and she didn’t need to worry about Emma’s ‘puppy dog’ face the blonde had been sporting. Regina’s also unaffected by the lack of communication that has been going on between her and Emma, but Emma is wholeheartedly fuming because of it. And to add worse to worse, Emma’s stubborness to just apologise, has her not apologising.

But, it’s gone on long enough and by longe enough, it’s getting to the degree that Chris is tired of seeing her act that way and act as if her world is ending.. Even though Regina’s was her world and she was destroying it. He somehow manages to convince her that she needs to apologise to Regina and at first, Emma’s ready to argue with him over it, but then she figures that if she apologises, Regina would forgive her like all those times before… and maybe she wouldn’t be feeling guilt though she denies she’s guilty of anything.

“We just have one problem though,” Emma admits and Chris is lost.

“And that is?”

“Aiya?”

“Who’s that?”

“Oliver’s mom… I don’t know where Aliya lives,"

“Do you know where she works?”

“Ummm, I think I remember Zelena saying she works for their grandfather,” Emma says and Chris nods before he pulls out his phone and does a little searching. He finds nothing before he squints and thinks…
“Come here,” he tells her and she follows him to a phone booth before he’d started flipping through something and looking for the list of names that usually were in phonebooks with addresses in it. He stops when he finds names that range in versions of Aliya.. And it’s a lot.. More than they expected at least. Emma huffs as Chris’s eyes widen for a moment and he swallows. “Anymore information?” he asks her. “Like a last name?” he suggests but she shakes her head. Time passes as Chris looks at the two full pages of names that spell out Aliya before Emma gets an idea.

“Give me your phone,” she tells him and he does. Emma decides to look up the company and see if that’ll help them out. She searches and searches until she finds what she’s looking for. She riddles off Aliya’s name, spelling inclusive and Chris finds it before he rambles off the address. He shuts the book and rests it back into the booth before he and Emma ride towards that suburb.

Once they get there, they park their bikes, but Emma has to stop Chris and let him know.

“You kinda can’t come inside.. Oliver’s weird with new people and Regina told me I wasn’t allowed to bring you with me anyway,” the blonde tells him and he pauses before he nods.

“Alright.. I’ll wait out here for you then?” he questions and she nods happily and eagerly before kissing him. Emma then makes her way up to the door, looks at Chris for a moment more before she’s knocking on the door and waiting, hoping Regina answers it.

She does, but she doesn’t look happy to see Emma at all. Before Regina can do much, Emma speaks.

“Can I come in?” she asks and at first, Regina just stares at her, but after a while, she steps aside and allows Emma access. Regina shuts the door behind them before she speaks.

“What do you want?” and Emma shrugs genuinely at that.

“I just wanted to see you,” she admits.

“You see me at my grandparents’s all the time,” Regina tells her in response and Emma nods at that. That is true.

“Yeah, but.. I haven’t seen you much lately and we haven’t talked either,” Emma says, but Regina’s not giving in to that bit.

“How did you get here?”

“Chris.. Don’t worry though, I told him he couldn’t come inside.. He’s out there waiting,”

“Well, I wouldn’t want to keep you from him-,”

“You’re not,” Emma answers all too fast as Regina then folds her arms. She blushes and looks away, taking into account the toy sitting on the table. “So..this is where you babysit?” Regina nods. “Where’s..the baby?”

“Oliver’s four and he’s asleep right now,” Regina says flatly and Emma nods with a swallow.

“Oh, nap time?”

“Yes,” she answers and silence engulfs them once more. It feels like an hour passes between them until Regina hears a sound that is vaguely familiar to a key in the lock and she’s right as Aliya
appears in the doorway, motioning her chin towards Chris.

“Hey, you left him outside,” she informs and Emma’s about to answer,

“Oh, ummm-,” but Aliya puts her hand up.

“It’s fine. I told Regina she could have friends over...make yourselves comfortable,” she tells him before walking further into the room and putting her hand to Regina’s shoulder. “How was Oli?”

“He was good, he’s sleeping now though,”

“Already?” Aliya questions and Regina nods. “I’m impressed how you get him in bed the times you do,” Aliya compliments and Regina blushes. Emma doesn’t miss that, but what can she do about Regina’s reaction, tell her she wasn’t allowed to take a compliment? “Are you staying tonight?” she then asks the teen as she makes her way toward Oliver’s room and Regina looks at her watch before she answers.

“I think I should. It’s a little late,”

“Good, that way you can help me make a late dinner- are your friends staying?” she then queried, disappearing into Oliver’s room. They wait a moment as Aliya reappears from checking in on her son, but Emma’s already made up a lie and saying that she and Chris had plans and they needed to get going and- “Yeah, I get it. Just be safe out there at this time,” is what she tells them and they leave quickly. Chris had only managed to glimpse Regina considering the encounter for him lasted all of one minute.

Once they leave, Regina is apologising profusely, explaining that she didn’t even want them there and they figured out where she lived somehow. Aliya’s pretty chill about it because she tells the teen as weird as that bit of information is, she’s fine with Regina having friends over… but it’s the final thing she tells her that has Regina thinking so deeply.

“Be careful not to get hurt in all of this.”

Those words carry on through the night and well past the next few days of Emma’s awkwardness around her until the blonde pulls her aside and manages to speak to her with sense. Emma tells Regina she really wants the brunette and her boyfriend to meet because she thinks Regina would really like him and Emma wanted them to be friends. It’s the irony of that which comes later, but she’s so…. Guilty these days, she’ll do anything to fix it.. Except apologise, clearly.

“I have to work later,” Regina tells her. It’s about nine in the morning and she would be leaving in a little while to go see Oliver and keep him.

“Okay, I get.. But what about if I bring Chris over.. Would you wanna meet him then?” Emma had asked, and Regina’s response to that was just all too brutal.

“He’s your boyfriend.. Do what you want… you always do anyway.” Thankfully, Emma doesn’t sense the clear cut annoyance in Regina’s tone or her blatant ‘don’t give a fuck’ kind of attitude.

“Okay, but um- we’ll come by later.. Chris asked me out,” Emma says and Regina nods, not focusing on the situation very much anymore.
That time to die had rolled around and a knock came to the door. Regina had answered it and stepped aside to let Emma and Chris in.

“Chris this is Regina.. My best friend. Regina this is Chris.. My boyfriend,” Emma managed to get out and Regina put on that very plastic smile for the boy who was smiling genuinely at her.

“I knew it,” he whispered and Regina looked at Emma who looked back at her.

“Knew what?” Emma asked and Chris shook his head.

“Regina and I went to school together when we were younger,” he tells Emma and the blonde looks at Regina for help.

“I’m sorry, but I don’t remember you,” Regina admits and Chris rolls his eyes playfully.

“Yeah, you kind of wouldn’t. I was only at that school for a year, but maybe-,” he stopped to pull out his wallet and then a picture. He showed it to Regina. “-you might remember that,” he said hopeful and she did remember it, but she said nothing. “It was Max’s birthday and you and I-,”

“-ended up eating his cake before they sang happy birthday,” Regina interrupted in a whisper before she grinned.

“Yeah and then our teacher took that picture and your mom went out and bought Max another cake because he started crying about it,”

“He hated us for the ten minutes he had to wait for a new one,”

“Yeah, but then when he got it.. He liked the one your mom picked for him better-,”

“And instead of eating any of it, he started a cake war,” Regina finished as she and Chris laughed before he pulled out another photo. It was one of just the two of them hugging after that giant mess with cake on their faces and in their hair. Regina giggled and Chris smiled.

“How do you still have these?”

“Well because, my mom told me I was so obsessed with being around you I developed this big crush on you. She said I would always ask about you and I only ever wanted to be your friend,” he shrugged lightly. Regina did not know how to respond to that at all, but Emma- thinking she would gain brownie points spoke up.

“That’s easy, Regina’s the sweetest person.. Kinda hard not to fall in love with her.”

Regina didn’t smile at those words or acknowledge them in the slightest. Quite frankly, those words didn’t do anything for her mood or change her attitude in that moment as she handed the pictures back to Chris and he tucked them away in his wallet. Emma uneasily pulls at the sleeves of her sweater, knowing fully well she’s not doing that good of a job at getting back into Regina’s good graces.
Chris leaves the girls alone as he goes and sits down in the living room, sensing the tension...or something. Regina watches him as he leaves before she hears Emma whisper out an,

“I’m sorry.” And Regina’s blatant question to that is,

“For what?” and that puts Emma back over the edge of unease.

“A lot,” Emma admits, but that’s not enough for Regina even though she just gives enough of a nod that Emma feels her lungs not ache so much from holding her breath on the response. “Can you forgive me?” Emma then asks and Regina nods because she can, it’s just whether or not she wants to. “Will you?” she then hears her friend ask her and in the most honest tone Regina can give her she says,

“Eventually.”

It’s enough for now because if she complains, it could all go crashing down. So, Emma takes that bit and she runs with it because it’s what’s gonna keep her going. It gives her a bit of hope that Regina’s world hasn’t competely vanished from her life. But then her thinking is cut short when Oliver comes out in search of Regina and he’s eyeing Emma with skepticism only known to few. Oliver hides behind Regina as she asks him what’s the matter and she has to then bend down and convince him that Emma and Chris won’t ‘hurt’ him and that they were ‘nice’. There’s a weird emphasis on her words which means she’s gritting them out as she says this to Oliver, but Emma doesn’t hear that, she’s too worried this little boy might genuinely dislike her.. Truth be told. He does. Her and Chris.

But, Regina manages to get Oliver to at least stop hiding and she tells him it’s movie time. He picks a movie he likes and they all sit to watch it. About a good hour into it, she’s leaving to head to the kitchen in order to get him something to eat and in that time, idiot one and idiot two decide to kiss because they haven’t in ‘ages’. By the time Regina is back with Oliver’s food he speaks.

“Gina- they gross,” he informs her and Regina laughs lightly.

“They are.. But that’s what monsters are supposed to be, sweetie,”

“Not da monsters... them,” he points to Emma and Chris and Regina looks at them before she looks back at Oliver and asks.

“How were they being gross, Oli?”

“Kissin’,” he says before scrunching up his face and the look Regina levels them both with is enough to induce pee. Emma flails as she sits there and Chris just turns red. They can’t answer her and she doesn’t wanna know. She rolls her eyes at both of them before lifting Oliver up and taking him to get dressed, agreeing with him that it is,

“Gross.”

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By the time Oliver is dressed and ready to go, they all begin walking towards the aviation company, Emma trying to explain it as they went. She was cut short by Regina saying,
“I don’t wanna hear it,” and she meant that. She meant that she really didn’t wanna know what 
Emma and Chris might have actually been doing and it only being a little bit of what Oliver saw. 
She shakes her head before turning her attention back to Oliver and talking with him, asking him if 
he’s excited to see his mom and he of course is. He was also set to see his dad later, but that was 
after, and Regina would be walking him to see Jeremy anyway. So, when they’d arrived, Regina 
noticed Aliya spotted Emma and she wanted to ask, but refrained from doing so. Whenever she 
decided to ask, Regina genuinely would tell her what the deal was.. But, for right now- Aliya had 
her son and whilst she conversed with Oliver, he’d immediately told her,

“I don’t like them,” and at first, his own mother was confused and when she asked who, he said, 
“Gina’s friends.” Emma and Chris were no where around when he did in fact say that, however, 
Regina was and she didn’t seem the least bit affected by it. Aliya went to apologise, but Regina had 
told her she knows Oliver doesn’t really like them and then she tells Aliya,

“They were dumb enough to kiss in the front of him when I went to get him something to eat.” 
Aliya knew Regina was more upset about the fact that they did it in the front of Oliver, more than 
the fact that they kissed… why? Because Regina’s been that teen who has been trying to prove she’s 
not like every other teenager and that she genuinely does not agree with the things her friends do. 
She’s not for having that around Oliver, but Emma and Chris figured he’s a kid, he won’t bother.

Aliya has every right to be upset and literally tell Regina she can’t babysit anymore, but she doesn’t 
and she isn’t. She trusts Regina and she more than likely knows Regina wasn’t there cheering them 
on. So, she lets it go and tells Regina she should too and to just enjoy everything else around that. It’s 
easier said than done, but after he spends an hour with his mom, he has to tell her goodbye because 
he would be staying with his father for two days. He cries a little bit because he knows he won’t see 
Regina in those two days, but Aliya makes a joke that he hasn’t cried for her like that in years.

It’s a little more stressful when they actually do get him to Jeremy’s and he has to say goodbye to 
Regina, crying of course and Jeremy gives her the most pitiful look, asking her if she would at least 
come to see him for an hour each of the days and she agrees because Oliver crying is enough to hurt 
her really badly.

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“Regina! Hey we’-,” August manages before stopping short. He takes notice that Regina’s there and 
so is his sister.. And Christopher. Auggie’s eyebrows lift suggestively and Regina rolls her eyes. 
“Umm.. we’re in the living room watching a movie,” Auggie tells her and she nods. “You wanna 
watch it with us?” he offers and Regina bobs her head. 

“I’m kind of tired but I can,” she says back to him and he nods at her.

“Okay. cool… Chris?” Auggie squints and the teen smiles at him.

“Yes, that’s me.. You’re Emma’s little brother, right?”

“Yeah.. August,” he tells the boy. “Anyway, we’re in the living room. Your grandma made lunch 
and your grandpa’s out back,”

“Sunbathing again?” she jokes and Auggie laughs.

“Last I check, he was readin’,” the boy said and she nodded.
“I’ll go check on him and come see you guys a little bit later..”

“Kay… is he staying?” Auggie then asked as he pointed to Chris. Regina turned slightly to regard him and Emma who seemed to be glaring at her brother as if she had any right to decide that. Regina shrugs.

“I guess,” is what she says and Emma takes that as a yes before guiding Chris through the house. They meet a few of Zelena’s friends, some guys- some girls and Auggie’s really close to being girlfriend- friend and that makes Emma even more nervous as she and Chris take a seat. Regina heads out on the back patio to check in on Santiago who looks like he just might be napping until he looks over at her and scares the hell out of her.

“What were you staring at, little star?” he asks her and she jumps.

“Jesus, grandpa!” Regina scolds but he laughs.

“I’m sorry,” he apologises as he sits up and rests his book down. “How was today with Oliver?”

“Pretty good. I just took him to see Jeremy and he cried,”

“He’s in love with you already,” Santiago teases and Regina smirks.

“Yeah, it broke my heart though,”

“I understand.. Your sister and August brought a few friends over to watch a movie and whatever else they’d decided to do today. Are you going to hang out with them?”

“Yeah, in a bit though. I’m tired,” she admits and he nods.

“Something happen today?” he then asks knowingly and she shimmies in her seat before she responds.

“Yep… Emma came by Aliya’s today and wanted me to meet Chris.. Turns out we already knew each other and then she ‘apologised’ for everything,” Regina recaps.

“What’s with the weird emphasis on the word?”

“I just don’t think she was sincere about it, but she asked me if I could forgive her..”

“..and?”

“I could forgive her.. The main question is do I want to. And then she asked will I and I told her eventually,”

“Why did you tell her eventually?”

“Because I just know she’s going to do something else before we leave here and that would put us right back to where it was when we got here,”

“And that would be?”

“Her hurting me again and finding reason to justify why she did. Emma’s always relied on apologising to me when she does something and most of the time, she barely apologises. She’ll say she’s sorry and then tell me why she did what she did, but that she’s sorry anyway… I don’t want that. If that’s how she thinks apologies work, she can keep it,”
"But sweetheart-,"

"-Grandpa.. I know what I just said might seem harsh, but I’m tired of being stepped all over by people,” she tells him, holding to that strongly. He does not say another word about it. He simply motions that Regina take a load off with him until she’s ready to go inside. She stays with him for about twenty minutes before heading into the living room, getting drowned with questions by Zelena’s friends. Emma and Chris seemed to have blended in enough, but two people take very intrigued likings in Regina for different reasons.

The guy was ogling Regina’s body and couldn’t really make much conversation when he tried talking to her, whilst the girl seemed to really be crushing on her for whatever reason. She too was barely able to make much conversation with the teen. Regina had mouthed pitifully to her sister a ‘help me’ and Zelena managed to skillfully rescue her.

The group stays until after dinner when Rose notices Santiago had ordered pizza and even she indulged in a slice or two. After the teens leave and the rest of them clean up, Rose notices Chris’s attendance and looks over to Regina who catches her eye. Her granddaughter is too busy smiling and shaking her head at the woman. That’s a silent ‘I’m fine. Don’t worry’ kind of shake that Rose lets happen and lets the situation be.

Regina then makes herself scarce to talk to her parents and then talk to Nori before she’s getting dressed for bed and curling up under her blanket. The door to the room opens and shuts and in comes Emma who tilts her head as she looks at her friend. Regina opens her eyes and stares at the blonde who makes her way closer to the bed before she’s kneeling down, not catching when Regina shuts her eyes completely and holds her breath. Emma then gently presses her lips to Regina’s before she stands and heads into the bathroom. Once out of the bedroom, Regina opens her eyes and stares off at the wall…

“And how did that make you feel?” her therapist had asked and she snorted.

“Is that a mandatory question for you to ask?” she queried and the man grinned.

“I apologise, I couldn’t word it any other way...how did that affect you?” he tries and she stops smiling.

“It...confused me,” she admits before looking up at the man and his eyes widened.

“Why? Was it not what you wanted?”

“I wanted to be with Emma, to be in love with Emma. Not share Emma with Christopher just because she felt guilty. What I did not want, was what she’d done that night,” Regina admits.

“Why? What had it done to you?” he asked and at first Regina didn’t answer, but then a moment passed and she looked up at him, still fiddling with her fingernails as she said,

“It gave me false hope.”
Tempers Flare

Chapter Summary

Emma's still a douche guys.. that's pretty much all I can tell you

She could hear it.

Giggling .

But that wasn’t the only thing she could hear. She could hear other things, like the visible sound of morning rays seeping through. Unless those were the singers, because they reacted to too hot or too cold weather..so it just might be them. But amongst that, she could hear the vocal shushing and light laughter as four people prepared to wake her with their voices. She could appreciate what they were about to do, but in all honesty, she just really wanted to stay balled up in her blanket and sleep. She’d pulled a serious one with Oliver the night before and Aliya had tried to tell her he would be more than a handful considering what the following day would be, but Regina was convinced she could do it. Convinced she could handle the little boy who was springing off the walls with his excitement. Hell, she was springing off the walls in her excitement as well, but Oli just. Would. Not. Stop. Still, she could not blame him- she really couldn’t. It was a special day and as promised, he would get his birthday wish to spend it with Regina and his mother… that’s if Regina ever got out the bed anytime soon.

“Happy Birthday-,” The voices began gently and Regina groaned quietly but she could feel her face having a mind of its own as she smiled. It wasn’t easy to hide either, considering she wasn’t actually under the blanket, so they kept singing and singing and singing and finally, Regina opened her eyes, rubbed at them gently and smiled at the group before her. Her eyes scanned the small group very quickly, though it did not look so and she noticed one person was missing.. This person was never missing.

Emma

Her face went sad within the moment and they noticed, they all noticed; but they continued to sing to her because it was her birthday and missing Emma or not, they would sing to her. So, they sang and they kept singing until they had nothing left to sing to her. When the song was done, she received those smiles. Those knowing smiles of sadness, of pity, and she hated it. God did she hate pity looks. But, she must have looked pretty damn pitiful right then and there if they were looking at her like that- Still!

“Good morning, my little cherub,” her grandmother greeted with a softer smile, one where the pity was drifting from her features.

“morning grandma,” Regina whispered. Her grandfather came into view and kissed the top of her head.

“Morning, anela. Happy birthday, sweetheart,” he smirked and she could see it more in his face. The pity was drifting away.
“morning grandpa,” she whispered to the man, feeling that with every greeting, maybe she’ll get out of the funk she was feeling. And then, her sister and Auggie tackled her on the bed and she began laughing as they teasingly sang happy birthday to her. That right there, that got her and crap!

She broke down in a fit of laughter and tears. She was in pain that Emma was missing but happy that those four people cared enough just to sing it to her. To wake her up with their voices and show her genuine love. Both August and Zelena had paused when they saw her tears and they felt bad because they didn’t know if they’d done it to her or if the thought of Emma not being there did that to her. Yet, she was still laughing, clutching at her stomach and crying just the same. Fighting through the pain and fighting against the happiness all in one fluid motion.

And then it stopped, or rather, she stopped.

She stopped laughing. It subsided almost drastically. And she stopped crying- just as quickly, the tears seemed to have dried up just in the moment as well, and that was frightening. Her face went solemn as she looked at the group and spoke.

“Thank you, guys. For singing to me,” she clarified with that megawatt smile they were so used to seeing and there it was, that flick of change in her mood once again. “Seriously,” she added as she attempted to get up off the bed and they made space for her. Individually, she hugged them all and surprised each one of them with every hug.

“You deserve it,” her grandmother said and both her sister and their friend nodded eagerly.

“Yeah, totally,” Auggie smiled at her and Zelena hummed.

“You indeed do. I’ll be downstairs, when you’re done up here, breakfast will be waiting,” her grandfather said to her before kissing the top of her head and bowing out.

“Is grandpa okay?” Regina questioned and her grandmother nodded.

“He is. He was just very saddened to know you being upset that Emma was missing would be a possibility… though, none of us have seen her at all this morning as far as I’m aware,” the older woman quickly said and saw the slight upward tilt of Regina’s head.

“Yeah- no, I didn’t see her,” Zelena shrugged, arms folded and August shook his head as well.

“Neither did I,” he adds. The room is quiet for but a moment until Regina shrugs lightly.

“Well.. she must be doing something. Doesn’t matter. The people who care are the people here-right?” Regina managed to smile even though they knew she’d give anything in that moment to not force herself to be brave. It doesn’t reduce the pain she feels either. The pain of knowing that Emma chose something else- someone else.. over her.

After a while of everyone just making awkward conversation that skirts around the topic, they leave her room in order for her to get dressed, though, she’s not sure why when all she does is shower and put on a pair of shorts and an old t-shirt from her school. She goes down the stairs slowly, hearing the voices go on and on until she reaches the kitchen and they all turn to look at her, smiles adorning their faces. Regina looks skeptical.

“Okay.. what did I do?” she asks but her grandmother shakes her head.

“Absolutely nothing, darling. We were just thinking that later tonight might be a good chance for us all to go out to dinner and celebrate your birthday, that’s of course- if you’re up for it?” she had suggested and Regina paused, thinking for a moment before nodding and smiling.
“Dinner sounds like fun.. Where are we going?” she’d asked and Rose shrugged.

“Anywhere you’d like,” the woman responds.

“How about Noonan’s?” Zelena suggested and Regina looked a tad bit lost.

“Noonan’s?”

“Yeah..remember.. It’s where mami and papi used to take us all the time and the only place you ever wanted to eat because you had some crush on one of the waiters,” Zelena teased and Regina went red.. She remembers precisely who that crush was and then it clicks in Zelena’s head.

_How did I not see it before?!_

“Is Noonan’s even open, still?” Regina turns to her grandparents, hastily trying to avoid what her sister has said and her grandfather nodded.

“It is in fact still open. They expanded too, if I’m correct,” he continued on in explanation.

“Then.. I guess we can go to Noonan’s,” she said half-heartedly and no one except Auggie and Zelena seemed to notice that she was now lost in her own mind. Her grandparents had nodded and taken the rest of the breakfast platter out and into the dining room where they waited for the teens.

“You okay?” Auggie queried and Regina blinked.

“Yeah.. yeah- I’m fine.. Why’d you ask?”

“I dunno.. You look- a little lost in your head there,” he comments and she blushes.

“I guess I’m just thinking about things…” she trails off.

“Did Nori call yet?” Zelena questions but Regina shakes her head.

“No. No call, no text- but that’s because Nori has classes, so,” Regina finds herself defending because, what if they think Nori was just like Emma?

Zelena senses that bit of defensiveness and smiles.

“Then I guess they’ll call later or something.. Grandpa said Mom and dad said they’d call in a little while, I think. We talked last night after you got in from babysitting Oliver…”

“Sorry, I was tired.. I guess I just crashed,” Regina admitted and her sister nodded.

“It’s okay, they actually like what you’re doing for the summer over what I’m doing better,” Zelena joked and Regina shrugged. Zelena nudged her. “Don’t be so hard on yourself.. Like you said the people who are here and who sing to you and all that other stuff are the ones who care. So, they’ll call because, let’s face it. It’s mami and papi and I’m sure Nori’ll call too…”

“..yeah, I guess you’re right,”

“Good, now come on.. I’m hungry,” Zelena laughed.

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“I’ve never seen the sun up that close on this side,” Emma grinned as she and Chris made their way back to the manor. Chris, for all his goodness and innocence, just smiled back at her.

“Well, I wanted to show you something not many people get to see… Did you like it?” he finds himself asking her, unsure and Emma looks at him like he grew a third eye.

“Liked it? I loved it! It was so relaxing and calming and I never thought I’d see something that cool in my life,” she complimented and he blushed.

“Well, good. I’m glad you did..” he tells her as they come up to the gate and see that Klause is handling something. Emma squints at him and is then asking.

“Klause.. What is that in your hand?” as she walks away from Chris and nearer to the man. Since she’s that much further away, Chris can’t hear anything she says, so, he just stands there and waits.

Klause looks down at the present and then back at Emma before he says, “Gift for Regina,” very strongly and Emma’s eyes go wide with fear.

“Shit.. I forgot!”

“Oh,” she says, trying to play it off as best she could before she swallowed thickly and turned around. She jogs back over to Chris and stops abruptly, slapping a hand over her face and groaning.

“What’s the matter?” he asks and she sighs again.

“Nothing.. It’s just.. Do you guys have like a card store around here or something?” she asks and he nods.

“Yeah, there’s a hallmark like five minutes from here- why?”

“I just forgot to get Regina a card on the way back,” she says and she can see it in his eyes.. He was judging her. Though he’s unaware that she has completely forgotten her ‘best friend’s’ birthday, he’s more so surprised she quote on quote ‘forgot to get it on the way back’ but, Chris says nothing because he’s nearly positive if he does, she’ll be mad at him and he’d prefer it if she weren’t. So, he just guides her to the hallmark store and Emma picks up one of those overly impassive, quite literally unoriginal, birthday cards. The thing is so generic that it’s offensive more than anything else. Emma told Chris to wait for her because she wouldn’t be long and he listened as he watched her jog inside and ask the first person she saw where the birthday cards were. But, she had fiddled through the aisle for like thirty seconds until she lazily settled on a card that said happy birthday and grabbed it up. All 89 cents of it. Emma pulled a crumpled dollar from her pocket and paid for the card, tax not included of course and took her card without an envelope or anything else. She then rushed back outside and nudged Chris so they could get a move on. He continued to not say anything. He was in the dark about the situation anyway.

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“So far so good,” Regina told her mother as she talked on the phone with her parents almost animatedly. She’d gotten over Emma’s absence because it was becoming a thing where Regina
realized that Emma… just wasn’t who she’d hoped the blonde to always be. “No.. Nori hasn’t called yet. I guess classes and everything else are keeping her busy,” Regina huffs. She hears a sound that sounds like something is falling.. Or braking until the room to her door is knocked on and she answers. “It’s open.” Within her view, is Emma, smiling at her a little bit shyly and Regina has to wonder why. “Uhh..mami, I’ll talk to you guys later… yeah. Okay, love you too. Bye,” she said before hanging up and resting her phone on the bed.

“Happy Birthday,” Emma tells her and Regina swallows, barely responding as she nods. Emma makes her way further into the room and shoves her hand out. Regina looks down at the card in Emma’s hand and then back up at her.

Seriously! She thinks as she looks at it. And she’s looking at it because this isn’t what they do. They never ever buy each other that generic crap and here Emma is, passing it off as if it’s okay… How did she even think it was okay to give Regina some store bought piece of stationery and pass it off as a birthday gift. They made things for each other, every year, without fail they made things for each other, most specifically- friendship bracelets. They made those anew, each year as a reminder of the most important thing they shared… a bond. And yet, she’s faced with a folded piece of hard paper that is telling her to have a happy birthday. She looks back up at Emma before she takes the card and looks at it with even more scrutiny than usual. Emma sits beside her, clearly happy with herself and Regina really does want to slap her for it. The young brunette flips the card open and of course there’s nothing inside but the usual lines of ‘heartfelt’ words already embedded into the damn thing- that tell her on her special day she’s so important and blah blah. Emma didn’t even write inside the card and that’s just as bad.. Hell, this particular card had a line for Emma to sign her name and she couldn’t even put love Emma… that’s what gets to Regina.

She shuts the card and would you look at that! The fucking price tag sticker is still on it.

89 cents … wow, I’m only worth 89 cents from a Hallmark store….that’s rich.

And it’s enough. It’s more than enough.

It’s enough to let her know, Emma forgot and tried to rectify it with this half-assed thought to get herself out of trouble. It’s enough that Regina knows she’s not important enough to the girl who claimed she was her best friend. It’s enough for Regina to realize.. They’re drifting apart.

“thank you,” she mutters as she fingers the edging of the card and sighs heavily. Emma doesn’t notice that the sigh is most specifically because of this crap she’s pulled. The card falls away from Regina’s hands and onto the bed before the young brunette rises from her position and makes her way over to her closet. She’s looking through what’s hung up when Emma asks the question, “Has Nori called yet,” and she finds herself answering.

“No. not yet.”

“Oh… I’m sorry, hey-umm, what are you doing today?”

“I’m babysitting Oliver,” Regina tells her distractedly as she pulls her clothes off the hanger and Emma’s confused.

“On your birthday?” she queries and Regina huffs.

“Oliver and I share the same birthday,” she informs and it lacks all versions of joy when she tells her, mostly because she doesn’t feel like speaking to her right then and there.
“Ohhhh, like a birthday twin,” Emma smirks.

“Mm…” she answers before she walks into the bathroom and changes. She only really changed her shirt and put on a pair of skinny jeans. Emma is eyeing her like she didn’t something, but she doesn’t ask her what her issue is because Emma is already one to vocalize it anyway.

“Wait.. you’re going out dressed like that?” she asks the girl and Regina would be offended if she wasn’t so over it already.

“Yes… why?”

“Well, it’s just.. It’s your birthday. Don’t you wanna dress up or something?”

“No. Besides- we’re going to dinner later this evening at one of the restaurants in town. I’ll ‘dress up’ then,” she mocks before she gets her backpack, that birthday card, her keys and her phone She fingers her jacket for her wallet before she drops everything else into the backpack until she hears something buzzing and fishes around for her phone before pulling it back out. She unlocks it and it’s the birthday wishes that have started rolling in. Some from their classmates and others from her family in different states. But none of them are from Nori. Though, Regina doesn’t worry about that. She’s more confident in Nori than she’s ever been in Emma right at this point.

“Hey,” Emma says, jarring Regina from her thoughts. “Do you mind if Chris and I tag along? I mean, we can hang out today with you and Oliver and then I can take you to that smoothie place Chris was telling me about. It’ll be my treat?” Emma offers as if it’s such a good one, but she does it with that smile Regina wishes she could slap off of her face. She shrugs in response.

“sure,"

“Awesome! I’ll go tell him,” she says before getting up and rushing out of the room. Regina just sighs as she shifts her backpack on her shoulder a bit better. Then she hears a soft knock. She turns and looks on.

“You okay?”

“... no, but it doesn’t matter,” she responds.

“But, she remembered, that has to count for something right?”

“It would if she did… but she didn’t. She didn’t remember at all and that last minute attempt to make me think she remembered, was piss poor,” Regina muttered.

“I’m sorry,” they told her but she shrugged.

“I’m not.”

Regina, after a while to herself, gets downstairs and sees Auggie sitting on the steps. He looks up with a soft grin.
“Ready to go?”

“Yeah.. where’s Lena?”

“She said she couldn’t go. Something about helping your grandma with something, but she asked if we could tell Oliver she said hi and Happy Birthday?”

“Sure… is everyone else ready?”

“Yeah, your grandad’s already in the limo. He said Klause had something for you…”

“Wonder what that could be?” she’d half questioned, half said as they made their way outside and toward the limo. Klause turns around and he’s grinning at her before sticking his hand out and Regina’s eyes go a bit wider than usual.

“Heppy Birday,” Klause managed as best he could. He smiled at the teen and watched her smile back at him. He held out his gift a little further. A scarf of varying, warm autumn colours that was obviously knitted by the man himself, was adorned with a little red bow that clearly meant it was in fact a gift.

“Awwww, Klause. I didn’t know you knit!” she said a whole hell of a lot more excited than she expected even she would.

“Ju like?” he blushed and Regina took it before hugging him tightly.

“I love...thank you, Klause,” she told him and his heart swelled as he hesitated for a moment and then hugged her back. He was crushing her once again, but damn it- it was worth it.

They all get in and head towards the aviation company. Regina says nothing the entire ride because Chris and Emma are in the limo with her, and her grandfather and Auggie. It’s awkward to say the least and Santiago wishes he’d sat up front instead of in the back. Thankfully, Auggie saves him and they talk about sports and other things. Once they arrive, Aliya is there to greet them.

“Well- well. Happy birthday to you, baby doll!” Aliya says to Regina ery cheerily and Regina can’t help the blush that encases her face. She shyly whispers back a ‘thank you’ as Aliya’s hand strokes through her hair and she’s giving the young girl the most genuine smile Regina's seen on an adult in a good while. Aliya’s fingers drift to the nape of her neck before she lets go and Regina’s reluctant on losing that gentle scratching as she sighs.

“Decided to go all casual today?” she asks her and Regina looks down at herself before she looks back up and nods.

“I didn’t feel like dressing the part,” she admits and Aliya snorts.

“Welllll, it’s gonna be kind of hard for you not to considering what Oliver made me buy for the two of you,” she tells her, watching the way her eyes go wide with something akin to fear and determination.

“I really wish I didn’t have to,” she laughs.

“You just might have to,”

“Why is that? And where is Oliver, anyway?”

“Jeremy's bringing him in a little bit and because, Oliver made me buy you two matching shirts..
Guess who’s the birthday girl,” Aliya snickers and Regina groans but she watches Aliya pull the shirt from under the desk and thank Christ it’s not pink.. It’s dark purple and has white lettering on it. She unfolds it so Regina can see it and sure enough, it says

“Birthday girl?”

“Yeah, you’ll see why in a minute,” she says with a grin and Regina’s confusion sits upon until Oliver comes bursting through with his shirt already on. Regina shuts her eyes and laughs. Oliver’s shirt is yellow with black lettering and it says Birthday boy, which is now extremely obvious to Regina that he wanted them to have matching shirts, even if they were different colours. Once he spots her, Oliver makes a sprint for her and tackles her until she falls over, hugging her like she were his mother.

“Happy birthday, Oli,” Regina grins and he nods, lifting his head from her chest, a toothy grin on his face.

“Happy birthday, Regina,” he says back.

“I love your shirt,” she tells him because, if she was being honest, it really was cute. Up close she could now see that it had little bumble bees on it and they are all holding pencils and the font on the shirt mimicked that of something a child would write. Regina’s was a little bit more reserved, except for the fact that there was a crown hanging off the H in happy and there was something on the back of hers that said ‘Today is my day’.

“Hehe- cool. Cus I got you one too,”

“Ohhh, I saw it. So, does this mean I have to wear it too?”

“Duhh, Gina,” he giggles and she sighs playfully.

“O-kaaaaay,” she says before she stands up and surprises him after zipping her jacket down. He nods his approval at her and drags her towards his mother.

“Doesn’t she look pretty, momma?” he asks and Aliya nods at Oliver, but the look she gives Regina is gentle and sweet.

“She looks really beautiful, baby. Now, remember what I told you?”

“Uhuh, you said- Gina’s a princess today and I have to be a gentleman and open doors for her and stuff cus it’s her day too,”

“Awesome. Give me a high five and go show your date around town,” Aliya teases and Regina turns red with embarrassment.

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After Oliver is told happy birthday from everyone else they head to an arcade where they have lunch and play just about every game the place offers. Granted, it’s massive, but they get through most of the games. Winning and losing and winning some more. And after they get tired of that, they head to the park. It’s not much, but Oliver enjoys it and Regina enjoys just being with the little boy and
because Regina’s happy, Auggie is as well- even if he rolls his eyes at his sister consistently disappearing just so she could kiss Chris. That was starting to irritate him because they delayed them leaving every time someone had to go look for them. Oliver still didn’t really like either of them, well within his own reason, but at least he didn’t have to see them kiss anymore.

Finally though, Oliver runs himself thirsty and they need to leave the park which is when Emma finally suggests the smoothie place and they head there. Auggie, Regina and Oliver find a table whilst Chris and Emma get the menu and then they’re all looking at it, unable to decide.

“What’s the best thing you’ve had from them?” Auggie asks him and Chris shrugs.

“I always pretty much get the same two things. Tropical berry blitz or the usual oatmeal and banana combo,”

“What one is your favourite out of the two?” Emma questions and he laughs.

“Berry blitz, but that’s only because I only have the banana and oatmeal one in the morning, and the berry blitz has just about everything in it,” he clarifies and she nods. Emma looks back at the group.

“Well, there’s five of us. We can all get one.. Make sense?” she asks and Auggie nods, just as Regina does and Oliver didn’t seemed too fussed. He’s more intune with distracting Regina. Emma and Chris get up and head over to the counter, starting their own conversation as they have to wait in line for a good minute before being served.

“You okay now?” Auggie queries and Regina sighs.

“Yeah, I’m a little better.. Are you having fun, Oli?” Regina asks the child and her grins.

“Yup.. can I play with Auggie more, Gina?” he asked and Regina smiled.

“I don’t know, you may want to ask Auggie. He’s right there,” she points and Olive goes very silent and very shy. Auggie smirks at him.

“Of course we can, but you gotta let Regina know so I can know and maybe I’ll teach you how to play soccer,” Auggie offers and Regina gives him a grateful smile. He then looks over at his sister and then back at Regina before he sighs.

“What’s the matter?” Regina sks and he raises his shoulders.

“Not sure. I don’t know if I’m disappointed or just sad with what’s going on with Emma and you,”

“I don’t think you should be hurting your head over what happens between me and Emma, Aug. You can’t change certain things, and I stopped bothering to try because it’s tiring,”

“Yeah, but that’s because you’ve been putting up with it for so long,” he tells her and she now shrugs.

“Yeah, but that’s what needed to happen… how about you tell me about Lena’s friend,” she changes the subject and Auggie looks like he’s about to deny anything, when he says,

“She’s cute,”

“ANNNNNND?”
“And… I like her as a person…”

Emma and Chris are so caught up in their conversation, one another and the idea of swapping more spit that when they hear a gentle sigh and someone telling them it’s their turn, they blush and pull apart before heading up to the counter. She riddles off their order and doesn’t really listen to the question the guy asks her, but she still says no, anyway. Bad Idea.

She pays for them and she balances three as Chris balances the other two and they set them all down on the table. Everyone takes their smoothies and Regina makes sure that Oliver is set up with his before she begins on her own. Oliver is weaving a story of absolute cuteness to Regina when she feels a certain itching at the back of her throat. That itching continues on and she’s trying to clear it away by humming a little. Auggie notices and puts his smoothie down.

“Regina.. You okay?” he asks and she nods.

“Yeah, just a bit of an itch,” she tells him as she tries clearing her throat, not realizing it’s slowly starting to close up. Oliver now seems worried as well, and it’s a good thing because just as quickly as his worry sets in, there is in fact something to worry about.

It’s as if someone clicked pause on their actions, but Regina’s horror story continued to play out as her throat nearly shut completely and she fell off of her, so close to seizing. August manages to catch her almost a little too late, but he gets her on the ground and then he’s shouting, Regina’s convulsing body in his arms.

_Any allergies?_

_No_

Auggie is yelling at her to get help, to call someone, to do something as he tries in vain to get Regina’s spazzing body to calm down, but Auggie knows as well as anyone there, that what she needed was an adrenaline shot and he thinks about it so fast that he nearly drops her head from his lap as he reaches for her backpack. He can’t reach it, so he- as calmly as he can manage- tells Oliver to give it to him.

_Any Allergies?_

_No_

Auggie is then dumping all the contents out and onto the floor. Her epipen makes itself known when
that tell tale sign of spring loaded ness, clatters against the marble flooring of the smoothie shot. Auggie yanks the top off of it and fuck! Regina’s jeans are long. He is going to have to do it. He unbuttons her jeans and yanks them down before he strikes skin, lodging it into her thigh with enough force that the medicine shoots out in rapid succession. Auggie then throws the epipen to the side just as the worker and manager are coming over with the first aid kit and dropping down at Regina’s side. The sound of the ambulance coming is also happening as August now comes from his daze of fear. He looks at Regina’s face. Pale and sweaty as he brushes her hair away. He pulls her pants back up and holds onto her until the medics need to pretty much pry him away from her. Oliver isn’t too happy about it either. He may have been a scared five year old, but he didn’t trust anyone else with Regina right now and in some bout of good favour, he and Auggie are allowed in the back of the ambulance as they check her over. Waiting for her to come to.

Any allergies

No

Chris looks at Emma and Emma swallows, looking at the smoothies that sit on the table, melting. Once Regina’s given the all clear and she’s walked back inside, Auggie to one side and Oliver to the next, he sits her down and looks her over one more time. She’s weak and that’s obvious, but what’s even more obvious is how she now purposefully avoids Emma’s eyes. Emma herself isn’t sure she’s completely just witnessed what just happened, but if she did, she knows it was literally her fault. The manager, in all his ways of fear, is about ready to fire the guy who was working behind the counter but when Auggie overhears, he goes over and tries to clear it up. Thankfully- the man can keep his job and Regina’s too mad at Emma right now to care about any legal issues. She wouldn't press charges anyway, it wasn’t their fault, they didn’t know about her allergies. But Emma did, and if looks could kill, sue or harm.. Shit, Emma would be all three right then and there.

Once Auggie has managed to deal with that situation, he creates one of his own, laying into Emma with enough hellfire to destroy a small country. They argue.. Back and forth.. And back and forth and back and forth some more as Auggie yells at her.

“If you weren’t so caught up in swallowing Chris’s face, you wouldn’t have poisoned her, you idiot!”

“You’re being dramatic!”

“She almost died, Emma. Does none of that concern you?!?” he asks her, incredulously.

“She’s fine now, isn’t she. It’s not that big a deal! She got her epipen. She’s fine. Look at her!”

He scowls.

“What part of her looking like that is fine? Tell me! You’re so selfish. You knew she had allergies. You know she’s allergic to apples and you didn’t even bother thinking to make sure hers didn’t have it in there?!”

“Auggie.. She’s fine ,”

“And what if she wasn’t?” he questions and she stops short. “What if she wasn’t fine! What if she
didn’t get her epipen- what if she died?! Did you ever think of any of that? I bet not, and that’s because you’re so caught up in Chris. Everything is Chris! You care about nothing and no one else, but Chris-

“- Auggie,” Regina whispers hoarsely and he stops. He falters in his anger, even though his eyes are trained on Emma and ready to pretty much end her right then and there. “…it’s okay,” Regina tells him and he falters even more. His face is red, and angry and he can feel his tears pushing to the surface. He can feel his features changing in that painful way that lets you know he really doesn’t want her to say that. To justify Emma’s poor actions. To give her an excuse to be this terrible.. But, Regina’s already looking away from the entire group as she tries to help Oliver hold his large smoothie cup.

“It’s not okay. You almost died on us because of this idiot,” he somewhat seethes.

“I’m fine,” she answers back.

“You’re not,” he combats but she shakes her head.

“We need to go...I have to get Oli back to his mom so we can get dressed for later.” Auggie sighed and nodded.

“You want me to go with you?” he offers, She shakes her head at him.

“No. You go back, I’ll take him in. I need to talk to him about what happened today anyway and I wanna talk to Aliya about something.”

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True to her word, Regina explains what happened to her earlier, to Oliver and she does it as best she can and Oliver has the best conclusion she ever heard. Her body just thinks apples are icky and they go to war anytime the apples invade her tummy. She has to admit, his version is better than hers. As they get back to the aviation company and into the office, Aluya spots them.

“Oh, Regina.. How was today?” she asks with a smile and Regina manages to give a tired on in return. She’s still not one hundred percent herself, but she’s getting there.

“It was good. Oliver was amazing as usual,” she says before ruffling his hair and he grins.

“Gina’s super cool!” he compliments before he hugs his mother and Aliya lifts him up.

“That’s awesome buddy.. Listen, how about you go bother with Mister Sorentini and I’ll come see you in a bit,” she tells him and he nods before she sets him down and he runs towards the office screaming ‘Mister Sorentini!’ She and Regina share a soft laugh before she makes her sit down. “Okay, tell me what happened,” she urges immediately and Regina surprised she picked up on anything at all.

“I had an allergic reaction today and I think it scared Oliver,” Regina admits and Aliya nods.

“You ate something that had apples in it?” Aliya asked because she’s nearly positive Regina will tell her no.
“Not willingly. We went to the smoothie place and Emma and Chris ordered everyone the same thing and it had apple in it and I didn’t know and then.. You get the rest,”

“But, doesn’t she know you’re allergic?”

“She does.. But, it’s not as if it matters. Today was just an afterthought for her anyway,” Regina shrugs and Aliya feels for her.

“What’s going on, baby doll?” she queries and Regina looks up at her before she looks back down at her hands.

“She forgot my birthday today.. And then she tried to pretend she didn’t with a card from hallmark that still had the price tag sticker on it and she only took us to the smoothie place because Chris has been telling her about it. She ordered my smoothie. She knew I was allergic to apples and she still bought it. Emma knows everything there is to know about me and I almost died today, but once again.. She didn’t even care. She didn’t freakin’ care!” Regina seethes and she hadn’t noticed until now, but she’s crying against Aliya’s chest and her tears are soaking through the woman’s blouse. She sniffles and whimpers. “Why me, Aliya? Why is it that it has to be me? Why is she doing this to me? We were supposed to be best friends and she did this to me… she almost let me die and then she got made at Auggie when he started yelling at her. Why doesn’t she realize how serious it is that if Auggie didn’t give me my epipen, I could have been dead. Tell me.. Why me?” Regina finds herself asking tiredly and Aliya sighs.

“Honey, you know that better than anyone why it is she’s doing this, but I will say it out loud so that you know that other people see it as well. She is taking advantage of it and she’s taking advantage of you because she knows just how much you care about her. She knows how much you love her. She knows that you would do anything to fix whatever it is you two have and so, she takes it for granted because she doesn’t have to put in any work to do it. She doesn’t have to apologise, and even when she does, it’s not her best, it’s not sincere, but because you care, because you love her, you stay, you take it. You accept what she’s throwing at you and you swallow back all the pain it causes you just because. I used to do the same with Jeremy. I know how it feels,”

“Does it ever get better?”

“Not unless you walk away,”

“I don’t want to have to walk away from her,”

“I know. I didn’t want to walk away either, but guess what happened…”

“What?”

“I realized after it started to turn into verbal insults and heartbreak that I couldn’t repair anymore, that I needed to walk away. It didn’t matter what we had planned. It only mattered that at the end of the day I didn’t feel like he was choking me without physically touching me, forcing my hand for me to stay when I really didn’t need to. If someone ever tells you that you and them need to be together. Remember that you don’t. You don’t need to be with anyone. You do things because you want to, not for need. You find relationships because you want a relationship and you want it to be happy and you want it to last. You do things because of need when it comes to surviving in a general sense, not an emotional one. Not where it determines the rest of you future.. You deserve better, sweetheart. You know that. But, it’s whenever you decide to give yourself better… and when you do, you’ll be surprised by who is waiting on you.”

“Yeah, but for how long?”
“It all depends on you… I do have one more question though,”

“What is it,” Regina asks, not really ready to relinquish her hold on the woman.

“How much was your card?” she hears the questions and Regina snorts out a boisterous laugh.

“89 cents,” she answers.

“Tax included?”

“Not even close.”

After that massive heart to heart moment with Aliya, Regina uses her new bout of contempt feeling to beg Aliya to come to her birthday dinner later and Aliya cracks after like ten minutes if Regina giving her the eyes and using Oliver as leverage. When she gives in and she’s hugging Regina, the brunette feels her heart rate speed up for some reason. She has no idea what it is about Aliya, but this woman has been amazing to her, supportive of her and a very close shoulder that Regina really did need to lean on.

Regina gets back to the manor and Zelena already could tell something was off with her. Auggie hadn’t told her because he was so pissed he didn’t even bother speaking to anyone. He shut himself away in his room and went to sleep. Emma felt she had some weird right to do it, so she invited Chris inside and he’s been there since. Zelena was on the phone with Wade, but the second she spotted Regina looking as if she might be happy and still completely broken at the same time- she asked what happened and her sister told her.

It took just about every bit of control present for Zelena not to turn into seven different versions of Auggie’s previous anger as Regina convinced her it wasn’t even worth it and when she sat there, when she thought on it. When she focused on what it was Regina was begging her not to do., She was more hurt about it than she was mad and now she sees why Regina was as well. Regina leaves her sister in her thoughts as she heads upstairs and immediately passes out. She in turn misses Nori’s call and when she wakes, it’s time to get dressed to leave.

They make it to Noonan’s and she spots Aliya and Oliver who are matching. It’s cute to say the least and Regina ushers them over. Somehow, Chris is there too and she’s not even sure how that happened, but she supposes her grandparents extended the olive branch just to be nice. Regina opts to sit with Aliya and Oliver and slowly but surely, they all notice how mute she’s fallen, but she claims everything is fine when she’s asked periodically if she’s okay. If you didn’t know about the depth of pain she was feeling, you’d take her words at face value. But Aliya knew, and her sister knew, and now Auggie was sure he knew, but Emma remained oblivious on intentional reasons.

She didn’t want to feel guilty for messing up again. Quite frankly, she’s managed to mess up the entire summer there and Regina can’t believe that the thought crossed her mind, but- she’s praying to God she and Emma aren’t in the same classes come the following year. Either that, or at least not the same homeroom. When she gets back home, she’s praying that half the things she and Emma did together, they no longer do because this summer was horrible and she doesn’t even have anything worth putting in their friendship album. The only thing that actually managed to make her feel
Alright, was the fact that there was Oliver and as much as she feels guilty to admit it, Oliver became a distraction she looked forward to. Of course she enjoyed his company and everything else, but she was stuck with that realization that the initial reason she took it was so she had someone else. She supposes in a way, Oliver was the same considering he was five now and needed a friend too.

It’s funny to her in that moment, Oliver was now her friend. A cute little five year old was her friend and they shared a birthday and it may have sucked for her, but he thinks Regina’s awesome and he thinks she’s pretty and he thinks she’s sweet and so does Aliya.

She is pulled from her begging and persistent thoughts as her cake arrives and just based on what she can tell is an oreo cheesecake cake, Regina knows fully well- That’s what Zelena was helping Rose with. There’s no doubt about it.. Especially since the words scrawled on it say ‘Happy birthday, midget’. Leave it to Zelena to remind her of her height, but the jab was all in love and she can appreciate the fact that Zelena actually kept that particular tradition going. Usually her mother would make her that cake, but Zelena made it for her and it was gorgeous. She’d taken her time and Regina could feel it but she willed them away. Those tears would run her dry if she kept letting them fall, but this time- they were once again happy and when she hugged her sister with so much strength that Zelena had to joke that Regina was stronger than she thought, she released her and shook her head. She had tried calling Nori, but got no answer. They cut up the cake and everyone eats a slice until the group heads over to one of the ‘clubs’ that was geared more towards the dancers. The movers and shakers of the town. It’s lively, it’s exciting. It is absolutely everything she needed in that moment and she finds herself dancing with just about everyone, avoiding Emma and Chris who didn’t bother letting go of one another anyway. Oliver takes up most of her time and then she’s dancing with Aliya and it’s a different kind of dance because the music is slow and the woman before her has a hand resting gently to the small of her back and another set just on her shoulder. It’s one of the prom positions she remembers from being with Nori and Aliya keeps her entertained and happy and laughing, with absolutely so much ease and surprise that Emma becomes pretty damn jealous. She’s just about to fall completely in love with the moment when her phone rings and she pulls away. Aliya releases her hold and watches Regina rush out the door as she answers.

It’s Nori and as promised, Nori is singing her happy birthday. They talk and catch up, which means it goes from happy to sad to happy to sad and it stays sad for a bit until Regina tells Nori something happy again and that’s what’s just transpired. Other than that- Regina claims she has nothing else happy to tell Nori, but they still find things to talk about and they talk about everything from Kevin to Nori’s classes to Regina’s now ending summer vacation. She admits she’s hoping she can avoid Emma for a good while because the summer was just atrocious, but she also admits that it’s opened her eyes to some new things and she’s nearly positive with this new information, she might be able to better gauge where she stands with Emma and what she know she won’t even bother to do with Emma anymore.

And that just might be more than fifty percent of everything they usually do together.

After Regina and Nori say goodbye to one another, Regina heads back inside and sees Oliver dancing with his mom and she gently cuts in to dance with them both, the music is still slow and it’s still relaxing and before she realizes it, their entire group as formed a circle and they’re dancing together. By the time most of them get tired, Regina’s still dancing, she’s still going with the gentle sway of the rhythm. She’s still feeling her energy, her raw emotions, everything she hadn’t been able to get out of her system since all this shit has been happening and people watch her. They watch her in awe as her body moves with that exact demonstration of control, of dominance, of brokenness. They watch the way her body moves with the absent feeling of judgment. Her body floats and crashes. It shatters and repairs. Everything happens right before their eyes and most can see her story, but she hasn’t shown them her true pain.
And then she falls, heavily—she falls. She falls to the ground and she starts to cry and it’s then, in that moment that arms are around her. She doesn’t know who it is, but the arms around her are holding her together and keeping her strong as the person manages to lift her up and out of the building and set her down in the limo. They hold her head in their lap and she falls asleep, staccato tears and breathing as she drifts into a dreamless world.

When she comes to only slightly enough, she’s in her bed back at the manor and Oliver is there in his mother’s lap, watching her. Regina stirs and coughs and immediately Oliver shakes Aliya awake and she shudders. Regina sees her smile and she manages to smile back before Aliya stands and walks over to her, bending to kiss the top of her head.

“Happy birthday, baby doll,” she whispers before she watches Regina drift once again and the second time Regina comes to, it’s because Emma’s shaking her awake. Because Emma doesn’t seem to care that she needed the rest, all because Emma wanted to talk and justify her reasons, but that’s always been what Emma wanted, never what Regina wanted. And it doesn’t even make her mad anymore, it infuriates her. But, what’s the point in getting pissy mad over a situation Emma will claim innocence from. It makes no sense getting upset when Emma will claim no one else did this so that’s why she did that and that she had every right and that it’s not as serious as everyone keeps making it out to be. Just.. it makes no sense.

So, when Emma tells her she wants to talk, Regina doesn’t respond vocally. She doesn’t respond physically. She actually doesn’t respond at all, but Emma still finds that as reason to ‘apologise’ and yet still find reason to dismiss how she was earlier, but that’s just it. That’s all Emma ever seems to do. Find excuse after excuse after excuse and all for justification.

Too bad Regina doesn’t give a damn about her excuses anymore.

Too bad, Regina doesn’t even care.

It’s just...too bad
Moving on and Moving through

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, you guessed it, Regina is starting to move on, but not before one more hiccup that surprisingly, had nothing to do with Emma.

Chapter Notes

The next chapter will feature another hop forward into their teen years. More shenanigans and a huge twist of surprise hits with an unsuspecting character. As always, I apologise for it being late but fighting writer's block is a tough nut to crack. Enjoy and thanks for reading!

Something about that summer being over, made Regina more happy than anything else. School may have been starting soon, but she could do with the distraction. Emma and Chris had one of their sickeningly sweet couple moments in the airport, claiming they’ll call each other every night and all that other garbage you usually hear and Regina shook her head. She shook her head for many reasons; one of the main reasons being, she knew- and Emma and Chris knew, they wouldn’t last but a month if they’re lucky. As Zelena had called it, it’s another one of those summer flings. But, they didn’t say anything on that or comment on that, and it wasn’t as if Regina cared for it anymore, anyway. Emma could do what she wanted. It wasn’t Regina’s choice to make or her opinion to have. Besides, she had her own distractions. There was Oliver, there was Nori and there was Aliya..

Zelena was going back to Wade, Katherine, the school soccer team and more than half of her grade that she hung around and hung with. Auggie was going back home to gloat that he’d been kissed on the cheek by an older girl to his own friends and classmates. Emma was going back with a boyfriend in another state and many nights of late calling to come. All fine and good, but Regina was beginning to harbour something that was simply bourne of confusion and it began right in Maine. It was to do with a certain birthday twin and his mother. At first, Regina tried not to think much of it, claiming it was her own imagination or that it was just some residual emotion that came way out of left field. But her logical side told her she knew that wasn’t what it was and she had ended up drowning in that belief for a good while.

Oliver had begged his mother to let him go see Regina off and Aliya had agreed without much restraint at all.

Strike One.

And then there was the fact that Oliver begged her to come as well and once again, she had agreed without much restraint.

Strike Two.

But that isn’t what caught Regina’s full attention. Her attention and confusion peaked when she saw the way Aliya and Oliver stood there in that airport like she was sending her husband off for war and
Oliver was hoping his daddy would come back alive... And Regina only thought husband because Aliya was with Jeremy a while back. She didn’t know if the woman ever...experienced that other side of that spectrum.

*Strike Three.*

But none of that stuck because illogical Regina came into play and illogical Regina was like the blind leading the blind. She just found reasons to write each one of them off, hoping to quell her confusion right then and there. Aliya only allowed Oliver to come see her off because he’s her birthday twin and she babysat him. Aliya only came because it would be easier to get Oliver there and back home instead of letting him travel with her grandparents. And they were only looking at her that way because they’ll miss her... she dare not say because she was someone worth being missed, though. *See, there. No more confusion...right? Right?!* she’d thought to herself as she sat in the aisle seat of the plane. Emma was sitting next to her and Regina had tried everything in the book to inch as much away from the blonde as she possibly could. But that was useless. There was nothing more she could do except ask for a seat transfer, but if she did that, it would look like she was making a big deal out of nothing and Regina already had to function with having eyes on her, daily. She didn’t need anymore attention than that.

She pretended to sleep and listen to music and Emma, for her part, pretended not to notice. They hadn’t really talked since Emma made the ‘mistake’ of getting the young girl a smoothie with apples in it. They hadn’t talked since Emma brushed it off like it was no big deal *after* Regina’s seizure. And they hadn’t talked unless forced to since Emma flat out said that August was overreacting and nothing was wrong with Regina. But that was just Emma...wasn’t it? That was what best friends said because, nothing seriously medical mattered. None of Regina’s possible reactions mattered. Simply put, Regina clearly didn’t matter. But things that did matter were named Christopher Ivan Josephs. Things that did matter was spending all her time with Christopher Ivan Josephs. All her attention was on *Christopher Ivan Josephs*, and you know what... Zelena stopped giving a damn. August stopped giving a damn first. Doesn’t mean none of it hadn’t hurt, but after a while, she remembers going numb. She ended up spending the last few weeks of her time, sleeping at Aliya’s simply because she no longer cared. Emma could do who and whatever she wanted, Regina wasn’t about to stop her.

But now they were in a plane, heading back home to parents who would want to know how their summers went. To parents who would want to know just what they got up to, to parents who- half knew the situation and the other half didn’t. That’s what they had to go back to and that’s what Regina found herself trying to figure out how she was going to get out of it. She sighed gently and shifted before she felt something touching her. She opened her eyes and saw that it was Emma’s hand gently resting on her thigh and she had to wonder why. Regina looked up to see Emma looking at her phone, but her hand was still on the young girl’s thigh. She cleared her throat and Emma chanced a glance at her before she whispered,

“You sound stressed...just breathe, everything’s gonna be fine.”

Well, that threw the brunette for a loop. Her own eyebrows rose in suspicion, and based on her lack of response and Emma peeking over at her, once the blonde had removed her hand from Regina’s thigh, she’d shut her own eyes and turned her head towards the window. Regina just watched for a moment more before she distracted herself with something else.
Their plane ride ended and they were jet lagged. After the four of them got their bags from the carousel and made their way out of the airport, they didn’t have to wait too long to see that their parents were there and waiting. Pleasantries and love were done and out of the way before Henry helped Zelena get her now three suitcases into the back of the car as Cora took Regina’s still, one duffel and set it down in the back as well. Emma and Auggie managed with their own on the back of their father’s truck and then climbed in. Unaware that their parents had something planned, they’d arrived at a restaurant and were told to go inside. Based on how much August and Zelena were now communicating, they barely took notice of Regina and Emma’s lack of direct communication. If Auggie or Zelena made a joke, of course they laughed and chimed it, but none of those words were ever directly towards one another and that’s what they’ve come to. Regina didn’t know if Emma being the way she was in the plane earlier was her attempt at trying again or if it was because she realized she only had Regina when they were due back in school. But whatever the reason, it was clear Emma was more inclined to trying to communicate with her. Under the impression that they could just fall back into it..now that was another story. The topic of what they got up to that summer comes up in the little side conversations the children have with their parents. That much was the expectancy that Regina had still, not been prepared for. So, she told them exactly what she did. Which was babysit, cry and babysit some more. She told them (that being anyone who had asked) about her birthday with Oliver and stopped just before the whole seizure in a juice shop scene, politely (figuratively) stepped over that and got to the part of dinner and dancing. Her mother asks about Nori and Regina smiles with pride as she tells her about how Nori had kept their promise and had called her. She also tells them that she’s got a shirt Oliver was serious about her having and that Aliya bought it for her. The blush that creeps across her face at the mention of the woman, was enough for her father and her mother to notice. Yet, they say nothing because who knows anymore. They had teenagers with hormones and questions.

Questions geared towards Emma come in the exact same form but instead of Emma claiming that Chris was her boyfriend, she stuck with saying that he was someone real special to her, that he was like her best friend. Zelena shared a look with Auggie who shrugged helplessly and the mood at the table shifted. Some of that attention ended up on Regina, but her reaction was nonexistent. She hadn’t flinched or scowled or looked heartbroken. She just looked like Regina. If anyone wanted to say something or comment, they didn’t. There was just a train of smiles that hid concern. Question.. And whatever else went through their minds. But no one says anything on the referencing of Chris and best friend status, it comes more with Auggie saying what he said to get the awkward looks to go away that,

“Chris is her boyfriend and he’s so weird,” which in turn had Emma rolling her eyes and scowling at her brother. Zelena smothered a snicker and Emma’s father’s eyebrow shot up in contemplation of the words. Surprisingly enough, David didn’t go all cop dad on her, but he did ask why she didn’t just say Chris was what he was to her. She’d uncomfortably shrugged and swallowed thickly before apologising. It may have been unorthodox for Auggie to do, but it worked..kind of. Regina had given him a thankful smile and Auggie had nodded inconspicuously.

The dinner goes fine enough and the Mills clan stay over at the Nolan’s home per request by the Nolans. Once again, All fine and good, but Regina chose to sleep in the backyard and Emma chose to stay in her room. Emma had a call date with Chris and Regina had a date with her own rampant thoughts in the quiet of the backyard. Everything came crashing down somewhere between nightfall and sunrise.
She was 15 now...they both were. They were also ninth graders now, but that was another thing to think of on another day that didn’t matter like most of the days that currently don’t as well. She lay there in the Nolan’s backyard- sprawled out and trying to will her thoughts away so that she could start getting her sleep schedule back on track. But, her trying went in vain as she thought on. Auggie had asked for Regina and Zelena to sleep over after they’d all started school once again. As per his request, both girls had agreed, but once again, Regina found herself hiding out in the backyard as Emma remained shut inside of her room. Her parents said nothing and couldn’t deny Regina from laying in the backyard, they’d just told her to be safe where she slept, less she be subject to waking up with dog poop somewhere on her. She’d tried her hardest to find it funny, but it was ironic that at that point, she’d felt like nothing but shit. Going back to school was alright. Their classes were going to be fine for the most part, at least as far as she could tell; and Emma and Chris would surprisingly last more than a month with their now long distance relationship. Since that summer from hell, Regina had somewhat given up on the thought of Emma in general and the hope that she would change, or even give her some form of genuine attention that wasn’t revolving around a guy or herself. It seemed Emma only called when she missed homework or wanted help on how to handle Chris and her distant relationship. But the funny part about that came when Emma had called the first evening to get help with Chris, that she’d told Regina she was calling for Zelena. Why? Well obviously because Zelena was with Wade and Regina wasn’t dating and Emma figured she had some sort of.. friendship with Zelena now that she could ask about those kinds of things. There was also the whole point of Regina realizing something in depth that she hadn’t allowed herself to understand until she got back to KeyWe. Something she forbade herself to admit and accept since she was in the damn airport terminal back in Maine.

She had a crush. A massive one.

She had a crush on a woman who was absolutely sweet to her. She had a crush on a woman who was a good bit of years ahead of her. Regina had a crush on a mother and a woman who was more of a friend than her best friend was a friend.

She had a crush on Aliya.

Shit.

At fourteen, she didn’t know what that thumping in her heart meant. She didn’t know what that sped up heart rate meant. She didn’t know what feeling breathless around her meant. She didn’t know why she felt as complete as she did when it was just her and Oliver and Aliya. She didn’t know much until she got back and her father seemed curious as to why she looked, both depressed and yet still, happy in the same breath. Because she had tried convincing herself of that otherwise, but it’s been three months since they’ve been back and it’s illogical to believe it was anything other than a crush She remembers when he asked her specifically,

“What’s got you so smitten, mija?” and she had blushed red, crimson even before she said.

“I think I have a crush on grandad’s assistant, and I don’t know what to do about it.” That had literally shocked her father and made him panic because his baby was only fifteen and he was nearly positive if it’s the assistant they all know very well, it was Aliya. When Henry had asked her the name and she had confirmed it was in fact Aliya, he had to take a seat and stare at her for a good bit
which had made her uncomfortable, but he didn’t know what to say.

“You have a crush… on Aliya?”

“.uhuh,”

“And you’re sure it’s a crush?” Henry questions his youngest and she swallows thickly.

“I think so,” Regina admits, scared and coming close to tears.

“Sweetheart, I’m sorry if I’m asking questions or making you uncomfortable, but I’m just trying to understand where it is you stand on your feelings for her,” Henry tried to clarify and Regina nodded a little too quickly for his liking. She was still, in fact, afraid. Henry sighs gently before he reaches out and rests a hand on her thigh. “Does she know how you feel?” he asks her and Regina looks like a deer in headlights, violently shaking her head in the negative.

“I’m fifteen, I can’t tell her how I feel! She’ll laugh in my face or something!” she blurted so heartbroken and fearful that he had to quickly switch his position to shake her shoulders.

“Regina, listen to me. You need to calm down, okay? I need you to calm down for me and let me wrap my head around it all….,” he had tried to communicate, but then he trailed off, unable to express what he truly wanted to. So, Henry settles for a question instead. “What about Emma?” he had asked and she looked at him with a weird face that he knew too well.

“What do you mean, what about Emma?” she had asked and he smiled sadly.

“It’s okay, baby girl. Your mami and I already knew after your declaration when you came out, who you had said you’d fall in love with…. We were both wondering why it was you hadn’t told her,” he’d rambled and as he looked at his youngest, he saw more pain cross her features than anything else. And then the tears and the sniffles came, but she didn’t want him to hold her. She didn’t want her father to coddle and cradle her. She didn’t want to focus on it, but God damn it- it was so painful, it was hard not to.

“Emma’s still dating that guy named Chris.. And… things happened. We can’t be together,” she tried waving off.

“What happened?” her father pushed and she sniffled again before wiping her tears. Regina then finds herself laughing, bitterly.

“What didn’t happen… the worst thing she could’ve done, she already did,” Regina shrugged out her response and her father’s eyes went solemn.

“Sweetheart, I don’t think her dating someone is cause for you to be upset with her-,”

“-OH-hoho, that’s not what she did. I couldn’t care less about her dating Chris. It’s the fact that she forgot my birthday and tried to make it up with a card from hallmark that costs eighty nine cents. She didn’t even sign it! She can date Chris, I don’t care! But as my best friend… forgetting my birthday is a stab to the heart. And Emma knows we don’t buy each other that junk. We never buy
cards. Ever! We make each other birthday gifts, she knows that! And she goes to Hallmark, buys some crappy card and doesn’t even bother to put something in it. Words! Her name! SOMETHING!-

“Okay!..okay, mija.. Okay,” he tries but she is vibrating with anger.

“No, daddy! Not Okay! Okay?! It’s not freaking okay! She forgot my birthday. She’s been so terrible to me this entire summer and then- THEN, she gets me a smoothie with apple in it! She knows my allergies and still gets my smoothie with apple in it and it’s all because she only cares about Chris. Everything is Chris! I’m having a god damn seizure and she’s stunned into oblivion because it hits her that she did this to me! If Auggie wasn’t there, I’d be dead! And she scared Oli, too! She just stood there in shock because of her guilt and when I’m fine, she makes it seem like it wasn’t even a big deal! How can someone be that heartless and say it’s not that big of a deal!”

But now, now she was laying there in the grass, eyes flitting over to gaze at Emma’s window. Her lights are on and her curtains are cracked and Regina can just make out her figure behind the sheer material as Emma paces in the front of the window. Then, Regina sees her pause and a finger hooks around it before tugging it out of the way gently. Emma peaks down at her backyard, the cellphone that was once at her ear, drifting down to her stomach. Regina can see Emma staring down at her and her eyes stay locked on to the blonde, but she’s positive Emma can’t see she’s looking right back at her..

Through yonder window breaks. It is not the east and Emma...Emma is not the sun she thought before turning her head and sighing gently. Regina shut her eyes as she rolled over.

Emma is not the sun….

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Regina stood there staring at the mass crowd of students, clustering in areas at the front of the school. Being back and starting another grade was always stressful because in most cases, everyone just wanted to know if their friends were coming back to suffer with them as well. You’d think that almost three full months into school that they’d all be used to it, but people were still struggling just to find their classes, and who wasn’t struggling with that was already wracking their brains about SATs and nationals, and pretty much every other ‘major’ course of their lives. Regina spun around gently, eyes narrowing and scanning the groups that formed. There were many new students and some of the old ones had departed, but it seemed like an equal balance of replacements had come. Auggie and Zelena were back into their usual soccer runs and games, though- they didn’t have many during the winter season. Regina’s photography elective was solidified and thankfully, they had switched around the art room, putting the students in a smaller one and giving Regina and whoever else had joined photography a completely separate room. Granted, all elective classes were lined up right next to one another, but Regina didn’t have to worry about Emma’s green eyes staring that smoldering look right into the back of her neck. She didn’t have to worry if Emma was contemplating talking to her or whatever it may have been. She just had to go to class, do her work and go home. And as if that wasn’t obvious enough for the people at school, even their dogs picked up on it. Nougat was getting leaner, longer- taller even and Daxter was as well. The baby fat on Daxter’s face was still evident, but for the most part, both boys had grown to rather impressive structures. Nougat stopped visiting Daxter so much, opting to comfort Regina instead, simply because he could sense her distress. But what made Regina so teary eyed was the day that Daxter decided he was coming over and he did. He walked all the way to the Mills’ home and settled beside Nougat. That was what Regina saw as true friendship. Nougat stopped going to Daxter, so Daxter...
came to him.

Regina’s coursework for the term was something that embodied things she’s dealt with all her life. Feelings she’s let go simply because she’s convinced herself that the pain of it is what she deserves when in all reality, this young woman deserved nothing but the joy and happiness someone who loved her could give her….and those were words that came from Nori. Those were words Aliya had actually said to her without saying to her and now she questioned it all. But it didn’t stop there, her project would encompass hurt, pain, heartbreak and she just had to wonder if her teacher took one look at her and went, *Eureka! By George, I’ve found the topic for the semester!* Because, how in the hell was this right up her alley and she was already vibrating with an unknown need to get it over with.

Whilst she was fifteen and held onto that crush she had on Aliya, there was nothing much else she had focused on. She excelled in her classes as usual, and mostly kept to herself, but had surprisingly made a few friends because of her work during the formal the year before. Most of it was simply admiration and Regina soon realized that as she found herself walking around, still by herself and only being waved at or acknowledged by the others when they were singing her praises- that she hadn’t made any friends at all. *God I wish Nori was here!* she had whined to herself because she could really use it. She was alone in that small yet, seemingly massive, high school. She couldn’t bother her sister who was a whole two grades ahead of her.

“Do you know how badly you’d get ragged on if they knew you were my little sister and you didn’t have any friends except Emma?” she distinctly remembers hearing her sister ask and she had scowled at the mention of Emma’s name. Zelena wasn’t saying it to be mean. Quite the opposite in fact. Where she had Wade to protect her and Katherine, amongst others that could vouch for being her friends, Regina was solo- pro bono. Eleventh graders were ruthless and relentless. And simply because Regina and Zelena looked nothing alike at first glance, not very many students knew they were sisters. Regina was awkward and Zelena wasn’t. Regina was shy and Zelena wasn’t. Zelena was athletically inclined and Regina was a klutz pretty much everyday of her life.. And Zelena had friends.. Regina..well, she didn’t even have Emma anymore and her other friend was states away.

But, like whirlwinds, exams came, she studied, she passed with excellent marks and her father handed her a ticket for her flight as an unaccompanied minor to Maine. She was escorted to her plane and put in first class. Tended to and smiled at, and it made her blush and be even more timid. Her grade nine year had already started out shitty, but she had good grades. That was her only fall back, literally. Zelena was coming over about two or three weeks later and that’s if she didn’t change her mind about spending Christmas with Wade and his family. Their parents were supposed to fly to Maine as well, considering Cora hadn’t seen her own parents in a while and Regina’s grandmother needed to scold Henry once again. Emma hadn’t even blinked twice at the offer. She was definitely going to Maine because she told Chris Regina was going and that way she’d get to see him if he came. He’d agreed and managed to convince his parents to let him go. Oddly enough though, Emma was like a puppy, following exactly into Zelena’s footsteps, and she too had some strange thought about how she’d spend three weeks with Chris before a trip too, that was until Zelena popped her bubble and reminded her that Chris lived no where near them and that it’d never happen. August, as much as he loved the Sorentinis, he wanted to see Tennessee. His grandparents wanted to see him and Emma, but Emma whined for the better part of her last week in school just to go to Maine. At first her claim was because of Regina, but somehow, her mother had figured it out that it wasn’t. And as much as she wanted to scold her child for lying. She didn’t. She didn’t bother because Emma was at the age where anything she told them could be a lie and Mary Margaret really was not in for going through the torturous years of trying to decipher lies from the truth. And reluctantly, she had agreed, for many reasons. To prevent more unnecessary whining, and to simply just reduce having an argument with Emma over not visiting her grandparents. But those two were just the main ones.
As Regina thought on and on and on, things in her mind started to fall in line. She’d get the chance to see Oliver once again and babysit much like the previous summer. Why? Because Christmas break was coming—hell, it was already there—and she already told her parents that’s where she wanted to go. Maine was her first and only choice. It’s where her life began. West HollyWood...well, that was for people like Nelson and the Nolan’s. Quiet Maine was the place for her. No one expected more than she could give and she could be her beautifully awkward self as much as she wanted to. It also didn’t hurt that she had people supporting her embracing who she was as she got older. She already convinced her parents it’s where she needed to be and at first, her father was under the assumption it had more to do with her crush than anything else, but based on her mother’s assessment, Cora managed to convince Henry it was more so because Regina genuinely liked it there and adored Oliver—which she did. But that didn’t mean she also didn’t want to figure out what the hell kind of crush she was harbouring either. She ensures a call to Nori, just to give the teen a head’s up considering Nori’s break will pretty much never coincide with Regina’s until she graduates.

“Owww, you’re gonna spend all of Christmas break with your new girlfriend!” Nori teased and Regina groaned.

“Shut Up!”

“What? It’s kind of obvious, Regina.. I wouldn’t be surprised if she likes you too,” the teen had said. Regina could sense the wink in Nori’s words and groaned even more.

“Nori, I doubt Aliya even knows I exist that way,”

“Trust me, she knows.. You’re just...”

“.too young,” Regina finished with a sigh and Nori nodded.

“Yup, just a little too young, Kiddo. But, don’t do anything reckless or regrettable. She could get into trouble and you wouldn’t be able to see her again,” Nori reminded.

“Trust me. I know that much. But even if I admit to this stupid crush-,”

“-it’s not stupid. It’s real. What you are feeling is real and you deserve to feel that, but continue,”

“If I admit these feelings to her. What’s the point? What does that give me?”

“A good night’s rest and a clearer head,” Nori said easily.

“Nor, I’m serious,”

“So am I. Listen, you’re stressing and stressed out over this when all you should be focusing on is handling it. The whole point of you admitting your feelings is to figure out where that person has you on their spectrum. Are you reflecting light or refracting light?”

“Aren’t they both bad?”

“Well, yeah, but I mean a reflection can reference memory or an empathetic state or—wait, stop distracting me!” Nori whined and Regina giggled. “I’m just saying, if you don’t tell Aliya anything, you’ll be stuck with the what ifs and not the ‘I did. I’ve done’ kind of feeling,”

“And now you quote Beyoncé,”

“Focus!” Nori waited only to have Regina giggle again.
“I’m sorry, but you walked into that one. I get what you’re saying though. It’s kind how I’ll probably never tell Emma, not that I need to anymore,”

“Emma’s just, a lost cause right about now. She’ll come back to you eventually,”

“People don’t wait around forever, Nori,”

“Who said anything about forever?”

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Because Regina arrives first, Klause isn’t there to greet her this time, it’s surprisingly Oliver and Aliya.

“Reginaaaaa!” Oliver wailed happily as he tore down for her and she bent to give him a hug. Oliver wrapped his arms around her neck as she lifted him and held him close. His legs were the next to wrap around her as she grinned and he admitted, “I missed you lots!”

“I missed you too, buddy,” she whispers before opening her eyes and seeing Aliya come closer to them.

“Hey cutie,” Aliya smirked and Regina couldn’t help her blush.

“Hi Aliya,” she answered, but the tone of her voice was barely a whisper. Still, her obvious fear and whatever else she felt was just rolling through her mind.

“It’s only been three months and you get more beautiful every time I see you, doesn’t she Oli?” his mother asked and Oliver nodded emphatically.

“Gina’s always pretty, momma,” he corrects.

“That she is,” Aliya agrees before she looks down. “Is that all you brought for winter?”

“Being in Key West, you don’t really… do winter,” Regina told her and she nodded.

“Ahhh, well we’ll have to get you some things then, especially if it snows. You’ll want to be warm.”

If you held me I’d always be warm Regina thought and immediately she shook her head and plastered a smile on her face. Regina then sets Oliver down and grabs her bag before she feels Aliya’s arm settle over her shoulder as she speaks.

“Is it just you this Christmas?”

“Mmm.. oh- no. Mami and Papi are coming in a couple of weeks. Lena might come if she’s not spending Christmas with Wade.. and I think Lena said something about Auggie going back to Tennessee to see his grandparents,” she recapped, but she didn’t sound the least bit interested in her own words.

“Mmmmm, and what about Emma?” Aliya questioned and Regina felt herself go slightly rigid before she paused to think. She shakes her head.
“Emma and I haven’t really spoken since the last time we were here. As far as I know, she’s still dating Chris and that’s all I do know. She doesn’t call to talk to me anymore. She always calls to talk to Lena about relationships and I don’t fit in anywhere in that, you know?” she’d ended up asking and Aliya gave a sad look.

“I do, kiddo.. So, what about your love life? Anyone new? Any boyfriends...or girlfriends?” Aliya made sure to ask carefully, noting the way Regina went red in the face.

“No.. I don’t...like boys like that. And I have a crush, but she’ll never return the feeling,” Regina admitted. Aliya’s eyebrow rose. Regina was looking away from her.

“Don’t sell yourself so short,” she said before taking Regina’s chin in her hand and turning her face back to see her. “You’d be surprised how people feel about you,” she ended, a small smile tugging at her lips. Regina nodded, chin still firmly tucked into Aliya’s hand. The woman let go and stood up straight. “Besides, if she doesn’t return the feelings, her loss right?” she asked but Regina couldn’t find it in herself to agree with any of that. She didn’t realize she’d shook her head until Aliya smirked at her. “Not her loss, huh.. She’s a lucky girl then.”

Woman, but who’s keeping track?

“Not to make you tired of being here already, but we have to go shopping for your winter gear,” Aliya said almost motherly and Regina groaned.

“Now?”

“Yes,” she laughed. “Now is a good a time as any. Besides, I saw you shivering for the half a minute we stood outside just to carry your bags. You’re only so big Regina. You need warm clothes,” she tells her and Regina pouts. Aliya reaches out and taps her lip.

“Don’t do that. It’s cute and it’s hard to deny Oli when he does that. You’re older, it makes it even harder,” she admitted and Regina couldn’t help but blush at the compliment. She buckled up and looked back to see Oliver in his carseat, already distracted by his tablet. His headphones were in and he was bobbing his head. “Don’t mind him. He’s watching music videos. He thinks he’s the next Michael Jackson,” she jokes and Regina snorted before turning back.

“I don’t think I’ve ever seen Oli dance,” she admits and Aliya’s eyebrow raises.

“Ohhh, you will,” Aliya smiles before starting the car and heading towards the Winter shops.

“Aiya?” Regina calls and the woman slows the car to look over at the young teen.

“Yes, sweetheart,” she answered but Regina could swear she swallowed her entire tongue with the way she ended up choking on a gasp. Aliya was quick to pull the car over, park it and rub soothing circles on Regina’s back, laughing worriedly. “If that was some pre-warning for what just happened, try telling me that, will you?” she teased and Regina turned crimson.

“I’m sorry,”she apologised but the woman shook her head.

“No need.. But what did you need?”

“Hmm?”

“You called me. I assume to ask me a question or tell me something,” the woman reminded. Regina hesitated before shaking her head. How the hell am I going to tell her after that!
“It’s nothing.. Nevermind,” she tried.

“You sure?”

“Mhm.. we can go now,” she informs before shifting away from the spot she hadn’t realized she was in. One that was very very close to Aliya’s chest. Aliya nods, still not convinced, but she puts the car in motion anyway and drives down the strip. Somewhere during their ride, Aliya had gotten a call and informed Regina’s grandparents that she had her and was taking her to get some winter gear. Regina said hi to her grandparents for that moment and had told them she needed to hung up because they had reached the shopping district. After hanging up and heading into the first store, Regina was immediately overwhelmed. She felt Oliver hold her hand and sigh.

“You okay, buddy?” she asked but he shook his head.

“I don’t like it in here. There’s too many things and too many people. It hurts my head and makes me want to cry,” he admits and Regina’s face goes so sad. She gulps back her saliva and bends to his height. She looks at his eyes as he continues to express his emotions. “Momma says I’m scared for a reason and that it’s okay, but I don’t wanna be scared. I don’t like bein’ scared. It stinks!” he complains and he heart hurts for him.

“I’m sorry, bud. You know, these places scare me too,” she said and he nodded. “But your mom’s right. It’s okay to be scared sometimes. And trust me, I know what that feels like. It makes you feel dizzy and it makes you panic because there’s so many colours and things to look at. And then it makes you forget what you were supposed to be doing or what you wanted to do and because you can’t remember, you forget to do the thing,” she continues and he nods again.

“Do you get super super scared, Regina?”

“All the time, Oli. All the time. But, guess what?”

“What?”

“You’re here with me today and I’m here with you. So I’m not scared right now;”

“But what about when you’re not here..”

“Then, I just have to remember my super special, awesome little guy in Maine who just happens to be my most favourite birthday twin ever,”

“That’s me?”

“Definitely,” she winked before hugging him. “Now, do you think you can show your momma how brave you are?”

“Yeah, but will you not let go of my hand please?” he had asked and she nodded eagerly. Regina rises back to her full height and walks Oliver over to where Aliya is who is turning around, already holding on to handfuls of winter gear. Regina’s eyebrow raised and Aliya looked like she had blushed at being caught, but her reasoning was,

“All of this isn’t for you. I needed to get Oli some new things and for myself as well.. Is everything alright?”

“Yup!” Oliver grinned at his mother and Regina shrugged playfully.

Aliya pays for their things even though Regina insists she can and they pack those into the car before
Aliya drags them into the shoe store to get boots with thermal lining and all that jazz. After they buy shoes and stuff those into the car, they begin heading towards the Sorentini Manor.

“Momma, do we really have to drop Gina off noooooow!” Oli whined from the back seat. His pout, Regina had to admit- was damn cute. Aliya’s eyes went glassy.


“B-but!” his lip quivered and she heaved a sigh. And then Regina saw it. The tear that fell from his eye. It let her know, he wasn’t crying to get his way. He genuinely did not want to tell Regina goodbye. Again.

“Oli,” Regina called, but he was already hiccupping and looking away from her.

“I don’t wanna talk to you. You’re leaving me again!” he wailed. Regina’s heart broke again.

“Oli, I’m not leaving. I’m just going to be staying with my grandparents for a while,”

“But that’s leavin’!”

“Buddy, I’m only a five minute car ride away. You know that. And I’ll come see you everyday that I’m here and I’ll even beg mami and papi and grandad and grandma to let you and me have a sleepover,” she offered and even with his lip quivering he managed to say.

“C-can momma come too?”

“Only if you’re super good and ask her,” Regina told him and he nodded. “Oli, you know you’re my best friend, don’t you?” she asked him and she found it to be pretty true. He nodded. “Good. So you know that we have to be super good and super sweet and super nice because your momma won’t be able to hear you when you cry. Remember what I taught you?” he nodded again. He wiped at his face before speaking.

“If I want something, I have to ask. If momma says no, it means no. But if I want something and I can get it without hurting someone, then I should go get it,”

“That’s right and doing that teaches you?”

“Responsibility,”

“Awesome, buddy. Now what’s the responsible thing to do, right now?”

“Apologise to momma for my tantrum and ask for the sleepovers?” he queried and Regina grinned. Aliya sat there, shell-shocked and shook beyond measure at how well Regina dominated the conversation and didn’t bargain to get him to calm down. Oliver wasn’t spoiled and he wasn’t rude, but when he threw a tantrum- which was rare, you knew it was because he really really wanted something or needed someone. His attachment to Regina was endearing and worrying because Aliya hadn’t told Regina how badly Oliver had reacted after the fact. After they’d walked out of the airport and it hit the little boy that it would be a while before he saw her, he’d wailed the entire ride home. He’d cried so hard and so long he passed out from lack of oxygen.

“I’m sorry, momma. I was bad,” he tells her. Aliya sighs gently.

“It’s okay, little man. But you don’t owe me an apology. You said you didn’t want to talk to Regina. I don’t think that was very nice, do you?” she asked and he shook his head.
“No.. sorry, Gina,”

“That’s okay, Oliver,” she cooed. She then unbuckled her seatbelt and climbed in the back before leaning against his carseat. He rested his head on hers. “Aliya, do you think you can ride around some more or maybe we can go back to your place for a little while? I don’t have to see my grandparents right this second,” she told her. Aliya, looking in her rearview mirror at Regina holding Oliver’s hand and simply nodded and kept driving. They stopped off for lunch and headed over to the park. Aliya watched as Regina wrangled Oliver in and made sure he ate and washed his hands before letting him play and it did something to her.

“When did you become the kid whisperer?” she had asked and Regina’s loose curls bounced as she turned her head.

“Huh?”

“Oli,” Aliya shifts her head in motion. “When did you learn how to manage with children so well?”

“I didn’t… Oliver and I are just so much alike, I guess it just clicked,” she admitted and Aliya nodded.

“Can I ask you something?” she then queried and Regina nodded. “What’s really going on with you, Regina? You look like you want to say something and can’t. And you look like it’s hurting you to keep it inside,” she comments, but the young girl vehemently denies any of that. Aliya settles her with a look that has her sighing. “Regina, you can tell me… unless you don’t want to tell me-,”

“-No! That’s not it. I just..it’s hard,” she admits.

“What’s hard, sweetie?” Aliya questions, brushing Regina’s hair from her eyes. She feels Regina pull away as she whispers.

“This.”

Aliya is rightfully confused, but by the way Regina won’t look at her, she has a feeling it has something to do with her specifically.

“Regina.. Tell me,” she urges only to hear the young woman sigh deeply.

“I can’t.. It’s embarrassing,” she complains but Aliya ignores her need to shell up and wraps an arm around her. At first, she thinks Regina might shove her away, but then she feels the weight of the young woman press against her side.

“There’s nothing you can tell me that I’ll find embarrassing,” Aliya assured her and she sighed again.

“But….nevermind,” Regina conceded. She took one very huge breath before she spoke.“I have a crush,”

“I remember.. You said she wouldn’t return the feeling.. Why do you think that?”

‘Because I can’t offer her anything at all, and it just wouldn’t work,” Regina admitted dejectedly. Aliya huffed.

“Why do you think it won’t work?”

“because…because, she’s older than me and she already has someone else in her life and… it just wouldn’t work,”
“How much older is she?” Aliya then asked and was surprised when Regina looked up from her fingernails to ask.

“How old are you again?”

“27,” Aliya offered in response and Regina sighed.

“Well, she’s our age gap older than me,”

“That’s an entire child,” Aliya found herself saying. Regina groaned. “Aww, hey- hey. Come on. I’m sure she’ll give you a chance. When you’re older. But you have a crush on a woman who’s so close to her thirties, it’s frightening,” Aliya said, not realizing she was partially dogging herself.

“But that’s just it. She’s. Beautiful and like her, and I like being around her because she doesn’t make me feel like a kid. I can’t tell her how much it hurts my heart because I’m not old enough. Because I’m not experienced enough, because I haven’t lived long enough. I can’t tell her that over three months ago when I started feeling the way I did, it hurt like a freight train to know it could never be. And I can’t tell her that because she’s. She won’t see me that way. Ever.”

“And what makes you think that?” Aliya had questioned, slowly realizing just who Regina might be talking to. Tears fell from the young girl’s eyes and Aliya brushed them away with her thumb.

“Because, she baby sat me and now she’s coddling me and wiping my tears away. I don’t think she sees me as anything more than a crying child. I don’t think she sees me. I don’t….I’m sorry,” Regina apologises, immediately pulling away and stumbling off the bench before she’s running down the sidewalk, Aliya shouting her name as she tried to walk faster.

Regina doesn’t know how much distance she’s managed to chip off, but she soon comes to a screeching halt as she walks right into Jeremy and he’s stopping her.

“Woah, kiddo. Slow down there,” he tells her and she tries to step past him.

“Sorry.. I need to go-,”

“-not like this you don’t,” he tells her and she swallows a small growl.

“I’m fine Jeremy. Please leave me alone,” she told him, but he held her in place. Not forcefully, just enough that she couldn’t fidget away.

“You’re not fine. You’re crying and walking into unsuspecting stomachs.. Sit, tell me what happened,” he told her.

“Nothing happened, I’m fine!” she snapped before a jolt ran through her. Jeremy’s eyebrows shot up in surprise, but before he could say anything more, Aliya was coming down with Oliver. Regina rolled her eyes and plopped down on the sidewalk.

“Thank God you got a hold of her!” Aliya thanked him, winded. It was obvious right then and there that something between them had gone down.

“Uhh, yeah.. Is she okay?” he whispered in question but she swallowed and shook her head.

“No, she’s not. Can you give us a minute?”

“Sure thing. Hey Oli!” Jeremy said happily and the little boy looked at his father.

“Hi daddy,”
“Hey bud, do you think you can come with me to get your momma and Regina some ice cream. They have to talk about girl stuff,” he said, playfully scrunching up his face. Oliver looked at his mother and then at Regina before huffing.

“But I wanna talk about the girl stuff too!” he complained and his father laughed instead of getting upset. If Oli turned out to be a little bit more flamboyant than usual, then.

“Oli,” his father grinned.

“NO daddy!” I’m not leavin’,” he said and his father just nodded.

“Okay then. I’ll go get them some ice cream then. Can you keep an eye on your mom for me until I get back?” he then questioned his son before watching Oli nod. Jeremy leaves after a moment and Oliver just sits quietly next to Regina. Aliya doesn’t hesitate before she sits on the other side and speaks.

“You wanna tell me why you ran away?” she asked only to have Regina sigh deeply and wrap her arms around her legs.

“No,” she said shortly. Aliya huffed.

“Regina-,”

“-I’m fine. Just.. can you leave me alone, please,” she had almost begged.

“I can’t. You’re hurting and you ran away from me….” she reminds her and Regina shrugs half-heartedly.

“Yeah well, that’s what you do when you like someone and they don’t like you back-,”

“-Regina, stop,” Aliya interrupted. Regina stopped speaking. “I never said I didn’t.. I mean, you’re too young. I mean- what I’m saying is, you just told me that and you bolted. That’s kind of hard to handle when you feel like it was you who hurt that person… You said you had a crush on someone and then you got flustered and told me it was me without telling me directly that it was me.. I was shocked. I have to admit, I was shocked. I’m not- I don’t-,”

“-like me like that. Yeah, I know that. It’s fine. Don’t say anything about it anymore. I’m too young. You don’t see me that way and that’s fine,”

“Regina, that’s not it,” Aliya tried but the teen practically glared at her.

“Isn’t it though? I mean.. Think about how badly this looks. I’m fifteen and I have some school-kid crush on you that you won’t return because, I’m too young. I’m not your type. I…. I’m not worth it,”

“Okay, first-,” Aliya grins beside herself and better judgment. “-you are my type. The innocent eyes. The dark hair. The beautiful smile and the amazing mind.. Yeah, that’s my type. And gender has nothing to do with it either,” she tells her and Regina is now looking at her skeptically. “Yes you’re too young, but trust me you’re worth it. More than worth it. It’s your age more than it is anything. And I like you.. Maybe not the way you’d hoped I would. But Regina, I have a child, an ex and a complex. I don’t give myself time to like people. I don’t give myself time to fall in love with people. And I can’t give myself time to string along such an amazing young woman for the better half of her becoming legal enough to explore that side of it with her. You’re a teenager and you’re meant to have many crushes. Many bouts of puppy love. You’re meant to have many things, but Regina, don’t put all your eggs in one basket every time your heart feels heavy with love and adoration. Even I’m not worth that. And I get it, okay. I’ve been there. Crushing on someone I thought would never
return the exact same feeling as me. But I learned something. That’s how some crushes go. They hurt
like hell or they end really sweetly, but never in between. I can’t tell you that I’ll ever give myself the
chance to see what it is you want to explore between us, but I’m not saying no either. It’s just your
age. Even kissing you at fifteen is a crime, but I tell you what,” she says before leaning in and
pressing her lips gently to Regina’s cheek. “How about we start there, you explore the world of
liking girls, and keep me bookmarked for later?” she had then asked only to see Regina tearily laugh
and hug her tightly.

“I see why you were always such a vocal mess when we were younger,”

“You always knew I was never that good with my words, but I hope you understand what I was
trying to tell you,” she hopes, hugging her back tightly.

“Yeah, I think I do. It’s my age… I’ll wait, but I’ll do what you suggested. Maybe there are other
girls here I can have crushes on.”

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Though the talk had started emotional, became even more emotional and ended pretty emotional,
Regina felt better after the fact. So, it may not have been the best way for her to admit to Aliya that
she was strung out on puppy love over her, but at least Aliya figured it out and now, she had a
bookmark for later. Aliya didn’t say yes, but she never said no and that was enough for Regina. She
may not be articulate, and neither is Aliya, but it’s better than what she expected. She either expected
to see Aliya laugh at her and tell her it would never be a thing of just flat out play dumb until Regina
gave up in trying. But she was lucky until her little bit of energy poked out.

Jeremy had returned and came back with ice cream before handing it off to each of them and then
sitting next to Aliya. He’d kissed her cheek and smiled the smile Regina remembers seeing so many
times when she was younger. That was the smile she remembers him having because he’d claimed
he was so in love with her. And he was. He really and truly was. But now wasn’t a time for him to
smile at her like.. Like.. like he was still in love with her, unless…

No.

Regina had turned her head away and shot up angrily from her spot, Oliver watched her intently
before calling her and she stopped, forgetting he was even there. Aliya jerked her head away from
Jeremy’s eyes and looked towards Regina, worry creasing back on her face yet again. Regina had
even left her ice cream on the sidewalk as she was trying to escape, but she wouldn’t be able to walk
away that easily.

“Gina,” Oliver called her again and she turned, holding back a deep and slightly depressive sigh.

“Yes Oliver?”

“Where you goin’?”

“I just need to go for a walk, buddy,” she told him, keeping her distance, but Oliver clumsily got up
from his space and buckled into her legs.
“Then I’m goin’ with you,” he declares.

“No, Oli. You have to stay here with your mom,” she had said to him, but he shook his head.

“I wanna go with you!” he whines. She sighs,

“Oli.. no. Just stay here for a little while,” she says a lot less sweet than she usually does.

“But-

“-OLI!” she angrily snapped, immediately regretting it because his lips quivered painfully. Tears started to fall from his eyes and Regina was over to him and on her knees to apologise profusely, cuddling him close and cooing as his tears broke vocally and a ragged staccato tone burst through her eardrums. “Oh God! I’m sorry, baby boy. I am so sorry!” she apologised profusely, but Oli was so hurt, he just kept crying. Regina never snapped at him before. And this time, it was scary. It was enough that even though she frightened him, he still wanted her to be the one to comfort him. He hugged her back with shaking arms and red eyes. “I’m sorry, Oli. I didn’t mean to do that to you.

That was mean of me and I shouldn’t have yelled at you. There’s no excuse for that. I was upset and I should not have done that. I’m so sorry, buddy. I am so so very sorry,” she continued and even with his hiccupped breathing he held onto her tighter. Aliya looked on with a pained expression. She had mixed feelings. She was mad that Regina snapped at Oliver, but she also wondered why she did in the first place. As far as Aliya was concerned… they’d gotten through everything just a moment ago. Regina brushed back Oliver’s hair and held his face in her hands. She looked at him, her own tears streaming down her cheeks. “Oli?” she called and though the child would like to keep his eyes squeezed shut, he opens them. “I’m sorry,” she whispered. Her thumbs stroked away the droplets of water she wishes she wasn’t the cause of.

He nods. He just wants to not feel pain anymore.

“Did I make you mad, Gina?”

“No! God no, Oli. I was upset because… because..” she trailed off before looking back at Aliya and Jeremy who now had his hand wrapped around the woman. Regina sighs and stands before she walks him back to the sidewalk. She bends once more as she speaks. “I was jealous of your dad, Oli,” she admits. She can see the confusion on the child’s face and she continues. “I was jealous because he gets to spend all that time with you and your mommy when I’m not here and I don’t like to share my best friends… but, I was really, super jealous of him cus he gets to give you and your momma kisses.. And I don’t,” she tells him sadly.

“But.. but… you can give me kisses all the time, Gina,” he argues and he laughs a little sadly.

“I know.. But not all the time-;”

“-uhuh!” he argues again but she shakes her head.

“Not all the time, Oli bear. But… “ she says before pressing her cheek to the top of his head. “That’s okay…. Can you forgive me for hurting your feelings earlier?” she’d then asked because, she realizes she hasn’t clarified that much, and she feels horrible about it. But Oli quickly nods it away and holds onto Regina as best he can.

“It’s okay, Gina,” he tells her.

“It’s not Oli. I never wanna make you cry like that again, and I never will.. I’m sorry,” she says to him, holding herself to that promise.
“I am not prepared for your mother yelling at me,” Henry groaned as he and Cora stepped off the plane in Maine. His wife rolled her eyes at him before they continued to walk into the terminal and towards the carousel.

“It honestly baffles me how you could be so frightened of my mother of all people,” Cora teased and Henry managed to glare at her, and keep his eyes on the carousel at the same time.

“We both know that woman hates me on a good day and despises me on a great one. I’m convinced your father only tolerates me because you’re the only child he’s had and I’d be so inclined to call you his princess,” he then teases and now his wife is scowling at him. Cora walks away from Henry and pulls her suitcase off the carousel and he walks up beside her before pulling his own off the carousel. They begin walking out of the terminal and towards the pickup area. Henry leans in whisper something smart to her but she swats his shoulder and he hisses. “Ow- God damn it, woman!” he growled lightly only to see her playful smirk in return. Henry rolls his eyes and scans the area.

“Where’s our ride?”

“Our ride is probably already here and you’re just not looking well enough,” Cora scolds gently. Her husband huffs.

“Well, you do the looking then. Because I’m nearly positive that I don’t see-”

“-Klause!” Cora says happily as she spots the man rather easily. Henry gapes at her for a moment as she turns to look at him and grins. “What? Wasn’t it you who challenged me to find our mode of transportation?” she questioned, trying to feign innocence. Henry’s eyes narrowed before he pinched her butt, but Cora just grinned and took it in stride.

They both turned to see that Klause was nearer to them than when Cora had first spotted him and the look on his face was one of admiration and joy.

“Klause very haypy to see ju!” he grinned only to have both adults grin back. Henry went in for a bear hug that had him lifting Klause up off the ground due to height difference and then there was a very brotherly like hug that expired between him and Cora as they embraced.

“How have you been, Klause,” Cora questioned with a soft smile and Klause just nods.

“I good. Miss Regina is waiting in car for you,” he tells them and the parents share a look before nodding and carrying their bags to the limo. They pack them all in the back and once they get in, they’re met by Regina and Cora’s parents. Her mother is on a call that seems to be going just a little bit in the left field kind of direction and her father is just reading the newspaper. Years of being married to Rose allowed him to understand that he should never bother to interrupt her during a call. Regardless of who was there or what was going on. Henry and Cora got themselves comfortable as Klause closed the door. Rose turned slightly, held up a finger for them to let them know she’ll be finished in just a minute and Cora couldn’t help but roll her eyes at her mother. Her father looked up momentarily to give his daughter an almost beaming smile and then do the same to Henry.

Regina for her part had silently switched her seating to sit between her parents and let them both hug her at the same time. She drowned in that and heard her father ask her in a whisper,

“Did you tell her?” and all she could do was nod quickly, eyes still seemingly frightened at the thought of it, but the reassuring smile he gave her was enough to put her at ease. Cora eyed them
both for a moment, wondering what silent conversation they were having only to see Henry mouth ‘I’ll tell you later’ back at her.

“Very well. Yes we will speak shortly. Right now my daughter is in town and I’d like to spend some time with her. Yes, yes that’s fine. Alright then. You too. Buh-bye,” she ended before huffing and tossing her phone in her purse. Rose then turns her body, angling it such a way that she looks more like the woman in congress that she appears to be. “Cora- Henry. Lovely for you two to join us this Christmas,” she smiles almost stiffly. It wasn’t because of them, it was that damn call. Cora smirks.

“It’s good to be back home for Christmas, mother,” she acknowledges and Rose nods.

“It is… is Zelena not joining us?” she then questioned but Henry shook his head.

“No ma’am. She’s not. She asked about spending Christmas with Wade and we told her she could,” he relayed only to have Rose squint at him gently.

“I see,” is what she settles for and Henry lets out a soft huff. Santiago looks away from his paper and speaks.

“Well, still, it’s lovely to have you all here. Is anyone hungry?”

“No, we ate on the plane,” Cora said and her mother immediately scoffed.

“That second rate garbage is not food. Come- come. Klause!” Rose called loudly. The window separating the front form the back rolled down.

“Yes madame!” he answered.

“Klause would you mind taking us to the supermarket, please?” she had asked because Rose was not the type to do that half-baked, backhanded demand sort of thing. Klause may be working for them, but asking him was still an important thing. He nodded quickly.

“Of course madame!” he said with a vigorous head shake. Rose smiled at him and nodded back.

“Thank you Klause, now…how is life in Key West? I’ve heard few stories from my grandchildren and even fewer from their friends. Is there anything exciting there? Granted the one time your father and I had visited for Christmas, we didn’t quite see the place...” she trailed.

“It’s a tourist attraction,” Henry snorted and Rose seemed offended by his response.

“I’m sorry.. A what?”

“A tourist attraction, mother,” Cora sighed gently. Rose’s eyebrow shot up. “Yes. We live in a heavily tourist based area. So, it is consistently alive and has more liquor stores and bars than schools on it…”

“That is rather unattractive ,” Rose concludes but Henry shakes his head.

“It has its perks,” he told her and she settled back against her seat to ask,

“And what are those?”

“Well, the suburban areas are extremely quiet and well lived in. Granted, the crime rate is absolute
garbage, but that’s going to happen with the place being as big as it is. The schooling system is pretty good and it challenges the girls. Granted, Regina excels rather quickly once she knows something,” he praises and his daughter blushes. “But that’s it. If they go anywhere, most of the time they’ll drive the four hours into the city, but other than that- David and I keep tabs on them to make sure they’re fine,” Henry informs her and Rose now looks impressed.

“So, my grandchildren have social lives?”

“Zelena definitely does,” both Henry and Cora snort.

“And what of Regina?” she queries and both share a look of almost, sadness. Henry shifts as Cora huffs. Regina burrows into her mother and father a little more. Under that bit of unintentional scrutiny is still more than she can handle.

“...no,” he whispers and Rose nods slightly. Rose isn’t upset. She’s been concerned about her granddaughter for a while as well. But asking Regina is different from asking her parents. Regina would tell her everything’s fine and maybe that were true, but Regina was also unpredictable.

“What of her relationship with Emma?” she then queries, noting the wide-eyed shock and fear in her granddaughter’s eyes.

“Emma is with Christopher, and she seems to be more intrigued by him than by Regina at this point,” Henry shrugs, sighing gently.

“Mm..it was much the same here. Though, I had assumed it would be over by now,” she had commented, sharing an unexpected look of distaste with Henry.

“So did we to be honest...but she’s coming to Maine in two days,” Henry says and he doesn’t miss it, neither does Cora. The flinch that ran through Regina was enough to frighten even him. Santiago looks away from his paper once more, sharing that look with Regina. His eyes are somber, like he’s trying to send her a message of hope, and in all honesty, Regina’s not so sure she even wants the message to reach her.

“No doubt to see him I suppose,” Rose implores.

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Two days later

“I’m already here and I don’t see ya,” Emma muttered into her phone as she spun around and around the airport terminal. She heard Chris laugh and couldn’t decipher whether it was on the phone or within her immediate area.

“How about you keep still, tell me where you are and I’ll come find you, deal?”

“Yeah, but you better hurry. This place is gettin’ weirder by the minute,” she groaned before telling him her location and they hung up from one another.

It took Chris no time at all to spot that blonde, long hair and those stark green eyes. He walked up to
Emma with a grin plastered on his face before they embraced and kissed like they haven’t seen each other in years. A few people who pass by have to stop and stare at the sheer ‘don’t give a fuck’ vibe they were getting from these two, considering the current dilemma.

“I missed you so much,” he mumbled after they pulled apart just enough to embrace tightly.

“I missed you too,” she responded in kind. He grinned and she gave him a small smile.

“You got all your stuff?”

“Uhuh,”

“Cool, let’s go then. My grandparents should be out there. Did you get your mom and dad to let you sleep over?” he’d then queried as he picked up her duffel and strung it out on his shoulder. As he and Emma walked, she groaned and shook her head.

“Nahhh, momma and daddy said I have to stay with the Mister and Misses Sorentini..I mean, I told them I wanted to come because of Regina, and I think they believed me, but I dunno, before I got on the plane, momma told me I have to stay with them. But Regina gets to stay out all the time,” she complains and Chris only laughs somewhat.

“That’s because Regina babysits.. She gets a pass and it’s not like Oliver’s the same age as us. Her grandparents know Aliya and well, I think her parents do too…”

“You’re supposed to be on my side,” she said petulantly and he laughed.

“I am on your side, but I go with facts… now, if you were say- helping me take care of my grandparents then maybe that could work. Just tell your mom and dad that it’s something you’re doing for the summer and I bet I can convince grandad to pay you every week or something,” he offered smartly and Emma halted walking to smirk at her boyfriend. She pulled him in and latched onto him before her lips pressed against his once more.

“I like your thinkin’,” she grinned.

“I tend to think smartly sometimes.. Come on. Let’s go find my grandparents,” he tells her and she follows.

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The doorbell rang somewhere closer to seven than it should have four hours prior, but Rose answered it anyway. Stood before her with a duffel bag, Chris attached at her hip and the young boy’s grandfather and grandmother smiling so sweetly at her, was Emma. Rose didn’t realize it, but her eyebrow quirked for a moment until she caught herself and spoke.

“Emma, you’ve arrived,” she said almost robotically and Emma nodded.

“Yes ma’am. Umm, Chris’s grandparents took us out for lunch and to a movie,” she said, feeling she needed to explain even though she and Chris already concocted a plan.

“I see. Well, come in-come in, we were just about to get dinner prepared,” she told the group before stepping aside and letting them all walk in. “Emma, I gather you remember where your room is?”
Rose questioned almost knowingly and the young blonde nodded once more.

“Yes ma’am, but I’m just gonna room with Regina if that’s okay,” she answered politely. It was obvious that the switch in Emma’s attitude was just so she could stay at Chris’s, but Rose hadn’t caught on to that. Either that or she chose not to comment, for many reasons that were beyond even her need to care. Chris could tell, but that was because he told her she needed to be nicer, even if that meant throwing in that southern charm. Rose merely gave a tilt of the head in acknowledgment to her changed plan and carried on into the kitchen.

As Emma trotted up the stairs to put her bag away, Chris found himself in the living room, bumping into Regina who more than ignored him.

“Uhh, hey,” he waved awkwardly, noting that Regina wouldn’t even crack an eye at him. He nodded beside himself and sat down, far away from her before he righted himself in the couch. With the tv going and an awkward silence pushing against both of their comfort zones, Chris found himself interrupting Regina’s ‘ignore him’ stance, once again.

“So, what are we watching?” he had asked and Regina shrugged. “Do you mind if I change the channel then?” he queried only to get yet another shrug. Chris sighed to himself before he reached for the remote and switched the channel over. He noticed the slightest flicker in Regina’s eyes when it switched over to Yu-Gi-Oh and he paused his actions. Chris gently dropped the remote on the couch and watched Regina get comfortable against the back of the chair. He hesitated on the third time to speak, but found he just couldn’t stay quiet.

“Are you mad at me or something?” he questioned her, watching her flinch slightly, righting her position in the chair. Chris waited patiently to see if she would answer, unmoving. Regina swallowed before she shook her head.

“..no,” she whispered and he finally smiled.

“Good.. hey listen, I’m sorry about how things are. You seem.. I dunno, off? I guess,” Chris went on, but Regina rolled her eyes this time. “Listen, I know how Emma was the last time you guys were here was.. Not nice, but she’s really sweet, I promise,” he continued, trying to convince her as if she hadn’t known Emma longer than him. With yet another roll of her eyes, Regina spoke to him, short in tone and annoyed by his current stance on Emma’s shit attitude. Her jaw set before she answered him, a crass remark waiting, but she wasn’t that type of person. She never could be vile or cruel to someone. Even someone as stupidly naive like Chris.

“I’m fine .. Shouldn’t you be with Emma?” she asked, switching the topic and he laughed uneasily as he scratched at the back of his head.

“Well, she’s probably talking with your grandparents right now,” he informed. Regina eyed him skeptically before she responded with question.

“Why ?”

“Oh, ummm. Well, my grandpa is…”
Chris’s grandparents maintained their rather calm demeanors. The young blonde got up abruptly and excused herself. Claiming she needed to use the restroom was probably the best idea she came up with. She however, just hides beyond the walls of the kitchen, eavesdropping and texting Chris. “- you need Emma to help you take care of Nola?” he queried and the man before him nodded.

“Yes.. we’re both getting older as you can see and I asked Christopher if he would be able to convince Emma to help us this summer. Nola is having issues with her knees and I’m not faring any better than she is.. Christopher already tries his best to help the two of us, but it’s wearing on him as well...” he trailed off, gaining an understanding look from Santiago. Rose shuffled away from the counter to continue preparing dinner. She distracted herself with vegetables that needed to be washed for the salad as Cora chose to ignore the conversation; considering it had nothing to do with her own children- it made no difference to her. It came down to Rose, Santiago- as well as the Nolans’ to decide. Henry was busy seasoning steaks, but based on his cough, he had overheard the exchange. His eyebrows shot up in question before he looked over at Cora who looked at him but then shook her head. “I also offered to pay her for her help. You know, give her a little something to get her excited about working,” he continued. Santiago tilted his head back in a slight nod before he turned to Rose, who turned for a moment as she spoke.

“It seems like a rather good thing,” she shrugged as she turned back to her task at hand. She continued her dialogue in that fashion. “Emma will have an opportunity to see how it feels to work for the things she wants and I’m sure she wouldn’t mind, considering it’s allowing her to see Christopher more often,” she adds just before the young blonde walks back into the kitchen, attempting to act as if she’d not heard every word. The adults pause their conversation, eyes falling on her, making her feel more than uncomfortable.

“Did I do somethin’?” she asked, swallowing thickly. She hadn’t realized that her hands rose in defense that seemed to falter greatly as Santiago smirks at her and Rose just gives her the look. That look is one she’s seen before. When someone knows something and can easily end you, but chooses not to because the satisfaction is rather lackluster. But the way Rose gives her the look is always one that borders on disapproval and questioning authority.

“Not unless you’re guilty of something, Emma- then there’s nothing to worry about,” Santiago remarked, and if Emma wasn’t as smart as she was with knowing how certain remarks worked, she wouldn’t have caught the warning in his voice. She put her hands back down and swallowed thickly before she nodded at him. Regina walked in immediately after, ignoring the eyes that settled on her. She sat next to her grandfather and laid her head on his shoulder. Santiago turned slightly to kiss the top of his little star’s head before he shrugged lightly and spoke. “Well, I see no issue with it,” he said.

“So, does that mean she can stay?” Chris asked, practically interrupting the entire entourage of adults. In his excitement, he’d rushed into the room with no formal warning, that was always something known to irritate most persons, but his was just a tad bit more unbearable. Maybe it was that all too sweet and sickeningly good charm.

Rose craned her neck, the familiar sound of a gentle crack, sifting through her spine.

“We will see, Christopher. Emma’s parents have still yet to be called,” she reminded him, but it didn’t seem to deter him. “If you’ll excuse me, I’ll get this situation sorted and see what the decision is,” she then announces before promptly standing and beginning her exit. “Do make yourselves at home,” she said, and no one missed it, the gentle smile and ease of happiness in her features. Santiago leans over to Regina and whispers,

“It’s been a while since the house was this full. This makes her happy,” he says solemnly. His
granddaughter smiles almost as sadly as she feels in that moment.

“This place is so big, it’s no wonder she’d feel that way,” Regina whispered back before her mother came over and rubbed her shoulder. Regina couldn’t help but lean into the gentle and reassuring touch.

“Are you okay, darling?” her mother queries and the young brunette is rightfully confused. She shifts away from her mother enough to look into her eyes.

“Of course I am, why wouldn’t I be, mami?” she responds in her own form of question. Eyes follow her mother’s line of sight to Chris and Emma huddled and curled up at the island counter, giggling over whatever it is on his phone. She supposes her mother sees what she’s now seeing; her and Emma as kids, almost everyday sitting at a kitchen island much similar to that one- huddled into one another and talking in their special language- well, at least what used to be their special language. The grip on her shoulder tightens somewhat as her mother looks on, but Regina is nonplussed. Why would she be bothered by that of all things? Granted, yes, it was a her and Emma thing, all the tie- but it was clear Emma was willing, ready and able to share that with anyone else that wasn’t Regina, so- who was she to care? She reaches for her own shoulder and squeezes her mother’s hand gently before removing it. “Mami.. I’m fine,” she reassures her before snorting, which catches the attention of both Emma and Chris. Four pairs of eyes lock onto one another before contact is broken and Regina stands before pulling her hair out of her face and into a high ponytail. She walks over to her father and gives him a hug before pinching him and whispering, “you told, didn’t you,” for which he had the decency to look a tad bit sheepish for.

“I had to, mija. Tu madre estaba preocupada- pero- mirame-,” he said and she gave him the requested eye contact. “We’re a team and nothing that hurts you will only be shared with one unless it has to be. Both your mother and I love you more than words and I’d die before I lie to her about what’s- or rather- who is hurting you,” he defended only to see his youngest huff. It wasn’t that she was mad, quite the opposite in fact, but- he was right. And she hated that sometimes. Regina decided to bite the bullet and excuse herself, saying over her shoulder,

“I’m gonna call Nori and then call Aliya and see about Oliver today,” before disappearing from the room.

She found the footsteps following behind her not too long after came from someone she no longer expected them to come from and it sent her mind off into a tailspin of memories.

`And did you.. Feel guilty?” the therapist asked carefully. Truth be told, the therapist had wanted to ask a sleuth of questions- one of the most popular and annoying, ‘how did that make you feel?’ The woman snorted lightly, folded her arms and shook her head. Whether it was in the positive or the negative, that couldn’t be determined but by the way she was tightening the grip on herself so much, it was safe to say, defenses were back up.

“Did I feel guilty for what exactly,” she asks and a soft sigh begins the response.

“Did you feel guilty for reminiscing, for remembering, for reverting to a simpler, happier- more cohesive time?” he asked and immediately she had an answer.
“Yes. Doesn't everyone?” she answered somewhat harshly. Her therapist shook his head.

“No, Regina.. Not everyone,” he says calmly. “Some people get annoyed, weirded out, twitch, cry- any array of emotions you can think of, humans will do it for and with the right memories. But you indicated you felt guilty for all the things I listed-,”

“No,” she interrupted, shaking her head with determination. “I agreed to feeling guilty, for what- is a different- completely different feeling than anything you indicated. I feel guilty because I felt guilty. Do you get that- doc ?”

“Regina..” he trailed off-

“-WHAT?!” she snapped, aggressively. He says nothing to her, rather waits for her anger to subside before he smiles softly and begins to speak again.

“You felt guilty for feeling guilty that you enjoyed a memory or that you now- or at that point in time- hated the memories that came flooding back?”

“All of the above,” she says, seemingly unbothered with expanding her range of expression. She shifted in her seat and heaved a sigh.

“Work with me here. You were making such good progress. What exactly happened to trigger this particular reaction?” he probes gently for which, she relaxes her shoulders and stares at the corner of the room. His line of sight follows hers before he stands and retrieves the item and then places it before her.

Regina cradles the photo album in her hand before looking at the therapist for permission. He nods his approval and she opens the cover. The first thing she sees is a little girl, dark chestnut hair and blue eyes. He clears his throat, squirming slightly as Regina’s facial expressions don’t seem to extend past curious wonder. It’s not the people in the next handful of photos she’s looking at, but rather the photos themselves. She can tell just by looking at some of them what exact device they used to take some of them with. Regina flips the album shut before gently placing it beside her.

“Who were those people?” she asks, and now the therapist is giving her an almost curious stare. He sits up straight and crosses her leg over the other.

“My daughter. Candice. Friends- family, random people I met on trips I’ve taken. Some memories and some mistakes.. Life lessons… Those people are a description of what my life could have been, should have been- would have been versus what it was, is, and will be,” he told her honestly. She nodded.

“And you’re content with that?” she asked him which made him take pause to think honestly.

“I would have to be. I always relive the moments and imagine different outcomes but the choices I made or didn’t make are why I’m here today. Sometimes it’s meant to be this way, I can’t deny that I’m happy to have my daughter, but the way I ended up with her was pain in and of itself,” he told her.

“So, I’m meant to be in pain, years upon years upon failed relationships later?” she asks. The smile is deterring at best, a little frightening and kind of off-putting to anyone that doesn’t know her mannerisms.

“Sometimes- yes. Sadly- we are all meant to experience pain- however, for the extent of your pain, I feel as though you are intentionally drowning yourself in past memories. Suppressed pain and emotion-,”
"-Not even slightly," she told him rather bluntly and he was inclined to not believe her had he not seen the lack of emotion within her eyes.

"So, it isn’t the past of all the things Emma has or hasn’t done?" he ponders.

"No, that’s the majority of it, but it’s not why I’m still in pain," she responds. The room goes quiet and it takes the therapist almost five minutes before it clicks in his mind why exactly after so many years, Regina still seemed to be stuck in such a shattered world.

"Regina?" he calls and she looks at him. Eyes locked, the therapist speaks. "When was the last time you spoke to Nori?"

"A handful of days ago," she admits. He hums.

"Tell me, did you and Nori talk about the past?"

"Quite often,"

"Most specifically- your past with Emma?"

"Sometimes," she relays and she smirks, she realizes he’s finally figured out her pain and she’s not sure why she’s happy that he actually paid attention and assessed everything but she supposes- for the few- it takes on for the masses. "Congratulations," she whispers. Her therapist squints.

"To what?"

"Figuring out the key to unlock the doors of my pain. Congratulations," she nods her head.

"How do you know I’ve figured it out?" he asks and she snorts.

"There’s a glazed and determined look in your eyes. Different from every other emotion in your photos," she informs- motioning to the album. He nods back.

"Then may I proceed in asking the most important question?"

"You may," she allows and her therapist can’t help but crack a smirk.

"Miss Mills. Regina, you found out that question and the answer to it Nori had asked Emma all those years ago, didn’t you?"

"Yes."

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“Hey, Regina,” Emma called after her as she tried to make her way outside, or up the stairs or really just somewhere that wasn’t in the kitchen. She was tired and over it all and just wanted to breathe some fresh air or suffocate at her own pace. She halted and turned around, the lack of emotion was deafening.

“Yes? What is it?” she answered unaware of the sculpted brow arching in such an offensively rude manner- and Emma gave her a rather bothered look in response.

“Woah- chill out, okay. I was just coming to ask if you’re alright. Jeez, don’t rip my head off,” she scowls but Regina continues to stare at her the same.

**It’s not as if you actually care, but whatever.**

“I’m fine… is that it?” she asked, clearly not in the mood for conversation. Her tone was horribly flat and it was as if she was looking past Emma and not at her. Emma scowled even harder.

“You know- I don’t even know why I try,” she grunted.

**Then stop because the half-assed attempts aren’t making any of this any better.**

“Like, you’re seriously acting like something crawled up your butt and got stuck in there,” the blonde continued, but Regina was now over it even more than usual and cut her off.

“Emma.. I need to call Nori and Aliya. I’ll deal with…this- another time…. Or not at all preferably,” she muttered the last part as she turned on her toes and once again attempted to make a break for it.

“Oh sure- go ahead. Call your stupid boyfriend, call Aliya . Go be one big happy family with her and her stupid kid- I don’t care,” Emma responded rather petulantly and immediately regretted it when Regina turned oh so rigidly and looked at her with such annoyance, it was hard to look away.

“Emma, you have Christopher . You have been with Christopher . What Nori and I do or don’t do is none and I mean absolutely none of your business. I do not get on you about the things you’ve more than likely done so willingly with Christopher. Worry about not getting caught sneaking around and being promiscuous and I’ll worry about my friend in college,” she iterated almost too coldly. “And as for Aliya and Oliver- don’t you ever fix your mouth to be disrespectful to or about either of them. You don’t know them- and even if you did that still doesn’t give you the right to talk about them. You act like a spoiled, irresponsible and irritating brat and it boggles my mind how I haven’t told you this before until today. The world does not revolve around you Emma Swan- remember that when it begins to fall apart and no one’s there to help you because you’ve been that much of a self-righteous pompous and pretentious little brat.”

At least, that’s what Regina wanted to say. Oh how she wanted to say it all. But, she just couldn’t bring herself to be that aggressively upset over yet another situation Emma would just feed off of and probably weave into a jacked up lie when she told Chris.
The way she turned and looked at Emma before turning back lacked all versions of venom she’d spew if she was even remotely in the mood to eviscerate her. However, whatever bit of residual anger or just flat out over the whole situation—emotions she had left, seemed to be enough to slightly frighten the blonde before her.

And at that point, with nothing to defend and a lack of wanting to do just that—her disappointment boiled over and she felt need to remove herself from the situation.

With a reserved sigh, Regina heads for the front door and leaves. She rubs at her temples, frustration coming to a head and a need to get away causing an ache to evolve. Her phone pings off with incessant need to be answered and without looking at it she accepts the call.

“Hello?” she answers somewhat warily.

“Regina, darling where did you go?” came the question which surprisingly was from her grandmother.

“I’m just outside..about to take a walk, nonna,” she informs, looking up at the sky and squinting at the grey she hadn’t noticed until just then.

“Do be careful, sweetheart. There’s reports of a storm coming this way. If you find you can’t make it back, you do know all emergency shelters and any other places you can go, right?”

“Yes ma’am,” she said softly.

“Very well.. I had called to tell you the Nolan’s have reluctantly agreed to let Emma stay with Christopher’s grandparents,” Rose then moves to say. Regina has to bite back the snort threatening to escape her as she’s beyond aware as to why it was reluctant.

“Oh?” she tried playing it off as if she was surprised.

“Yes… oh, indeed. They agreed that she can stay for these few weeks with them but that she must call and check in with not only them but me of course and I am going to make random trips just to ensure she’s.. Well, working for her pay I suppose,” she relays. Regina remains quiet for a moment before she speaks.

“Are you really going to check though?” Regina prompted, knowing the answer. She heard her grandmother sigh.

“Sweetheart, as much as I know I should, I won’t. I’m nearly positive what I’m shown is truly what’s not happening and I’d rather not have the images swirling in my mind.. I may check once or twice but it’s merely down to them if they choose to remain true to their agreement. That is between them one and God himself,” she tells her youngest grandchild. Regina thinks for a moment before she accepts the severity of the answer. It never ceased to amaze her how the adults around her knew what they were capable of because they’d once been in those positions again. It just sucked that when it came to Emma everyone just seemed… exhausted.

“Did they say anything about Auggie?” she asked with a smile, a hopeful one at that.

“Actually, they did. He’s enjoying himself back home, not too much with the farm work but he’s building more muscle and has managed to find himself a winter wonderland of some sorts,” she implies and if Regina wasn’t smart on that one she’d have asked her grandmother what the hell that meant.

“Go Auggie,” she cheers happily and her grandmother can’t help but laugh.
“How are you my little cherub?”

“I’m fine, nonna. Why does everyone keep asking me that?”

“Because we worry about you, anela,”

“Yeah, but I’m fine. I’m not inept or broken.. I mean- well, no. Not any of those things honestly,” she tried defending but her grandmother releases such a burdened sigh, Regina wonders if the woman has somehow taken on her stresses… and why, if that’s the case.

“My dear, something’s gone from you. The spark. The light. The joy and happiness. And it’s obvious to us all around you- everyone- except the one person we all knew you wish would see is inflicting this pain-”

“-nonna, no one is inflicting pain. I’m fine. Seriously. I really am. You’re all worried over nothing…” she trails off.

“Are we really?”

“Yes!” Regina laughs almost hysterically. “Whatever goes on here is the same thing that’s been going on back home. Daddy’s been helping me through it and mami just found out, but I’m not broken. I’m not shattered. I’m just over it to be honest,” she admits and the quiet engulfs them once again.

“If you’re sure,” she hears her grandmother bite out. Regina smiles at the thought of this woman so worried over her wellbeing.

“I’m positive… but, grandma.. I kinda need to tell you something,” she admits and feels the first drops of rain come whistling down. “Shit!” she hisses loudly and her grandmother’s worry kicks in.

“Regina- Regina!” the call statics and cuts out almost immediately. Thunder crackles and lightning whips across the dreary sky, striking a nearby pole. The sickening crunch of electricity snaps the pole on contact, a blasting beam of white light flashing and splitting Regina’s sight. Sparks ignite and trickle down, disappearing in the rain water. She ducks, covering her head and prays to a God she’s not so sure she ever believed in- not to die right there on a random street in the middle of Maine.

Thunder sounds again, jarring her from her stupor and it takes all of her fearlessness to kick into overdrive and help her haul ass to something she can hide in or under.

No trees, no poles, no tiny security booths. Stores- something.. Just... something she says within herself, but it seems she’d wondered rather far away from anything nearly conducive to keeping her safe. Thunder crackles loudly again, and it sounds closer. Lightning strikes once again, but further off in the distance. This one she can see. A jagged, frail line, almost like an erratic heartbeat before it flatlined. Regina swallows thickly as she looks at the succession of sporadic lines hail down on whatever area it clearly had a vendetta against. She looks at her phone again and just her luck, it still has no signal. She looks around, taking in the somewhat familiar area... it had been gentrified just slightly, but the longer she looked, the more familiar it became. She finally knew exactly where she was, and the closest place to her, was some place she honestly was a tad bit frightened to go to in that moment, but.. She had to swallow back her fears because she may have been scared, but she didn’t wanna fucking die either.

Regina runs to her destination because now the rain just really wants to fuck with her. It’s beyond pouring at this point. To the degree that she can’t even see, lets her know she’s within the storm and she needs to hurry up and at least clear most of the way. It sucks that the quickest way to get there is
literally through the goddamn woods, but it would put her right at the back yard and she could get in. So, with some steeled determination and a bit of pee down her legs from the last lightning strike that hit something she was sure was mere inches from her head, Regina hauls ass to the house and manages to get over the fence and to the front door. She collapses on the porch, heaving and a weak knock is all she can manage right that moment.

If I die, it won’t be from anything but hypothermia at this rate she thinks to herself. She attempts to knock again and again and again, but no answer comes which is now life or death considering the child is shivering to death. She’s turning paler and paler the longer she’s outside. And for what feels like mere hours, finally- something gives.

“Oh Jesus! Regina!” the voice screams before there’s a distinct sound of items clattering against the wooden porch. “Hold on, okay- please just hold on, Regina. God damn it!” she struggles as she attempts to open the door, shoving it harshly with her shoulder and pretty much lifting the sopping wet child into the bathroom and in the tub. The person disappears and reappears a short moment later. She swallows as she looks at the child and is quite literally freaking out on the phone. “I-I don’t know, she was just here on the porch when I came and she’s pale and- I… I can’t. I just- Oh my God! NO-NO NO!” she panics as she watches the girl convulse in the tub. It only takes a moment for her brain to switch into control and she’s at the tub, the phone forgotten before she’s then turning on the hot water and letting it blast Regina’s cold body. The little brunette can hear everything, she just can’t respond. She can’t open her eyes. Nothing. She can feel every bit of pain and weakness in her body and it’s winning. It’s on the verge of winning.

The wet clothes are stripped away swiftly and she’s immersed under the shower head, her body being cradled in arms that are strong and refuse to let her go under.

“Come on, sweetie! Stay with me! You’re okay.. You’re okay,” come the reassuring words. It takes almost forever for some sort of sign that she’s okay, but slowly- slowly the colour comes back and the water has since ran tepid at best. She shuts it off and wraps the child in a towel before she takes her out of the tub and carries her near the heater in her room that’s thankfully been on.

“Momma.. Is Gina gonna be okay?” the small child had asked with sadness in his tone and worry in his eyes.

“Yes baby, she’ll be okay. She’s not going anywhere,” his mother tries reassuring and she sees that his own worry, goes nowhere.

“Momma, she not wakin’ up,” he says and his mother swallows.

“I know baby,” she shakes her head. “She’s just really tired, that’s all. She’ll be okay, she just needs some sleep and some soup when she wakes up, okay?” she tries reassuring yet again and he nods, but it’s obvious that he is a believe it when he sees it kind of kid and she couldn’t blame him for that at all. “Hey Oli, do you think you can get momma a shirt and some pants to put on Regina, please?” she asked him and he nodded strongly. “Thank you, sweetie. Right in momma’s drawer over there,” she motioned with her fingers as she continued to cradle the small child in her arms. Oliver did his best to find clothes and gave them to his mother. He covered his face almost immediately and if Aliya wasn’t so into the moment, she’d have grinned at his modesty. She puts the clothes on Regina and lifts her into the bed before she wraps her in blankets and finds the thermometer and takes her temperature. It’s about as accurate as her guess at that point, which isn’t bad, but it isn’t good. Regina’s borderline shot to hell with that body temperature- so the heat is increased and Aliya just sits there for a while, watching her- her breathing was normal otherwise and it didn’t seem as though there was anything worse than the terrible moment of being caught in the storm like that. Oliver sits on his mother’s bed and at first, he just stares at Regina, almost as if he wasn’t sure what he was
supposed to do. Aliya saw the war within her son’s eyes. He was contemplating, planning, calculating—trying to figure out his role in all of it to help. He finally decides to lay on Regina. His little hands try to hug her and rubs idly at the fabric in a comfort reaching kind of moment. After moments pass and Oliver’s eyes are threatening to shut from exhaustion, his mother speaks. “Oli?” Aliya calls and he looks at her. “Come on baby. You need to take a warm bath too so you can cuddle with Regina, okay,” she said more than she asked and he nodded. He clammers off the bed and follows behind his mother, thankful for his bath, and almost immediately after— he’s back in the bed, head on Regina’s now slightly exposed chest. Aliya wipes her damp hands on the towel as she nears the bed and takes Regina’s temperature once again. It’s much better than the last check and the sigh she lets out is so heavy, she’s now feeling the exhaustion. She decides she’ll shower, only after she’s made Regina something hot to eat and at least waited until after the child awoke and could keep the food down. Aliya wasn’t the best cook—well, that’s what she thought at least, but when it came to homemade soup—she had that in the bag.

She found her mind calming as she prepped everything. She was in the zone, chopping and dicing and humming to herself and it was good, it was calm. Oliver was safe. Regina was safe. Her temperature was normal again and at that point— they were the only to people who mattered. But then, Aliya’s mind decided it was time to step cross the red flag line and into the realm of imagination. Her thoughts were pure, it was just… no, there was no real way to justify imagining the child asleep in her bed, much older and able to have a relationship with someone like Aliya. But that was just it. Who was Aliya?

A mother, that’s one thing.

A stress rocket.

A confused woman on a daily basis if what she’s planned doesn’t go according to predictions.

A damn good employee.

A woman pushing her thirties—there— that! God damn that chunk of an age gap.

She was all of those negative things, she honestly wasn’t sure what the hell Regina saw in her. Why would a kid—scratch that— a very mature teenager, find her attractive? Like, at all? Granted, she has heard of things like that happening, but why her? What was so friggin special that Regina had those kinds of reactions towards her. Violent, shy, upset… heartbroken almost, none of it made sense to her and that was just it. It took so much of her mind’s capacity that she hadn’t realized all the things she was doing on autopilot were quite dangerous.

“Shit!” she hisses loudly and looks down at her bludgeoned finger. Aliya squirms slightly. She’s convinced it looks like a stump now. She couldn’t think of what exactly she should do, she just does the first thing that comes to mind and runs it under cold water…. oh, that’s nasty she thinks to herself before shutting the tap off and hurrying to find antiseptic, bandages and a finger glove.

She finds herself losing interest in the shortened nub as she hears Oliver… singing? To Regina and from the sound of it, Regina is awake and responding. Aliya makes her way into the bedroom, only to be greeted by a rosy cheeked Oliver and a slightly more alert Regina.

“Momma! Look! Gina woke up! She woke up!” he said excitedly and his mother can’t help her own smile.

“I see that, baby. Did you sing to her so she’d wake up?” she asked and he nodded.
“uhuh- and Gina said I singded really good, too,” he tells his mother who now looks at the teen in the bed, blankets practically engulfing her, clearly making no need to move for Oliver’s sake.

“It’s true,” Regina replies in a small voice. “I could hear everything, I just couldn’t respond,” she admits. “I’m sorry about.. that, though. I just didn’t know where else to run and you guys were the closest to me,” she continued but Aliya shook her head.

“It’s okay,” she shrugged lightly. “I’m just glad we got home when we did,” she smiles and Regina’s cheeks heat up. “Though, I’m not so sure I wanna know why you were out in the middle of a storm to begin with,” she says, dropping a bit of a hint to Regina that she needed an answer, just.. Not in that moment. The teen bites her bottom lip, stuck with the possibility of reliving a moment she wishes she could forget.

“Yeah, I… I don’t know what would’ve happened,” she mutters. Aliya makes her way over to Regina and sits on the edge of the bed. She caresses the child’s face, also using it as a moment to check her temperature once more.

“Let’s not think about that. Your grandparents know where you are and the storm is expected to last for another four days. I’ll touch base with them in a minute to let them know you’re doing okay, but I just.. Why were you out in the middle of a storm?” she couldn’t help but ask this time, ignoring her need to wait.... and Regina was really hoping she could avoid that question. With a guarded sigh and a grumpy expression, she spoke because, better now than later when they’re alone and she’d have to actually look Aliya in the eyes.

“I was out for a walk, that’s all, and it wasn’t storming then,” she informs, and she knows Aliya doesn’t believe her.

“Regina-,”

“-no.. I don’t wanna talk about it. Lately, that’s all everyone has been wanting to do is talk and skirt around me like I’m some fragile baby. I’m not a baby. I’m fine. So what if Emma is going over to stay with Chris this entire Christmas break? So what if she just used me to get here just so she could suck face with him? So what if I’m damaged because of all that’s happened- So what? Isn’t this what’s supposed to happen? You gain a friend, you lose a friend. Oh well. Not everyone is as devoted to you as you are to them,” she rants and it takes all of Aliya not to ask more questions, not to search those broken words and not to realize that Regina really and truly was evolving and becoming number to emotions in general. She didn’t want such a bright and caring and educated young girl to just disappear like that, but what could she offer her in terms of comfort?

“Okay,” she finally says.

It’s a simple word with a simple start and it’s more than enough for the young teen.

“Thank you,” Regina responds with a deeply rooted and grateful sigh of content. “I’ve just been so over it all lately. Everyone is more hurt in this entire thing than me and I’m over it. Really and truly over it,”

“I know-,”

“-do you, though,” she interrupts and Aliya nods.

“I do. I’ve been there. I’ve come back, I’ve gone back over, gotten stuck, took some dangerous routes, lost myself and hit the last level of hell,” she says and the ominous feeling of the words makes
Regina shiver slightly, but she’s intrigued. Interested- a little nosey if she’s being honest.

“How did you get back?”

“It’s kind of hard to explain, but I just.. Came back. You know how some people have a reason, have a person or something they do it for,” she says and Regina nods. “Well, forgive me if this sounds bad, but I didn’t have a reason; not myself, not my job, not any of you- hell, not even Oliver. I honestly didn’t have a reason- justifiable enough to get my act together, to come back from that- to survive. Don’t get me wrong I love Oliver with all my heart, but his father was here, your grandparents are here, Oli’s grandparents are here- even though they’re.. Special at times. Anyone I know would’ve taken him and raised him well. But love was never enough for me to come back to reality. I literally just woke up one morning, numb beyond belief. I forgot why I was in that state. I forgot everything, every hurt and pain and confusion that I faced. I really didn’t know anything anymore, but like some well oiled machine I started functioning on autopilot, getting things done, cleaning up my messes- mentally and physically. Emotionally I was still stunted and I did not care. Jeremy tried ‘talking sense’ into me, but he said I quite literally ignored him. It was a hot mess in his eyes and I’m sure other people thought the same, but I’m here now and do I know how I got here, no. Do I want to know- no. But am I grateful I’m here… also no. I’m no further in life now than I was years ago. I’m mundane, I’m predictable. I am boring. All things considered, and through all of it, none of my attitude has changed towards the people who mattered most.. It changed how I was and am with myself. I still feel exactly the same for everyone as I did all those years ago, but for myself.. For myself- I have no emotions. No bearings. No soul. Nothing- and I’m okay with that. I kind of have to be, it feels like normality. Like this is my normal…” she shrugs.

“But.. that’s not good for you,” Regina tries to tell her.

“Isn’t it , though?” Aliya asks her seriously and it is within that moment that Regina truly thinks about it. It wasn’t that Aliya didn’t care about herself. Quite the opposite and far from the truth, she just no longer relied on her own emotions to guide her. She thought logically, not emotionally. Self-deprecating as it may be, she downplayed it because that was just who she was now, someone she didn’t recognize, but also- wasn’t upset that she’d become that person.

“The more I think of it, the more I question it, but- I don’t really know that answer,”

“Tell you what, don’t try to figure it out. Just come out when you’re ready, have some soup and you, Oli and me will watch a movie and thug out the storm, sound enticing enough?” she asked with a smile and Regina nodded, a soft smile on her face.

Thunder crackled enough to rattle items within the home as lightning struck violently, thrashing like an upset child throwing a fit. Thunder sounded again and again and again until the lights inside began to flicker. Regina looked at Oliver who was already making his way into her comfort zone. He curled into her and buried his face. As she held him, she gave Aliya a pitiful look.

“Stay here. I’ll get us all something to eat and we can hole up in here;,” Aliya decided after seeing his expression and the way Regina handled him. Nothing needed to be said, Oliver just seemed to require comfort and that’s what he was given. After having taken all their bowls up and bringing everything into her room, Aliya plugged everything in and set up a movie. She sat in the chair as Regina and Oliver lay in the bed cuddled up.

“Momma, come in da bed,” he said, and it bordered on a bit of a demand. His mother shook her head gently, noting the intensity of Regina’s curiosity as she answered.

“I can’t baby. I’ll just sit over here, okay,” she said but he shoved his face back into Regina’s stomach.
“Oliver,” his mother called him, but he did not answer. “Oli,”

“Not talkin’ to you. You not comin’ in da bed with me and Gina,” he answered her somewhat angrily, moreso saddened. His mother huffed, scratched at the back of her neck and rose from her seat. She excused herself from the room and found a bottle of white wine. Aliya knew no bounds with this wine as she poured until she was satisfied by the amount before her. She gulped it back with such aggression and speed she’d begun to choke on it. And then she emptied the rest of the bottle into her glass and drained it in the exact same fashion. Bracing herself against her counter, she stared at the ajar bedroom door, the light from her television flashing across the cream coloured walls, the faint sound of finding nemo going in the background and her rather upset son.

It’s not that easy Oli… I would if I could. If I could and not get charged, arrested, judged… I’d lay in that bed, but, it’s not that simple- it never is that simple.

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“Oliver,” Regina said softly to the boy before she lifted his face from her chest. She stroked his cheeks and looked at him seriously. “Listen to me, Oli. Your mommy can’t sleep in the bed or lay in the bed with us for a reason,” she begins.

“What reason?” he asks.

“It’s kind of hard to explain, but mommy’s an adult and I’m not and to some people it’s not okay for her and I to sleep in the same bed,”

“But mommy sleeps in my bed, sometimes,”

“And that’s okay because she’s your mommy, sweetie, but she’s not my mommy and she and I aren’t together so she can’t sleep or lay in the bed with me because people are mean and they’ll say bad things about her when that’s not true. She wants to, Oli, but I’m not old enough yet and she doesn’t want anyone to hurt your feelings or mine,”

“But… you love momma, don’t you?” he asks and she’s not sure of which version he’s referring but she remains honest with her.

“I do love her, buddy-,”

“-then she can lay in da bed,” he says definitively and Regina laughs.

“No, baby. She can’t. I love your mommy, but… that doesn’t mean she and I can lay in the same bed. It just means I care about her alot, the same way I care about you. And that also doesn’t mean your mommy loves me the way I love her either, so sometimes that just happens, and sometimes things like that just suck… But maybe, just maybe, when I’m older I can and all of us can sleep in the same bed, okay?” she tried and he nods. She’s nearly positive he only understood so much and she knew she’d probably done a terrible job at explaining it, but it was worth the try.

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“Knock knock,” Regina says softly as she raps her knuckles against the post of the kitchen. Aliya jerks and spins around, a dazed and slightly hungry look adorning her features. Regina’s head tilts ever so slightly, noting the empty wine bottle and she has to wonder how much and how long the woman has been drinking.

“Hey,” Aliya says noncommittally.

“Hey,” Regina responds, the same soft tone of care.

“...hey,” Aliya says again, but then she shakes her head. “Sorry, we said that already, huh?” she asks and is rewarded with the smile that makes many dark worlds fill with light.

“Yeah.. we did, are you okay?” Regina finds herself wondering, and the question is just barely directed at Aliya, but the woman deeply sighs and shakes her head in the negative.

“No… I’m.. feeling,” she admits and Regina is shocked.

“Wait, you mean like.. Emotions.. About yourself?” and the head shake is once again in the negative.

“Not necessarily, and I probably shouldn’t be talking about this with you,” she mutters bitterly, and just as the tone has leapt from her, she knows it sounds offensive.

“Why? Because I’m a kid in your eyes? Because I wouldn’t understand? Why?! Because I won’t know how to comfort you,” Regina lists off her questions and she expected Aliya to snap back at her, but she’s just shaking her head again. The silence stretches for much too long and far out of both their comfort zones.

“It’s not that,” she says and as much as Regina is hurt, the venom to spew still is nowhere present. She’s all angered out and being in one more frustrating conversation was out of the question. Once again, as the silence stretches, they’re both stuck, thinking.

“Is it me?” Regina then says randomly, noting the flicker of acknowledgment from Aliya. “It is me, isn’t it,” Regina says more confidently and now her mind is a whirlwind. Aliya said she was feeling, but what in the hell did that mean. Feeling bad, feeling good- confused- feeling feelings? What the hell could it have been.. A sigh brings the young teen back to reality, the look in eyes she’s yet to find the perfect description for. Auburn hair is always draped across her shoulder or laying against her back, and kaleidoscopic eyes forever pull her in. “You’re feeling actual feelings about me and you won’t just say it, that’s it.. Isn’t it?” Regina pushes the questions but she notices Aliya getting frustrated. “Is this why you’re drinking?” Regina then asks her, seeing the defenses go up almost immediately, but no answer comes. “Aliya, talk to me.. I’m not here to judge you-,”

“-could’ve fooled me,” she snorted aggressively, bouncing back and forth between guilt and petulance. Regina huffs,

“Do you want me to just leave?” she asks her, thumb pointing towards any area that wasn’t the kitchen. “Because I can just go if this is getting to you- sorry- if I’m getting to you,”

“Seriously, that’s the threat you throw at me? Why are you jumping straight to leaving?”

“Because you’re being weird right now and clearly it’s my fault-,”

“-no one said it was your fault-,” Aliya says but Regina snorts roughly, matching her tone from earlier.
“-could’ve fooled me,” she answers, but now Aliya is frustrated again.

“Cut it out,” she warns but Regina snorts yet again.

“Or what? You’ll drink some more? Ignore what you’re actually feeling or just be like everyone else?”

“What in the hell is that supposed to mean?!” she asked, her aggression surfacing.

“Nothing,” Regina says with a shake of her head, arms folding as she attempts to back away. “I’ll just leave, seeing as it’s making your world crumble and fall apart that it drives you to drink yourself stupid,”

“Leave and go where? It’s storming outside, do you want to die?” Aliya responds almost flatly. Irritated at best and somewhat curious to hear the answer. “Where in the hell are you expecting to go out with thunder pounding and lightning ready to strike its next victim? Go on and tell me in which asinine direction you’re about to travel so I can know when to report it on your death certificate,” she bit back, but Regina barely rose to the bait, knowing the woman was just as frustrated, confused and wishing for answers as she was.

“I was out there for however long, at this point- if this is how you’re going to be, I’d rather be out in the storm,” she tells her. Her attitude towards the woman isn’t argumentative, but it’s the attitude she found herself giving Emma earlier that day and she’d hate to have to give Aliya the same treatment, but… it seems so likely in that moment.

“What? What’s that supposed to mean?”

“It means you’re being mean and miserable and not communicating, and out of everyone in my life, I was hoping that all those nice words and all those things you said to me meant that you thought we could communicate with each other on the same level, no hiding things, none of that. But I guess that’s my fault. Naiveté has always been my specialty. Thinking the best of the most damaging people in my life,” she had commented and she knew the words stung but she was trying to sober up Aliya’s shitty mood. “Why is that so hard for everybody to do these days. Everyone wants me to bare my soul but no one wants to do the same, no one wants to communicate with me, treat me like an equal. I’m not inept, I understand things, but this is what I get. So, I’ll go, because I don’t need this from anyone, especially you, Aliya,” Regina tells her before attempting to turn and leave the kitchen. She’s caught by the arm and spun around, Aliya pulling her extremely close. Regina can’t help but gasp and swallow quickly as the waft of wine and perfume hits her. The sweet mix of Aliya’s skin, her perfume and the alcohol put Regina in such a daze she forgets why she’s so upset.

“I-I.. mm- sorry,” Aliya grunts after she manages to catch herself. “I.. don’t go… please,” she begs quietly. Regina manages to connect with her, eyes matching Aliya’s in a search for an answer.

“Give me a reason,” the young brunette responds just as quietly. “Give me the reason you’re scared to say and I’ll stay,” she challenges her and Aliya falters. She sobered up and takes a step back. The touch is lacking, her hands are cold as she now realizes they were somewhere on intimate parts of Regina like her shoulder and her lower back.

“You know that reason would end my life-,”

“-who says it has to?”

“Everyone will. The police. Your parents.. YOU-”

“I’m asking you for the reason, what makes you think I’ll turn around and use it against you?”
“Reality, Regina. Something you’re clearly not as familiar with or that thought wouldn’t have even crossed your mind-,”

“-Oh and the thought of wanting me crossing your mind is okay?!?”

“I didn’t say it was! AND I NEVER ADMITTED TO A THOUGHT OF YOU CROSSING MY MIND! AND SEE- THIS! THIS IS THE BULLSHIT I’M TALKING ABOUT. YOU SO EASILY USED MY EMOTIONS AGAINST ME JUST NOW, WHO’S TO SAY YOU WON’T PUBLICIZE IT AND END MY ENTIRE LIFE!”

“BECAUSE YOU’RE NOT HEARING YOURSELF! YOU DIDN’T HAVE TO. IT’S OBVIOUS. YOU CAN’T BE AROUND ME BECAUSE YOU ACTUALLY FEEL SOMETHING AND IT SCARES YOU. BECAUSE I’M NOT LEGAL- BECAUSE OF MY FAMILY. BLAH BLAH BLAH!” I GET IT! BUT I WANT TO HEAR THOSE WORDS!” Regina practically screeches her demand. Aliya sighs, she huffs, she groans and she shakes her head. With her face squished against her palms, she speaks.

“What good will that do you, or me or anyone else?”

“Alot.. it’ll let me know I wasn’t crazy for feeling what I felt and for thinking I saw something that turned out to be true… I just wanna hear it,”

“I can’t.”

“Can’t or won’t?”

“Both. it’s wrong to feel what I feel,”

“All because of what society says? My age isn’t the determining factor, years ago, age wasn’t even an issue. How many stories do you hear about people getting married young;”

“The same ones that are forced or have to do with the young women being sold into it,”

“You’re missing the point,” Regina tells her.

“No, I’m pretty positive you are. I can feel what I feel but that doesn’t change the world we live in or the times we live in, until you’re legal, I’m not saying anything. I’m not going to indulge anything and I’m not commenting on anything….”

“…..fine, then I’m leaving,” Regina says stubbornly.

“God damn it! Regina, stop it!” Aliya snaps at her and she freezes. “You’re not leaving to go be in some god damn storm and die or disappear or end up injured. Stop being so insistent on an issue that could become more than an issue if you keep pushing it. Nothing is going to change between now and legal age. Nothing is going to evolve between now and legal age. My feelings will still be feelings when you’re legal. Nothing changes now or then. So stop it. Whether I comment or not shouldn’t stop you from enjoying your life and enjoying the people in it. It shouldn’t stop you from experiencing your firsts, clumsily and sweaty and fun. It shouldn’t stop you from your first alcoholic drink or a blunt to smoke or an illegal car ride past the speed limit. Nothing, no part of this should have any bearings on how you evolve as a person or how you see the world and the people in it. Are you really so bent to put things on hold for the most fucked up possibility,” Aliya asks her, ignoring the fact that she swore, “Do you really think you should be stagnating the joy of your life for some crush you may not have a handful of days, weeks, months and years from now? Do you know how many women, men, humans- aliens you’ll meet who will make your heart flutter the way you hoped it would with Emma or.. Me- and for the love of humanity I still don’t know how the hell interest in
me is a thing- but I’m saying all that to say this. Life has to go on. So if you find out everything you ever wanted to know, what could you and would you possibly do with the information? Create happy scenarios? Daydream about a future that more than likely will never happen? What? What could you possibly gain from hearing the words, yes I feel the same w-....shit,” she mutters. She doubles back, knowing it’s all too far gone now. Aliya can see the eyes before her sift away the anger, comb through her words and finally hit the point she’d hope they would miss. But, there’s light and then there is a smile small step forward, hesitant as it may be, it’s there and then- Regina is on her tiptoes and turns her mouth to kiss Aliya on the cheek. Stunned to say the least, Aliya gulps and holds in all that threatens to spill out in an unartistic mess of dribbled words and poorly thought out sentences.

“I’m sorry,” Regina finally says to her. “You’re right. I’m sorry,” she says again and the woman has to wonder what the hell they went through all of that for just to end up ..here. She swallows again, nods beside herself and tries to speak.

“I -um.. I… I’m sorry too, for the yelling- and swearing.. And… everything,” she says. “Can we just forget that we argued like a messed up couple for right now, my head hurts and I think I’m gonna be sick, the wine is really not sitting well with me,”

“Sure,” Regina nods softly. “Go lie down with Oli and I’ll bring you some water and find some painkillers,” she tells her, rubbing at her arm. Aliya nods because she can trust that, her words, not so much. As she turns to leave, Regina stops her. “Hey, Aliya?”

“..yeah?”

“Promise me something.. You’ll give it a try when I’m older,”

“Which part?” Aliya asks. She’s not sure she quite catches what it is Regina is referring to, but she’s curious again.

“I wanna say all of it, but just dating and handholding if you’re okay with that. If not, we can stick to getting to know each other.. You’ve got less than a year til you can kiss me,” she tries in joking and it works, the woman manages to smile and laugh a little.

“True…. Maybe, Regina… maybe,”

“I can live with maybe,” she responds with a hopeful smile.

“What about forever? Could you live with forever?” she asks her honestly, seriously. Regina takes a moment of pause and looks at the woman who is seemingly searching for a new field of answers that Regina’s sure she already knows the answers to.

“I think you know the answer to that already,”

“But just like you, I wanna hear the words you’re so afraid to speak,” she combats and Regina smirks.

“Touché,” she says. “If it’s worth it and they’re willing.. There’s no doubt about forever. There won’t even be a doubt about starting and watching it evolve. Forever is just one part of existing….” she reminded.

“.I’ll keep that in mind,” Aliya smiled.

“Good, now go lie down, I’ll be in in a bit.”
“I still can’t believe it worked. Are adults really that gullible,” Chris said with a cheeky grin that usually would make Emma’s heart soar, but she felt a bit.. annoyed by it. Choosing to brush it away as residual anger towards Regina, she mustered a smile and spoke.

“Don’t get too far ahead of yourself there, bud. I’m pretty sure they all know and just aren’t sayin’ anything, I mean, my momma and daddy ain’t dumb but agreeing to let me do this only could’ve been because of Misses Sorentini. So, be nice,”

“When am I ever not nice,” he asks with that goofy boyish grin and yet again there was her annoyance.

“Dunno,” she shrugged, realizing it lacked all of the excitement she’d been displaying thus far. Chris squints slightly but then he looks at Emma and really looks at her for the first time.

“Something’s on your mind and it isn’t the usual, so what’s going on?” he asks and the way he asks lets her know he’s expecting an answer. Emma shrugs again.

“I dunno, I guess it’s just me and Regina again. Things just got worse, ya know?” she lies. Granted, it wasn’t a full on lie, but she knew she was lying about it being the reason in that moment. Chris rolled his eyes and Emma wanted to scowl so badly, but she held back.

“There’s always something wrong with you two. Why don’t you guys just talk it out or something?”

“I tried. She’s bein’ difficult. I mean I went to check on her about some stuff but she just brushed it off and told me about calling Nori and Aliya and whatever like I cared about any of that extra stuff. It’s like she doesn’t even listen to herself,” Emma comments but Chris’s mind has everything blurred in that moment as the words replay in his head and he has to think. No Em, I don’t think you’ve been hearing yourself lately. “- so I told her to go call those stupid people and be a family with them,” she shrugged but Chris didn’t respond. “Hey,” Emma calls. “Did you hear anything I said,”

“Huh-oh.. Yeah- yeah, I did.. Woo- wow, yeah, that’s crazy. I mean you tried being there for her and she just.. Did that,” he says and thankfully, Emma takes that commentary as even more justification that wasn’t needed.

“I know! She’s being so selfish about everything. Ever since that whole prom thing where I went with Kayla instead of her she’s just been acting strange and treating me like I did something wrong.”

But you did do something wrong! You did so much wrong!

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to hold you responsible anymore. Look at you, covered in tattoos so poorly done, smoking your life away, drinking so much that your liver is probably ready to shut down. You look 58 not 38, and damn sure not 28 like you’re supposed to be,"

“I get it, okay. I screwed up,”

“No, you did little more than screw up. You’ve annihilated every opportunity to redeem yourself not for anyone else but simply for you. Countless relationships later and this is what you’ve amounted to—,”

“-Okay! I said I get it!”

“I don’t think you do. I can still smell the weed and nicotine on you. Tobacco soaked into your clothes. Alcohol piping from your pores. You look like you haven’t eaten in months. Frail, your teeth are yellow, eyes are bloodshot and your skin is pale. And this is what your dues will do to you. The lies you’ve spewed. Falsified seeds you’ve sewn is what you’re currently reaping and a list of many other things, but I’ve said enough—,”

“-ya think?!” she bites back, but the therapist merely smirks.

“Do you?”

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“Four days?!” Cora asked, surprised and watched as her mother nodded slowly at her.

“Yes, it appears as though the predictions were finally correct this time. Heaven knows our news stations have never gotten a weather prediction right, but it seems as though it’s worked this time around.. And not to worry, Regina is genuinely safe, she’s with Aliya. There was a bit of an issue, but she’s fine now, Aliya said she will call with consistent updates,” Rose informs the entire group and she misses the shared looks between the three people. Henry could always level with Santiago who almost always kept his daughter in the loop, especially where his grandchildren were involved.

“Well, I guess Regina’s happy about this,” Henry mutters with a soft laugh, rubbing the back of his neck. Santiago looks at him with a shrug of solidarity.

“I know I would be,” he smiled and Cora had to keep from smirking because of the sheer amount of support that’s slowly building for Regina.

“Both of you, hush,” she tried, swatting at the air around them, but her husband grinned and her father laughed a good belly laugh, alerting Rose of the secret conversation.

“What am I missing,” she said moreso than asked.

“Nothing, sweetness. Nothing at all,” he said to her and that prompted her to walk over to him, bend to meet his eyes as she looked at him squarely. Rose rolled her eyes.

“You know what, I’m not even going to attempt to pry it out of you- you stubborn old man,” she said which in turn made him laugh even more.
“Well… shoot, why are you attacking me like that- woman,”

“Because I can,” she smirked and he laughed once more.

“At least I’m still a handsome dust bunny,” he combatted and Rose did not comment. It wasn’t until Henry and Cora looked at her that they saw the reason she didn’t and it was because of that look she had in her eyes. That solemn, beautifully sculpted smile where love was the only thing on her mind. Where love was the only thing that radiated from her. Years upon years of marriage later and they still shared such an unbreakable and unbeatable bond.

“I hope we’re this grossly in love at their age,” Cora said loud enough that they heard, for which she received scowls of petulance laced with childish humour in their smiles.

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“Sweet!” Nori cheered after Regina had relayed what transpired mere hours earlier. Regina groaned.

“No, Nori. Not sweet! So not sweet,” she tried hushing and yelling at the same time. Aliya was officially out cold with Oliver asleep on top of her stomach as Regina sat with her feet curled up in the chair in her room. Aliya stirred and Regina hesitated before vacating the room in search of some quiet space.

“What do you mean?! I thought this was something you wanted!” Nori practically shrieked in confusion.

“Yes! But not like this, not knocking at death’s door and nearly dying on her porch! Not literally being so weak that I couldn’t cover myself from her having to strip me of my wet clothes and put me in hot enough water so I didn’t die. Not to the degree that I just completely lost it and pushed the woman to drink enough alcohol to knock herself out because I started an argument that could’ve been avoided…”

“..okay- okay- but I mean, come on. You didn’t know any of that was going to happen,”

“I know but it doesn’t make this any less embarrassing,” Regina reminded and Nori hummed.

“Okay, true, but like was there anything positive that came out of it?”

“I guess, but it wasn’t really because of you guys,”

“You guys?”

“Yeah.. so get this- Emma decided to have yet another blow up because I was going to call you and call Aliya after she claimed she came to check on me, proceeded to insult me when I didn’t bother to bite at the weak bait she was dangling because she knows that I know why she came to Maine, and that’s another thing, exactly what she came for is what she got,”

“That Chris kid?”

“Yeah.. him,”

“I thought that little fling of theirs would be over,” Nori commented honestly.

“So did I, but I guess it’s a Christmas miracle for them,” Regina joked and Nori snorted.
“You’re rude,” she laughed but Regina smirked.

“Eh, I’m growing my backbone out,”

“It suits you and it’s attractive as hell,”

“Why thank you, kind person,” the young brunette grinned.

“My pleasure, little lady. Soooo, you take any good pictures lately?” Nori had then asked and heard the telltale sign of slight defeat.

“To be honest, no. Not since summer. Whatever was on the camera roll from then is still on it now. I don’t even want it anymore. I don’t want anything that has or had me attached to Emma. All of the old gifts, the friendship bracelets, all of it, shove it in a box and throw it away or burn it, whichever works,” she said a tad bit flatly. Nori remained quiet for a minute as they mulled it over.

“I mean, if it makes you happy,” they then said.

“I still have no clue what makes me happy, but I’ll figure that out eventually,”

“Good… but why not sell the camera. Get whatever the value of it is right now and buy yourself a new one?”

“Because I don’t even want the money associated with it- and I know it was you who gave Emma the money to get it, she admitted that much; but I just. You did buy it, I think that much is a slap in the face if I sold it, I’d just throw it away at this point. I know, that sounds no better, but still. I just, I don’t want anything from it Nori. Nothing. Not the pictures, the lense, none of it. Those aren’t memories, those were lessons, and I don’t need reminders…” she trailed off and heard the hum.

“I hear you.. Okay, whatever suits you, so- how’s your girlfriend?” Nori then teased and Regina groaned.

“Nori.. shut up, she isn’t my girlfriend,”

“Nope! You owe me an update,”

“She’s still asleep, what else are you expecting me to say- and she’s not my girlfriend!” Regina repeated but Nori just laughed.

“Whatsoever you say-,” hold on, phone’s ringing,” they said and Regina held her breath and her words, only to hear a little rustle of feet on her end. She spins around to see Oliver holding onto his teddy and rubbing at his face in the doorway of his mother’s room.

“Hey buddy, did you have a nice nap?” she pondered and he nodded before he blindly made his way to her and climbed into her lap.

“Gina, you still here.. You gonna stay wif me and momma tonight?” he asked and she nodded.

“I get to stay for 4 whole days, baby…so we can watch all the movies and play all the games and make treats for you me and your mommy to eat,” she offered only to see his beautiful and childish grin. But then, Oliver’s facial expression changes and Regina is confused as to what’s gotten him so down all of a sudden.”What’s wrong, buddy?”

“Is she coming too?” he asked and at first Regina was entirely confused.

“Who, Oli? Does your mommy have a friend you don’t like?” she wonders but he shakes his head.
“nuhuh, your friend,” he says and she gets it. Regina can smile with surety as she answers him, even though Nori has since been back on the phone and is now laughing at her.

“Ohhhh, no Oli. She isn’t coming. She’s here but she isn’t coming to your mommy’s at all,”

“Promise?”

“Cross my heart,”

“Okay.. momma’s awake, she wanted to see you,” he then says and once again Nori is laughing but is also teasing her now about tending to her girlfriend. Regina sings a song telling Nori to shut it before they say goodnight to each other and she walks in the room to see that Aliya looks like she slept some and isn’t completely shot to hell off alcohol anymore. Aliya turns when she hears Regina enter and they smile at one another.. Regina supposes she could wait til she was legal to pursue love with an older woman.

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Four days is a whirlwind for everyone. Regina’s time spent at Aliya’s is enough fun to carry her through the next year and into Summer. She kept to her promises to binge watch movies and make treats and do whatever other fun things she could do with Oliver and Aliya. Regina read him stories whenever he wanted and he slept with her all four nights. They made pizza, s’mores, rice krispies treats, cake, brownies, pancakes and waffles. She taught him how to cook eggs but made sure he was a good distance from the stove too. She reassured him everyday that Emma wasn’t going to just show up with Chris and even helped Aliya rearrange his room. As for her relationship with her birthday twin’s mother.. Well, they didn’t discuss their relationship or the lack thereof since that night. Aliya still drank but Regina was positive other things were now on her mind, and if it was still something to do with her then damn, Aliya needed a new way to release her energy or handle her stress. Regina had wanted to broach the subject a few times, however.. That was rough on her because she felt she’d do what she’d done nights prior to and taking a chance to be that.. Invasive, may not have ended well.

Emma’s time with Chris so far had managed to turn her completely off which was saying something as the raging teen hormones are what pushed her to agree with the plan from the beginning. It was just something about him that was now irritating her and she couldn’t quite pinpoint it. Was it the close spaces they shared, the consistent kissing that literally seemed to be the only thing he ever wanted to do with her or was she just, no longer interested in him? Whatever it was, it was grating on her final nerve and by the second night, somewhat into the third day, Emma had told him she couldn’t stay; she just wasn’t feeling at home and that she missed Regina. The missing Regina part was true, but Chris had a suspicion that wasn’t the only thing. She had seemed distant and annoyed at him quite a bit, pushing and shoving him away when he wanted to hug her, but he just figured she needed more affection, not less. And he certainly didn’t think anything else could be wrong, but it was because Emma never talked. She complained, but she never talked unless it was about Regina and how bad she was acting or mean she was being or rude and blah blah blah. He wishes he could say he’d turned off a listening ear but she would get him involved every single time and he’d have to pay attention or he’d be getting yelled at too.. The more Chris thought about her wanting to leave, the less concerned he was about why she was leaving because he was now assessing their entire
relationship. He had to spend two more stormy days with her at his grandparents and it was now awkward for him. But, their relationship was never roses he thought as he sat on the back of his grandparents’ porch. From they met it seemed so nice, but he remembers Emma complaining from the day they met. He remembers every day Emma seemed to be driven by her need to know where Regina was and who she was with and why she was with them, but he could never understand why someone who claimed the other was being so… unattractive, was the one who actually was unattractive. Chris didn’t want to say it, but he was now thinking it. Emma was a terrible person. She was.. Mean.. He stopped thinking and ignore it. He tried convincing Regina Emma was a sweet person. He tried convincing the best friend of someone else that the person was sweet and good.. And that was three red flags right there. How he missed that unnerved him and he forced the thoughts away even more because now, he had two more storm days with Emma and she wanted to go back to the Sorentini’s. Sucks to say he wanted her gone as much as she wanted to be gone. But now he had even bigger regrets, and that was asking for her to help with his grandparents for the time being.

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Four days of storms later and Aliya is reluctant to take Regina back to her grandparents for many reasons. It had gotten so comfortable with her there that it felt almost natural. They functioned like a family and not in a big sister- little sister kind of way but a ..family kind of way. The thought- or at least saying it may have made it feel too true, but Aliya had gotten attached once again the same way Oliver had and now both were harbouring tiny bits of anger over Regina having to go back to her grandparents place. So, instead of driving her home, She opts to walk her home and Regina is all for it because it gives her more time with them that driving would have otherwise reduced to nothing. The walk is fine, that’s not the part that becomes interesting, it’s bumping into Chris and Emma on their way there too. Oddly enough, they all meet at the gate and Emma seems shocked and still stuck in her mood that’s hard to read. Regina isn’t sure if she’s mad, annoyed or simply just doesn’t want to be there and Chris, well, he looks as though he’s had a rough couple nights and something bad is still looming over him. Oliver hides behind his mother’s legs when he spots them and Aliya blindly rubs her child’s back.

“Hey, Chris- right?” she says in breaking the silence and Chris nods and tries to smile.

“Yeah,” he says.

“Cool.. hey, Emma,” she then greets and Emma looks at her.

“hey..Aliya,” she says as if she’d forgotten. Silence enraptured the entire group as Emma stares at Regina who doesn’t even bother asking why she’s back or how she’s doing. Based on the emotionless stare that’s not even geared towards her at this point, she supposes Regina doesn’t have the slightest clue what in the hell is happening.

“Annnnnyyywaaaaay, Oli, do you wanna walk Regina to the door so you can say bye?” she then asks her child and he nods before tugging Regina away. Aliya has to make him slow down so she could hug the young teen and give her a kiss on the cheek and then let her be dragged. Well, two people were saved from the terror.. Now what?

Well, clearly the universe had something in store for Aliya.
“So, I guess I’ll see you later, you know, if you still wanna come over and help with my grandparents,” Chris had told Emma but she sighed heavily and shouldered the backpack Aliya hadn’t noticed until now.

“whatever,” she muttered.

“Em-,”

“-no, Chris. I don’t wanna hear it. Who just breaks up with someone and says ‘but we can still be friends’. Are you nuts?” Emma asks him and Aliya isn’t sure if she should back away or stand there and have a laugh.

Jesus Liya, having a laugh at her heart’s expense.. Damn!

Chris just sighs like he had heard her say it to her before.

“Emma, we talked about it-,”

“-no, you talked and all I heard you say was it wasn’t working and I’ve been different and loads of other junk. You didn’t even give me a good reason-,”

“-because there’s too many reasons, Emma. All reasons you should know by now. You’re different around everyone with everything and you’re just not the same…”

“What are you even talking about,” she pushes. “You planned half of this. You came up with these ideas to be together and spend time together-,”

“-yeah and ever since we’ve been in the same room, you acted like I had a disease. And you can’t lie and say you haven’t been different. You have been and you know it,” he accuses and she stays quiet. Jaw set. He shakes his head in disappointment. “Listen, I like you-okay-,” he tried but she snorted.

“Really? Couldn’t tell with this break up,” she interrupted but he rolled his eyes.

“This isn’t worth explaining anymore,”

“Then just go, Christopher…” she challenged and failed to realize he was willing to take that challenge to its fullest extent.

“…fine,” he agreed and turned to leave, neither was willing to stop the other, but Chris had already tried making his peace. “I just hope for your sake, you stop treating Regina like trash. She might end up being all you have left… Aliya, could you tell her I’m sorry.. I don’t think she ever wants to talk to me again, and I can’t blame her,” he says and sees the woman nod.

“Sure thing Chris..” Aliya promises before making herself scarce and walking up the pathway to do just that before she was coming back down with Oliver. Emma stood there..staring at Chris and wondering just what in the hell he meant by what he said, but- in the end she chose to ignore it and just went inside the house. She tried her best to avoid all adult conversation, but she was stopped and asked several times why she was back and what was wrong. She’d muttered mostly that she just felt homesick and wanted to be around the people she was familiar with even though she barely communicated with anyone unless she needed something. She just narrowly avoided Regina the rest of that afternoon but was faced with her when it came time for dinner. Rose had made it mandatory that since Emma was there, she was to help with dinner, breakfast and whatever other meals were to be made as they spend time there. Either she complained or bit the bullet and just got it over with, but
Rose wanted to see if this would push them to communicate and it had absolutely...not. It really did nothing for either girl. Regina could work quietly whilst Emma just worked stubbornly and was forced to be quiet. She wasn’t going to bridge the gap and Regina was no longer going to attempt to..

When it actually was time for them to eat and the questions of Emma and Chris came up, mostly about if she was going to help him with his grandparents still, Emma decided to divulge there and then that,

“Chris and I broke up…” with a shrug that seemed noncommittal. She wasn’t sure who snorted or if it was just a cough but she felt the air at the table go stale. But, then she looked around and the adults were kind of.. Relieved? Regina seemed, unphased and uninterested which really did nothing for Emma’s comfort or confidence and then Rose had simply said.

“Not everything is meant to last but hopefully you two remain cordial and friends at least… life and love are a learning process,“

“Here here,” Henry agreed and Cora nodded. The table was silent again for a while until Regina cleared her throat.

“Nonna.. “

“Yes My little Cherub,” Rose regarded her and Regina looked up from pushing her food around.

“There’s something I need to tell you and I don’t know how you’ll take it, but I need to tell you. Mami and papi and grandpa already know, but..”

“...Regina, darling. Spit it out. You know how I feel about trailing a topic,” she’d told her and it wasn’t scolding just a reminder, for which Regina’s response was blurted.

“I’m a lesbian,” she then said, clearly and slightly shaky on the end but it was there, it was out and Rose swallowed thickly.

“I-I… okay,” is all she could managed, which now had Regina interested.

“Okay? That’s it?”

“Well- I’m bloody well shocked, but that’s about all I can manage to get out.. I love you, Regina, but this is.. Different. And you said everyone else around me knows…”

“Except Emma,” she shrugged noncommittally as if Emma was just a background character.

“..right,” her grandmother had nodded weirdly. “You do know I will need time to process this,”

“I know. There’s no rush, I just… had to get it out,” she tells her and her grandmother nods

“I commend you for that, anela.. And I respect your confidence, but.. Time, sweetheart,” Rose said as if she was trying to remind herself to wait. Regina just nodded, swallowed and finished her food.

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The ending of dinner was much lighter as the conversation the adults had switched to something the
children did not need to get involved in and were now free to leave. Emma had followed behind Regina and had asked her if she could talk to her which was strange to Regina but she agreed. Once they were in the room, Emma spoke.

“Did you have fun while I was gone?” she’d asked and Regina was there trying to gauge what exactly Emma was referring to.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean here at your grandparents,” Emma said as if she should know.

“I wasn’t here. I was with Aliya and Oliver,” she corrected and saw the way Emma’s face contorted. “And I did have fun. More fun than I ever could’ve in the past few years,” she said.

“What’s that supposed to mean. Don’t we have lots of fun together?” Emma had then asked, offended.

“We haven’t spoken to each other in months. You didn’t come to Maine because of me. You came because of Chris. I didn’t even know you were coming and you didn’t bother to tell me. We haven’t talked since the summer-,”

“-but that’s your fault-,”

“-no, it’s yours,” Regina told her flatly. “Look, I’m not here to talk to you about who was wrong about what-,”

“-because you know you’re wrong, Regina. You were being difficult and only focusing on Nori and everyone else when you’re supposed to be my best friend. You just started actin’ all weird and brushin’ me off n tellin’ me things were fine. Like I cared about anything else or anyone else. I didn’t ask you about them. I don’t care about them-”

“-and you don’t care about me either, Emma. You’re inconsiderate, but you’re so nosy you pass that off as caring. That’s not caring. Trying to control me is not caring. Trying to bend me to your will is not caring. Getting mad at me for everything that literally has nothing to do with you is not caring, Emma. You don’t and didn’t care then so what makes you think you saying any of this to me now makes me believe you ever cared. I’m the one who’s acting weird and caring about everything and everyone else when you’re the one who dumped me and have been dumping me since before formal? I’m the one who is difficult when every single thing I’ve ever said or done in the past two years seems to have been a problem for you? I cared about everyone else when you ditched me, Auggie and Lena just to go be Christopher’s shadow? And now, you’re here, standing in the front of me, trying to be my friend again or whatever it is you’re failing at doing all because Chris dumped you? Do you honestly think that’s how life works?” she pushes and she wanted to push more and more and more but…. Just like the laugh of disbelief and the words of “You know what… just forget it, Emma,” Regina shook her head and walked out of the room, a door slamming behind her as she left.

Emma stood there and the words she wanted to say in response just left her with a resounding puddle of voices in her head.

These are the links for the beginning of the fic-photo wise, every coming chapter will also have moodboard kind of panels to better give you an imagery of the story-line we're following. They will be uploaded to Tumblr for easier access and will always come with the direct link in the Summary or otherwise, in the Notes.

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