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**I Don't Belong To You**

by IShipLOVE

Summary

Emma isn't the type to settle down. She enjoys the thought of a different woman every night. And for a while, one of those women is elementary school teacher Regina Mills. But what happens when one night just isn't enough anymore? G!P Emma so if it's not your thing, don't bother reading!
Chapter 1

G!P Emma. You've been warned.

I own nothing.

########

"Fuuuuuck. Yes, right there baby. I'm so close." 

Emma's eyes rolled back as she enjoyed the sensation of tight walls grasping greedily at her pounding cock.

"You feel so so good Gina. Shit, that's it. Squeeze my dick!" She tightens and squeezes around Emma's dick and within moments, she feels Emma's hips slam into her from behind as she releases her load.

Between Emma moaning into her back and the feeling of her cock pulsing at it comes into the condom, Regina can't help but reach her own climax, flooding Emma's cock and balls with her own stream of cum.

Emma kisses her sweaty back as Regina comes down from her high and when it appears that she's done, Emma pulls out slowly, knowing how sensitive she is after sex. She removes the condom, and as Regina collapses on the bed, she sees the look of disgust on Emma's face at handling the cum filled condom.

She ties it, tosses it in the trash, and heads back to the bed. She slips back on her Calvin Klein boxers then grabs her phone from the nightstand next to her. She's texting rapidly, from what Regina can tell, probably letting someone know she's going to be late before putting her phone down to look for the rest of her clothes.

This is the part she hates. This is the moment where she remembers that Emma isn't her girlfriend. In fact, she isn't anyone's girlfriend. Because Emma Swan doesn't believe in monogamy. And Regina knows this. She has since day one because Emma was nothing if not forthcoming about it. She lays there watching her dress quickly and she doesn't know if it's her confusing feelings for Emma or her pride that makes her speak up, but she sits up in bed, using the sheets to cover her.

"I don't like that you finish fucking me and then immediately get dressed to go fuck someone else. It makes me feel like a cheap whore."

Emma doesn't stop trying to pull up her jeans and doesn't even look her way as she responds, "I'm not going to fuck anyone else. I'm just meeting some friends for drinks."

Regina scoffs and rolls her eyes. She knows that's a half-truth meant to sooth her. Emma has said that before. She was just going for drinks or headed to the movies or bowling. Something boring to ease Regina's fears but the truth always comes out in the morning when there are pictures all over the internet and social media of Emma leaving a woman's house in the morning in the same outfit she left Regina's in.

"It may not start with sex, but that's always how it ends."

Emma finishes with her jeans and begins looking for her shirt. She hasn't turned to face her so she can't tell what she's thinking or if she's angry.
Don't sound so jealous Regina, you'll scare her off. Just play it cool.

"And I'm… I'm fine with that Emma, I am. I knew what this was when we started. I just… I didn't expect you to be hopping from my bed to someone else's. I just—"

Emma unexpectedly jumps back on the bed, forever playful, and climbs her way up to Regina's body.

She places gentle kisses on her tight stomach, before moving to each nipple and giving them just enough attention before moving up to her neck, a spot she knows is particularly sensitive for Regina.

She knows this tactic of avoidance and she knows she should put a stop to it, but damn, if Emma isn't the best lover she's ever had. But, in typical Emma fashion, she opens her stupid mouth and reminds Regina about why she was upset to begin with.

"Gina, don't think about those girls. It kills the mood. I'm with you right now and that's all that matters."

Regina's eyes shoot open and she sternly pushes Emma away, hands on her chest to keep her at a distance.

"Is that what you say to every girl? Emma, I'm serious. If you're going to insist on coming over here and then just leaving like-like I'm your dirty little secret, then you can say goodbye to sex with me at all."

Regina says it with a firm tone, and she supposes she could follow through, the only problem is that sex with Emma is the best part of her week. She's never had someone so big or so skilled and she is in no way trying to lose that. But she also can't stand the fact that Emma thinks it's okay to have sex with her and someone else in the same night. Not being interested in pursuing a relationship is one thing, but to treat her like another notch in the headboard makes Regina sick to her stomach.

She and Emma stare at each other for almost a full minute before Emma slowly starts to smirk.

She rolls her eyes, knowing that whatever comes out of the 24 year olds mouth will probably be something crude.

But instead, Emma moves forward and places a gentle kiss onto her lips, something that is very rare for the blonde. She doesn't do a lot of kissing and if she does, it's usually rough while in the throes of passion. But she's pleasantly surprised when Emma grabs her face, and deepens the slow, sensual kisses.

If this is a new form of distraction, she must say, it's working well.

Or it is until Emma unexpectedly pulls away and the smirk resumes. Regina forces herself to look away. She doesn't want to see the look of triumph on Emma's face.

"Gina, look at me."

"No," she says crossing her arms, "I hate when you do that. You think you can just kiss me and everything is going to be fine, but—"

"You know, if you want something Regina, you can just ask for it. I don't like games. And I hate to be told what to do. If you want me to stay, just ask me to stay. If you want a night that belongs solely to you, just say so, but don't threaten to take away something you know we both enjoy."
"I'm not trying to tell you what to do, Em-"

"You know, I realize that I don't have the same fancy education as you or whatever, but that doesn't mean I'm stupid, Regina." She says with a hint of laughter so at least she knows she isn't actually angry.

"I know…"

Emma sits back waiting for more, waiting for her to ask for what she wants, but after a few minutes she figures that prideful Regina Mills isn't going to do it, so she'll just have to take the initiative.  

"How about we don't do Wednesdays anymore?"

Regina looks up at her abruptly. Well now look what you've done! She doesn't even want to see you now.

"Why…why not Wednesdays?" She tries to keep her voice from shaking but by the raised brow that Emma is giving her, it's pretty obvious that she's failed.

Instead of responding right away, she scoots up towards the head of the bed to sit beside Regina and laces their fingers together.

"I've always felt like Wednesday's were bad for you. It's the middle of the week and I know you have to be up early in the morning. I-I don't just pack up my shit and leave because I'm in a hurry to get away from you or anything. So never think that. I just imagine that working with kids all day is exhausting. That's why I usually try to leave right after. I want to get out of your hair, you know?"

For some reason, Emma's thoughtfulness surprises her, though really it shouldn't. This isn't the first time Emma has shown a softer side. And it's moments like these when she has to wonder, which version is the real Emma Swan.

She watches Emma's thumb stroke her hand and it hits her that they've never held hands like this. Only when Emma is rushing her up the stairs does she grab her hand and even then, their fingers are never entangled like this.

This is new.

But despite this being uncharted territory for them, Emma looks completely content. Which makes her wonder what all she is willing to give, if only Regina would ask.

"I actually really like our Wednesdays. I mean, the kids drive me nuts every day and by Wednesday, I'm always in need of a pick me up so it's nice to come home and enjoy your company."

Emma laughs heartily at that. "My company…nice euphemism. Alright…we can stick with Wednesdays!"

"But…" she releases a breath then just goes for it, "I also like Fridays."

Emma laughs again, looking over at her, "Now you're just gettin greedy."

Regina blushes and prepares to retract the statement, but Emma leans over and kisses her cheek.

"But I kind of like it. Consider it done. Wednesdays and Fridays are just you and me. All night."

Regina is speechless. Never in a million years did she think it would be that easy. Emma had always shied away from anything that even slightly resembled commitment. She had asked once if she
wanted to go to dinner with a few fellow teachers and Emma had disappeared for a two weeks, silently letting Regina know that that wasn't acceptable for their relationship. Or lack thereof really.

But, as she feels something wet and scratchy brush against her cheek, she's finding that Emma is full of surprises.

"Did you just lick me?"

"No," Emma answers seriously.

"Emma, you definitely did. I felt it." she wipes her cheek off in disbelief.

"If you're going to nag all night, I'm just going to go," she makes a move to get out of bed, but Regina pulls her arm back and effectively puts a stop to all movement by climbing onto her lap.

"Well, if I have you all night, I should make good use of you. And since you licked me…it seems only fair that I return the favor," she finds the hem of Emma's shirt and lifts it over her head to reveal a braless chest and abs she could trace with her fingers and tongue all night.

"Mmm, please do."

And that's all the permission she needs before pushing Emma back onto the pillows and making her way down her torso to her favorite part of Emma's body.

As Regina unbuttons her jeans, she hears her mumble something about giving a whole new meaning to hump day and she can't help but laugh.

Emma Swan is going to be the death of her. In more ways than one.

######
Let me know your thoughts!
Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

No sex in this one, so no warnings necessary! This scene takes place three months prior to chapter one.

3 Months Earlier

What had she been thinking? How stupid could she have been?

Well, in my defense, everything seemed like it had been going well.

He had taken her to a lovely restaurant. He had been a perfect gentleman, as usual, all evening long. He had been completely normal. Everything seemed to be going well as usual.

And when he had taken her hand, leaned forward, and smiled gently at her, her breath caught in her throat.

For a quick moment, she thought…maybe…perhaps he was going to…

But he didn’t. And she reminds herself of that harshly as she takes a large gulp from her glass.

He had actually done the opposite of propose.

"This isn't working, Regina."

She takes another gulp.

"I'm just not happy anymore."

And another.

"Honestly, you're a little...boring...monotonous, you know?"

She finishes the half-full glass.

And it stings but not as much as his cold words from just hours before.

So what if their relationship was a little boring? So what if things were monotonous? Wasn't that what relationships were supposed to be? Boring? Monotonous? Consistent?

She liked going to the same restaurant and Movie Theater every week. She liked things that were familiar. She was a simple person. She didn't need fancy outings or spontaneous adventures.

She had been happy with her life. She had been happy with him.

But I guess that just makes one of us.

She raises her hand for another drink, but then thinks better of it. One more drink and she’ll have to take a cab home. Right now, where she is, she could walk the few blocks. She's buzzed for sure, but
not drunk and she supposes she should keep it that way.

"I'll close my tab and take the check now, please," she practically yells to the bartender.

As she begins to dig in her purse for her wallet, she is startled by a hand on her back.

She looks up immediately into the most beautiful blue eyes and she swears the entire bar goes silent. As she stares up at this woman, she can't help but feel like her heart is beating a mile a minute. She wants to say something. She should say something. But the mysterious blonde beats her to it.

"Please tell me you weren't leaving? I've been working up the courage to talk to you for the last ten minutes and now that I have, it would be a shame to see you leave now."

Goodness gracious, that voice. It's husky. It's confident. It's…

So damn sexy, she almost says aloud.

The truth is that she was definitely leaving. She is tired, tipsy, and has to be up at 5 a.m. for work.

But at the same time, this woman is hands down the loveliest creature she has ever laid eyes on.

So pretty in fact that Regina has no idea why she would be nervous about approaching her.

Not that Regina herself isn't pretty. She has been told that she was very attractive by her suitors, which were plenty. But somehow this woman talking to her feels like she is so far out of her league that the very thought of her contemplating nervously for ten minutes whether she should approach her or not seems absurd. And she's not sure if she buys it completely, but she is flattered.

"Uh, no. Well…I was just closing my tab. So…yeah," She laughs nervously as she finally manages to look away and continues to search for her wallet.

"Oh," is the only response she gets accompanied with a sigh.

When the bartender returns with her check, she grabs it frantically, then places her bag on the bar top to try to get some better lighting.

Eventually, the blonde must see her stress because she gently takes the book from her hands.

"Please, for being a coward and not approaching you sooner, allow me."

Regina looks up to find her pulling her wallet from her breast pocket of her jacket. And for the first time, Regina gets a good look at her outfit.

Tight black pants, gripping her thighs as if their lives depended on it and at least 4 inch heels. She has a white button up tucked in, a thin black tie with a clip to hold it in place and a jacket on to complete an outfit that looks like it would cost more than her annual salary.

She wants to protest. Instinctively, she almost responds in her usual way, telling her that it's a very sweet offer but that she's seeing someone and wouldn't want to send the wrong message.

But she isn't seeing anyone.

Not anymore.

And really, it is a sweet gesture. And apparently much needed because she cannot find her damn wallet anywhere.
She looks over to see blonde put two twenties with the check, nearly double the amount of the bill, and can't help but smile at her kindness.

He had always paid. For everything. But she suspects it was always out of obligation and pity more than a genuine desire to be sweet.

"Thank you so much. I swear, this isn't a trick or anything. I really have no clue where my wallet disappeared to."

The blonde smiles broadly, exposing sparkling, perfectly aligned teeth.

"I'm happy to take care of it. Of course, it's not without ulterior motives that I do so."

Her smile falters. This is why she doesn't let anyone buy her drinks. She's found that in the past, men always expect something in return. What starts out as a seemingly innocent gestures always turns into a tit for a tat.

When the bartender comes to collect the check, she tells him to keep the change then turns back to Regina.

"So, now that that's taken care of, what's your name?"

She is hesitant. She's not exactly familiar with the bar scene, not having been in one since college. But she does remember, years ago, being warned about predatory men at bars.

*But she's not a man…that has to count for something right?*

Sensing her hesitance, the woman reaches forward with her right hand.

"Emma."

"Regina," she relents, reaching out to shake the impossibly soft hand.

"Lovely to meet you, Regina."

Regina's eyelids flutter as she hears her name on Emma's lips for the very first time ever.

She can't honestly say that she's never felt an attraction to women before, but she knows it's never felt like this. She's not sure if it's the suit or the confidence or just the sheer undeniable beauty, but she finds herself wanting to put her hands on this woman.

On Emma.

"Since you're leaving, I won't hold you up. However, I can walk you to your car. If that's okay?"

The words are spoken softly, as if to assure her that she is of no threat. That she means her no harm.

She seems gentle and sweet and so, though her father would be turning in his grave, she nods her head and grabs her purse.

Emma's grin lights up the room and once again, her hand finds its way to her back as she is guided through the small bar and out into the cool, smokeless air.

Regina breathes in the fresh air deeply as, unbeknownst to her, Emma watches, absolutely enthralled.

Realizing that she's staring, she clears her throat and looks around. "Where are you parked?"
'Oh, I'm sorry, I forgot I actually didn't drive. I...I was just at a restaurant a block away, so..."
Emma nods understandingly, reaching into her pocket. "Not a problem, I can take you home."

Regina's eyes immediately widen. A walk to her car was one thing, but a stranger knowing where she lived was out of the question.

"That's really alright, I can walk. It's only a few blocks over."

"Oh, okay. We can do that then. Lead the way."

Regina clutches her purse a little closer, growing nervous at Emma's assertion that she would be joining.

"Oh, you don't need to walk with me. It's not far, I'll be fine. I know this neighborhood well."

Emma pulls up her sleeve to expose a sleek black watch.

"It's almost 10 p.m. I don't at all feel comfortable letting you walk home alone," she looks up skeptically at Regina.

She blushes at the sincerity in her voice, but refuses to give in. For all she knows, this could be some sort of act. She's not willing to take her chances.

"Really, it's fine. I've lived here for years, it's very safe."

Emma laughs at that. "That's what everyone says until something happens and I refuse to let you become a statistic."

"Emma, seriously. It's okay. I can walk."

"I can too. We're a match made in heaven. We should walk together."

Regina sighs.

She's not sure if she should be creeped out by Emma's insistence or flattered.

She must see the nervousness because Emma steps back a little and puts her hands up in surrender.

"I promise, I'm not trying to hurt you, stalk you, or scare you. I just want to see that you get home safely. I totally understand if you don't want a complete stranger walking you home, but at least let me hail you a cab. For just you." Emma adds with a smirk.

Regina sighs again.

It is rather late. And though Regina is certain that the neighborhood is safe, that mainly only applies to the daytime. She's never been out this late without him by her side. So the offer to take a cab is actually much appreciated.

"Okay, that's...really nice of you."

Emma grins triumphantly and she finds herself staring for a long moment. This girl really is beautiful.

She moves to the sidewalk and holds out her arm for just a minute before a cab speeds up towards the curb. She leans down to speak to the driver quickly before opening the back door for her.
As Regina approaches, she smiles appreciatively before lowering herself into the car.

Emma closes the door behind her and leans down to talk through the window.

"Well, Regina, I have to say, I have really enjoyed spending time with you. Highlight of my day, for sure."

Regina lets out her own laugh, for the first time since she left him at that table.

"We've only known each other for five minutes."

"And yet…" She lets the unspoken words linger in the air for a moment as Regina fiddles with her dress for no good reason before looking back into a sea of blue.

"Goodnight Emma."

Emma says nothing. She only smiles and steps away from the car, hands in her pockets.

The driver immediately pulls away and inputs her address into the GPS, before silently driving her home.

When they arrive at the brownstone, she leans forward.

"I seem to have lost my wallet, but if you'll give me just a moment, I can go grab some cash. You can even keep the meter running."

Already reaching for the handle, she misses the driver shaking his head, but hears him speak.

"The woman, she paid already. Gave me a nice tip too. Told me to take you wherever you wanted to go. Oh…" he reaches into the passenger seat for something and then turns back towards her.

"She told me to give you this too."

Regina can't help but smile as she reaches forward to find Emma's name and number scribbled on a bar napkin. When she had the time to write it, between the bar and the cab, Regina will never know, but she takes it anyway.

She thanks the driver and he waits until she is safely in her home before pulling away. She can't help but to think Emma had something to do with that.

She also falls asleep with a smile on her face.

But she refuses to admit that Emma had something to do with that.

######

Love and appreciate all of your kudos and comments! Until next time!
Chapter 3

This is a continuation of the previous chapter however, a month has gone by. I'll let you know when we're all caught up and back to the present that we saw in chapter one. Enjoy!

She wakes to a blaring ringing.

Well, it probably isn't blaring, but she's hung over as fuck so even a whisper sounds like a blare.

She reaches for her phone, staring at a number she doesn't recognize before deciding to answer.

There are always girls she doesn't have names for in her phone, that doesn't mean she doesn't want to hear from them.

So she answers and she's pleased to find that it is in fact a woman.

"Hello, Miss Swan?"

But not the kind of woman she's hoping for. No one she sleeps with called her 'Miss Swan'.

"Yeah, who's this?"

"Hi, I'm Amy Turner, the school nurse at Coral Academy. I'm calling because August fell while on the playground today."

Upon hearing her little brother's name, she sits up in bed.

"Is he okay?" she asks while throwing off the covers and looking for something to wear.

"He's doing alright, but I really think he's broken his arm. I was going to call an ambulance but he refused to go anywhere and said he wanted you to take him. I know you're not listed on his-"

"It's fine, it's okay, I'm uh, I'm on my way and I'll be there in 20. Just tell him to sit tight, please."

"Of course, thank you so much! We'll see you soon."

She hangs up without saying goodbye and finds a pair of chucks lying around to slip on her feet. She grabs her Ray Bands and keys and is out of the door in record time.

She walks into the nurse's office to see her 6 year old brother sitting on the bed with tear stained cheeks and his right arm in a sling.

"Hey, buddy."

Hearing her voice, he looks up and immediately bursts into tears again. She hurries forward to hug him close, while being mindful of his possibly broken arm, and kisses the top of his brown curly hair.

"I felllllll," he drags out in a sob.

She rubs his back soothingly as he wets her shirt with his tiny tears.

She knows she's not the world's best daughter and she's aware that she isn't the best sister either, but
she loves this kid.

She admits that a part of her hates him because, unlike her, August is her parent's biological son. Emma herself was adopted at 14. And while she will forever be grateful for that, she knows that they love him more. They cherish him and coddle him and she hates them for it, for swearing that a baby wouldn't change anything when really he changed everything.

But in these moments, when he's holding onto her like a lifeline, she could never bring herself to feel anything other than love and adoration for him.

It's not fault that he's the favorite. Hell, he's her favorite too.

"I know kid, but it's okay. We're going to see Dr. Danny right now and he's going to take a look at it."

She feels him nod against her shoulder and she gently wraps her arm around his waist to pick him up.

He cries out a bit, but otherwise seems fine so she carries him to the front office to sign him out for the day.

She manages to scribble her name with her left hand and prepares to leave when August nearly bursts her ear drum.

"Emmy, wait! I needs my backpack!"

"Okay, okay. Right," she turns back to the nurse and she smiles sweetly.

"His classroom is 312."

She nods and makes her way out of the office and down the hall.

She passes all of the hideous artwork and wonders if any of it is his. She hopes not. It really is all awful.

She stops at 312 and looks in. There doesn't appear to be anyone in the room which is great because she's in no mood to explain who she is.

She opens the door gently and looks around for a backpack hook or something.

"I'm cubby 7."

Right. Of course. This was a private school. There wasn't just a hook for kids to carelessly hang their bags. There was a whole cubby for all of their shit.

"Awesome."

She finds the cubby easily enough and grabs his Lego ninjago backpack.

"And my collage from art today, please."

He's so polite that she grabs it and even finds something nice to say about it.

"I absolutely love this. There's no way you made this by yourself."

"I did, I promise! All by myself!"
Yeah, that's pretty obvious. The "collage" is really just different colors of ripped up paper glued together and put on a piece of paper, then a picture drawn over it.

All this money they spend on his school and his art is just as shitty as mine was in public school.

But he looks so proud of himself that she isn't going to burst that bubble.

"Well in that case, this is really good August! I'm so proud of you!"

She turns her head to blow a raspberry on his cheek and, for a brief moment, he forgets about his hurt limb and laughs.

As they're headed back to the door, she remembers that for some reason, the kid has the smallest bladder in the world and their mom always makes him check the potty before going anywhere.

She lowers him to the ground, instructing him to use the bathroom before they go.

"But I don't hafta go."

"Try," she tries to sound firm like their mother and it must work because he goes without further complaint.

As she waits, she examines the room, checking out other boards around the room.

She's finds a spelling test that her brother received an A posted on the "You Rock" wall. She reaches up to get a better look at his work and freezes midway when a strange, but somehow familiar, voice calls her name questioningly.

"Emma?"

She turns to find her.

"Regina."

She tries not to seem surprised or pleased to see her. But really, she sort of is.

After giving Regina her number that night, she had expected a call. She always received a call. But no call ever came and even though it stung a bit, after a month of nothing Emma had all but forgotten about the beautiful, paranoid brunette from the bar. But standing in front of her again, seeing her in a respectable black dress and a boring pair of black heels, makes her wish that she had called. She had forgotten how beautiful the brunette was.

"What are you doing here? How did you find me?"

Emma has to laugh at that, mainly because Regina sounds so serious and fearful.

"The taxi cab driver I had take you home? He works for me. After you failed to call, I gave it a respectable amount of time, then I asked him to return to your home and follow you for a few days. He informed me that you worked here. So here I am. To inquire about why you didn't call."

Regina's eyes widen as she obviously believes the bullshit Emma is feeding her.

Well, not complete bullshit. It would be nice to know why she didn't call.

"I-I-uh…I just…"
Emma smirks at her loss of words. "Don't worry about it, seriously. I-

"No, I mean, I just didn't expect it. Or, I didn't know what to think. I didn't know if you were expecting a date or something.

She cocks her head to the side at the ridiculousness of that statement. "Regina, I was flirting with you, though obviously not well enough. And I was wearing a suit, for God's sake! Of course I was asking you out."

That's a tiny bit of a lie. She really had no intention to taking her to dinner or anything. She had, however, wanted to take her home. But Regina's departure put a stop to that, so she had no choice but to give her her number if she wanted to see her again.

Regina's tan cheeks flush a pretty scarlet and Emma has to look away. It's too cute.

"So, do you do this often? Show up at people's jobs when they don't call back?"

Before she has a chance to respond to that, August comes barreling out of the bathroom, his shirt almost completely soaked with water.

He's laughing at first, but the moment he sees Regina, he stops in his tracks looking like a deer caught in headlights.

"Hi, Ms. Mills."

"August," she says looking over at him, "What are you doing in here? You're supposed to be waiting for your mother in the nurse's office, young man. And why on earth are you covered in water?"

August says nothing, but at least he looks sorry for his obvious misbehavior.

"I'm going to need an answer August Nolan."

He sighs, resigned to giving her some sort of answer.

"I couldn't wash my hands with the only one hand and I didn't have no one to help me so I had to do it myself but my slinky was in the way and so then…it got my shirt wet."

The story makes no fucking sense and Emma has to bite her tongue to keep from laughing.

By the look on Ms. Mill's face, they would both be in trouble if she laughed.

But she must take pity on him and his arm that's in a 'slinky' because she smiles gently and crouches down to his level to speak to him, touching his arm gently.

"How are you feeling sweetie?"

He shrugs a little, "Okay I guess. Emmy said we're going to see Dr. Danny so he can see if it's broken or not."

Regina looks back at her and she shuffles uncomfortably.

"I take it you must be Emmy," she stands and extends a hand.

"He's the only allowed to call me that," she says, being somewhat short with her and not taking the offered hand. "Emma Swan. I'm his sister. I'm the guardian while my parents are out of the country doing their humanitarian thing."
"I've never seen you before and they never mentioned a daughter. And when Ingrid isn't free, usually Lilly picks him up."

Emma sighs, completely unsurprised by that information. "Yeah, I'm sure they didn't. Lilly is the nanny, she's the primary person for watching him, but she has classes while he's in school so they had to call me."

"Well…sorry for the trouble."

She looks down at August cuddled into her side and moves his slightly shaggy hair out of the way. "It's totally fine. He's my favorite kind of trouble."

Regina smiles at the two as August sticks out his tongue at her and she reciprocates. When he hugs Emma's legs tightly, she starts to feel like she's intruding on a moment so instead she walks over to August's desk to confirm he has everything he needs for the weekend.

"August, take your work book home and get it signed please."

"Can Emmy sign?"

"Sure, just make sure he writes his entire lower and upper case alphabet one time, he'll show you what page he's on, and sign it."

Regina looks up at Emma, who looks terrified at the thought of having to do some sort of work over the weekend. She hands the workbook over to her anyway and she slips it into his virtually empty backpack.

"Please write neatly, okay August?"

He doesn't acknowledge her request. Instead he grabs Emma's hand, tugging her towards the door clearly ready to go.

"Come on Emmy, I wanna see Danny! I wanna get a lollipop!"

"August, Ms. Mills was speaking to you. Don't be rude." He looks at her like she's crazy and she feels a little weird being so assertive with him. She never reprimands him about anything, she never really says anything authoritatively. Most days, she's more immature than he is. But it seems like Regina has high expectations of him in the classroom and so she feels bad letting him be kinda disrespectful.

"Okay, I'll write neat. Promise."

"Thank you, August. I hope you feel better."

"Thank you," he says quietly as they head towards the door.

"Yeah, thanks. I will…make sure this all gets done. See you around. Or not actually," she mumbles the last part under her breath but Regina must hear because she calls out to her.

"Miss Swan?"


"Emma…sorry. Um, I know I probably have no right to ask this, but I was just wondering if you
wanted to get dinner with me. Tonight, if you're not busy?"

She sighs.

On the one hand, she wants to say no. Though she would never admit it out loud, the lack of a phone call had really bruised her ego. They always called. They always wanted whatever it was she had to offer.

Never in her entire life had someone not been head over heels after their first encounter. Girls usually loved Emma Swan.

Which made this an even harder enigma to solve.

What sort of girl was Regina Mills?

Which brought her to the other hand. She was dying to find out what kind of girl Regina was. She was desperate to know if she was as bland as she seemed or if there was a dirtier, sexier side to Ms. Mills.

And it seemed impossible to get any answers if she turned down what might be the only opportunity to spend time with her.

So against her better judgment, despite the voice of reason in her head screaming 'DON'T DO IT', she agrees to dinner.

"Sure, if you learn how to work a phone you can call and we'll work out the details."

She smirks and says it with just enough humor in her tone to not sound like a complete bitch and Regina hears it because she smiles back, laughing breathily.

"I've been watching How To videos on YouTube so we should be good."

Emma just nods and decides to leave it there. She usually likes to have the last word but there is also power in refusing to respond. So she just walks out with August's hand in hers and anticipates Regina's call.

And, as promised, she calls later that afternoon on her way home from work.

7 p.m. A little cafe on 3rd and Canal.

She didn't choose the time or place and couldn't care less about the details. All she knows is that by the end of the night, she intends to fuck Regina Mills so good and so hard that she won't remember her own name.

She'll fuck her, get dressed, promise to call, and then show Regina what it feels like to await a call that never comes.
Chapter 4

Same warning as before with a few extras! G!P Emma, with some dirty talk and accidental sweet sex in there!

And one more thing, this is NSFW. I know this because I wrote it while at work and almost passed out.

"Here you are, ladies."

"Thank you so much," Emma says to the young man before removing her jacket and taking a seat. They sit in a slightly awkward silence for a few minutes looking over their menus.

"I think I'm going to have the southwest burger," Emma says out of the blue. "I love guacamole."

Regina smiles at that. She doesn't know why, there's nothing particularly special about guacamole, but the way Emma says it just does something to her.

*Everything Emma says does something to me.*

"Yeah? I think I'm just going to do a Caesar salad."

She watches Emma roll her eyes and feels instantly defensive. "What's wrong with that?"

"Please don't order a salad to try and impress me or trick me into thinking you're super healthy. I don't care."

Regina scrunches her face. "Do women do that?"

Emma squints at that, "Have you never *met* any girl ever made? They all do it. They order water, or better yet Perrier, and a small salad with the dressing on the side. Then they pick at it through the entire meal and then tell me they're just so fullllll," she whines to imitate these women and Regina snickers at her. "Meanwhile I'm over here eating enough for the entire Brady bunch."

"Well, I can assure you, I would not order a salad just to impress *you*. I genuinely enjoy salads. I…I could get a fancier salad if you want? Would that be better?"

Emma just shakes her head. "Order what you want, really. I just wanted you to know that you could get whatever…you're paying anyway."

Regina immediately looks up at that. "Wh-I…I don't mean to be presumptuous, but I thought this was a date."

"Oh, it is Regina," she says pretending to still be examining the menu, "but after standing me up *a month ago*, the least you can do is pay. Have some class."

Regina sees the small smirk on her face and can't help but smile.

This seems to be a trend, constantly smiling against her will in the presence of Emma Swan.

"I didn't stand you up! We never had plans."
"I planned to receive a phone call from you. You never called. I felt stood up."

She rolls her eyes and puts down her menu.

"I didn't know you'd take it so personally. Honestly…I wanted to call but I thought…"

Emma looks up when the silence persists.

"What did you think?" She asks curiously.

"I thought it was just a game to you."

The look on Emma's face is hard to read, as if she doesn't understand something.

"I thought you were just using a series of lines designed to get me to sleep you, so I'm very sorry that I misread the situation and didn't call," Regina offers as an apology.

"You didn't…misread the situation."

Now it's Regina's turn to look a little confused.

"So…you did want to sleep with me?"

Emma's smile widens. "Of course I did. I still do."

Regina's cheeks flush and, not a moment too soon, the waiter comes to take their orders.

"Hey, I will take the Southwestern burger and can I substitute the regular fries for waffle fries?" He nods and she continues.

"And she will have your Caesar salad with the dressing…" she looks to Regina, questioningly.

"On top is fine," she responds quickly.

"Okay, and would you like anything to drink with that? Water? Tea? We have coke products."

Emma again looks her way.

"Uh, water is fine. And maybe a few lemon wedges please?"

He nods once more.

"And for you miss?"

She doesn't miss Emma rolling her eyes.

"Coke please. With extra ice in the glass."

He nods, writes it on his little pad, and then leaves without saying another word.

Regina tries to remember where there were in conversation and when she remembers, she flushes.

Where is that damn water?

Emma leans forward a bit, removing the button on each of her sleeves so that she can roll them up.

As she does so, she tries to make casual conversation.
"Next time, I'll be better at ordering for us. I just didn't know what you wanted to drink or anything so that was a little awkward." She finishes her second sleeve with a little chuckle.

"Now who's being presumptuous? It's a little early on this date to assume that we'll be having a second, don't you think?"

Emma lifts her eyebrows and shrugs a bit.

"I suppose that's true. I can tell you that this won't be happening again."

Immediately Regina's heart sinks.

And all at once, his words come flooding back to her.

*Monotonous.*

*Needy.*

*Boring.*

"Is it...is it not going the way you'd hoped?"

There is an edge to her voice. She knows it. But on some level, she doesn't care.

*Who just says that to someone?! That they wouldn't go out with you again while on the very first date?!!*

"No, it's going well. I'm enjoying myself." She stares at her for a minute to determine the truthfulness of the statement and she has to admit that Emma does seem to be serious. Her body language and tone and all of it says that she's not bored out of her mind, which is promising. Except...

"Then why no second date?"

"Because I'm not the type to do a first date. Like I said, I approached you that night in the hopes that I could take you home with me. You're beyond beautiful and to have you in my bed for even one night..." she whistles lowly, "if only I were so lucky. But when I came over, you said you were leaving. And though most girls would usually just stay, you still left." Emma looks utterly perplexed at that and she can't help but feel a little pride that she didn't respond the way the other girls do.

"So then I had no choice but to give you my number and now here we are."

She gestures around and leans back in her chair.

Regina thinks that over.

She can't decide whether she should be flattered or furious.

All things consider, she liked Emma. She thought she was sweet and considerate and as it turns out, she just wanted to have sex with her.

But was that really so bad?

Was she ready to jump back into a relationship anyway, with a woman no less?

*Maybe this could be exactly what I need.*
Maybe this was the key to getting him out of her head for good. And like Emma said, she didn't want anything more than sex. And by the looks of it, by the way she walked and talked and oozed confidence and sex, Emma was probably great at pleasuring women.

She sounded like she had done it many times before and so what was the harm in it all? If not her, then some other girl. And why not her? If Emma wanted her, if she thought she was worth her time, then why should she pass up the opportunity to be shown a good time?

Sure sleeping with someone she barely knew was something her previous self would've frowned upon.

But her previous self was also apparently too conventional and lacking spontaneity. So for one night, she vowed right then, she wouldn't allow that side of her to control her thoughts.

She nods subtly to herself to confirm her promise then looks up to see Emma sipping on her coke. She isn't sure when the drinks arrived, but she lifts the class and takes a big sip.

"What if I said okay? To...to sleeping with you? What if I wanted to?"

Emma looks up from her drink a bit startled, but leans back again and eyes her suspiciously.

"I would warn you once more that I am in no way interested in pursuing a relationship."

"I'm fine with that. I-I just got out of a two year relationship so I-" she waves her hand lightly as if that explains the situation but Emma seems to understand.

"Ookay, well, then I would also warn you that I'm not like most women. I was born with male genitalia. Long story that I don't like to get into, but the fact still stands that I have a dick. Is that alright with you?"

Regina's eyes widen. Mostly at the word 'dick' in a rather populated restaurant. But also at the fact that this woman, whose features are nothing if not feminine, has a penis. But she has to admit that the thought of it doesn't turn her off. At all. In fact...

"It's more than alright. It actually makes me...it makes me want you more."

Emma raises one eyebrow and sits perfectly still for a moment before standing abruptly.

"You wanna just get out of here now?"

Regina sits for a moment, staring between the door that leads to the kitchen and Emma.

"But our food is-"

"I've waited a month to have you and now that I have permission, I literally cannot wait. And I refuse to sit here with a boner all night while you eat your fucking salad." She throws on her jacket and when Regina finally stands, she helps her put on her peacoat.

Once that's taken care of, she places her hand on Regina's back and leads her towards the exit.

"But I was actually kind of hungry," she mumbles, shamelessly pouting.

Emma leads them outside and hands her ticket to the man at the valet and then leans in close to her ear.
"Don't worry baby. I'm going to feed that pretty mouth of yours."

Immediately, Regina's throat goes try and her core begins to throb. She's not sure if that's sexual innuendo, but she knows that Emma whispering to her is one of the sexiest things she's ever experienced. And she wants more of it.

Wants more of her.

She inadvertently leans in closer to her and Emma wraps her arm around her shoulder while they wait for the car, both of their bodies desperate to get home.

When her car arrives, a sleek yellow Corvette, the valet opens her door for her as Emma rushes around to the other side. As soon as her seat belt is on, Emma nearly floors it.

He was never this excited at the thought of sex with her and that alone makes her anxious for what's to come.

*Hopefully me.*

---

Emma had been desperate and dying to rip Regina's clothes off when leaving the small restaurant, but the apparent excitement she felt between them in the car has all but disappeared. Now as they stand in the middle of Regina's modest bedroom, the shorter brunette appears to be nothing but a ball of nerves.

She can tell that if she doesn't do something soon, Regina is going to change her mind. So she comes a little closer and runs her hands up and down her arms.

"You know, if you've changed your mind, it's okay," she whispers gently and hopes it's convincing because she would probably lose her fucking mind if Regina said she was no longer interested.

To her surprise (and relief), Regina immediately shakes her head. She seems to be contemplating for a second and the next thing she knows, Regina's lips are pressed firmly against hers.

She doesn't respond at first, as she's been caught off guard, but after her brain has a chance to reconfigure everything, she realizes that she's kissing Regina Mills.

And all at once, her body and all of its senses come alive and take over.

She wraps her arms around Regina's waist possessively, pulling her closer and she falls into her.

She lets out a soft moan, telling Emma that she must be doing something right, so she parts her lips to take things a step further.

She has to admit, she's never had such a good first kiss. Usually, the girls are a little drunk (but still very much aware because she's not into taking advantage) so their kisses are slightly awkward and bumbling, if they kiss at all.

She feels one of Regina's arms move around her neck while the other one grips her tie and pulls her closer. She obliges and leans down a little more to sprinkle kisses on her neck, taking a moment to breathe in the smell of Regina's hair.

*Apples.*

She instantly falls in love with the smell.
Upon thinking about that phrase, she realizes she should probably speed this up. If she keeps at this pace, Regina is going to expect intimate lovemaking because thus far it has been kind of sweet and soft.

And Emma is the opposite of those things in the bedroom.

She pulls away from her neck and gives her one final kiss, making sure to gently slip her tongue into Regina's mouth, the way she knows every girl loves.

And once she's breathless, she pulls away slowly and looks into her eyes.

Her brown eyes are dilated and it looks like Regina can barely keep her eyes open.

"You're not falling asleep on me, are you?" She asks, running her fingers through soft, shoulder-length brown hair.

She shakes her head slowly. "No, not at all. I just…I feel dizzy. I have never been kissed like that."

Emma smiles and almost says me neither, but thinks better of it.

"Well, though I have no doubt in my ability to hold you up, how about you lay down?"

Regina nods and gives her a smile before sitting on the edge of the bed.

She has no interest in the dom/sub thing, but she has to admit, there is something so incredibly hot about seeing Regina follow her instructions without hesitation. She feels her cock twitch at the thought of having a little more control than usual.

"Take it off."

Regina's eyebrow shoots up. "Take what off?"

"Everything."

Regina only pauses for a minute before reaching to unzip her dress. Her bra is plain and black and Emma thinks it's a shame that she isn't wearing something nicer, but she shakes that thought away. She never cares about what anyone's wearing. The only thing that matters is what they look like not wearing anything and as she continues to undress, dropping the dress to the floor, Emma is more than impressed.

She's not very toned but certainly thin and curvaceous in all the right places.

Emma laughs at the rhyme in her head, but it must spill out because Regina immediately moves to cover herself as best as possible, wrapping her arms around her middle.

"I know it's not like super sexy or anything, I just wasn't-"

"Stop talking." Emma lifts her finger lightly to Regina's lips and looks her directly in the eyes.

"You're fucking beautiful. From what I can tell, you have nothing to be embarrassed about. Okay?" She waits for Regina to nod before lowering her hand.

She takes it upon herself to finish the job and lowers each strap of Regina's bra down her arms, slipping her out of it and she kisses each bare shoulder.

Her skin smells so good and Emma feels that dizziness she had spoken of earlier. She feels like she's
getting drunk off of just her scent and it's embarrassing.

Regina reaches behind her and unhooks the bra and it falls to her feet, revealing two beautiful breasts.

As if they cannot stop themselves, Emma brings her hands up to her tits and squeezes roughly.

Regina's eyes close immediately and her lips part as she lets out a whimper, reaching forward to hold onto Emma's hips.

And it's the hands so close to her dick that remind her that she is hard as a rock and she's not here to worship Regina's body, she's here to fuck her.

She abruptly pushes her back gently onto the bed and Regina lets out a little laugh.

Emma stares down at her and takes a moment to acknowledge that she's quite adorable and it's a shame that, just to prove a point, she can't continue this thing with her after tonight.

As she watches Regina scoot up to the head of the bed, she realizes she's become too hard to stay in her tight jeans. She unbucks her belt slowly, never breaking eye contact with Regina.

Once her pants are loosened, she pushes them to the floor and removes them, standing in nothing but a button up, loose tie and a tented pair of briefs.

She rubs herself a few times over her underwear and she can't help but swallow at the pleasure she feels.

But if Regina's expression is anything to go by, she's enjoying the show even more than her.

She puts her hand in her shorts and strokes it a few more times to really get her in the mood and it must do the trick because Regina spreads her legs eagerly.

And now Emma regrets not taking her panties off when she had the chance.

_I bet that pussy is dripping wet._

She wants to pull them off to see but she is admittedly a selfish lover so she wants something in return first.

_I did promise to feed her. And I am a woman of my word._

"Come here baby."

Regina wastes absolutely no time sitting up and crawling over to her sensually on her hands and knees.

When she stops just in front of Emma, her face is so close to her dick that she can hardly stop herself from ripping her shorts off and thrusting herself into Regina's mouth.

Somehow she manages to suppress the urge and instead reaches down for her hands.

She places one hand on her waist band and the other firmly on her dick and when Regina feels her bulge for the first time, she moans out loud.

Emma smirks.
"You like that?"

Regina nods, gaining the courage to squeeze her a bit.

She moans out and reaches out to lace her fingers through Regina's hair, pulling gently.

"Mmm, that feels good."

Regina looks up at her and squeezes again as they stare at one another.

Emma's eyes close involuntarily and she grips her hair again, pulling harder this time.

"Don't tease baby. Take it out."

Regina exhibits a little more hesitance here and just when Emma thinks she might change her mind, she reaches up and hooks both her thumbs into the waistband before pulling the boxers down slowly, nearly being slapped in the face by a fully erect penis when she gets them down.

Emma watches carefully as Regina takes her in for the first time. Emma's done this a million times with a million different girls, but each time she worries that they're going to say something. It's one thing to hear about a girl with a dick, it's another thing to see it in person.

But apparently Regina has no qualms about it because she reaches out and grabs it firmly.

"Ahhhh," she hisses and thrusts her hips forward against her own volition, but immediately Regina leans back away from her.

Emma looks at her questioningly, a silent look of 'what the fuck is wrong with you?'

Regina sees the face and sits back for a moment, "I'm sorry, I just…it's really big. The biggest I've seen," she says staring right at it.

Just the sight of Regina's eying her cock makes it twitch.

"7 ½ inches, all for you."

Regina looks beyond impressed as she puts her hand back on it and strokes it once.

Then twice.

And again until it becomes pretty clear that she has no intention of sucking her off.

But as hard as she is, that's not an option for Emma.

One of her hands makes its way to Regina's hair again while the other covers the hand on her dick, effectively stilling it.

"You have the prettiest mouth. I want to see those lips around my dick."

Regina's eyes widen at that and she looks surprised and apprehensive.

*She acts like she's never heard the word 'dick' before. Jesus.*

"I've never...done that before." She finally says in a low whisper, as if it's some huge secret.

Though it isn't a secret, it does however surprise Emma.
"No one's ever asked you for a blowjob?" She asks in disbelief.

Regina rolls her eyes, "Well, plenty of men have asked, but I've never wanted to. The thought of something like that in my mouth never appealed to me."

Emma squints her eyes for a moment and tries to decide what she wants to do about this.

She could be a gentleman and say nevermind. Or…

"I promise to be gentle. We can take things at your pace."

She could be a gentleman and just offer to take things slowly?

_What the actual fuck Emma? Since when do we go at anyone else's pace?_

But she doesn't take it back because Regina appears to be considering it and she thinks this might have been the right approach after all.

After another minute, her patience is rewarded when Regina nods.

"Okay, just…maybe go slow at first? You are rather big."

There is a lot of hesitation in her voice yet she seems committed.

"You sure? Don't feel like you _have_ to."

Regina blushes a bit. "I want to. Really."

Emma smiles encouragingly, but gives her a few more seconds to change her mind before inching her cock forward towards those beautiful lips.

She runs her dick over her lips a few times, precum beginning to leak from the head.

"Open up baby. Suck me."

Regina opens her mouth obediently and Emma finds herself getting impossibly harder.

The first time she feels Regina's mouth close around her first few inches, she is torn between screaming out in pleasure and just immediately cumming in her mouth.

She settles for something in between, groaning out loudly.

"Fuck. That's…that's good."

Though Regina is hesitant to put any more in her mouth, Emma pushes forward slowly, desperate to feel more of her warm, wet mouth.

"Baby, that's perfect. Your mouth is perfect." She's nearly half way there and desperate to know if Regina can take all of her so she pushes in a little further.

She realizes she's hit the back of her throat when Regina gags a little though. She immediately pulls out and strokes her hair, waiting for her to catch her breath.

"I'm sorry, that was too much," she says it with so much sincerity that she has to ask where it came from.

But Regina shakes her head and tugs her dick back to her lips, "No, sorry, I just wasn't expecting it.
I'm ready this time so you...you can put it in all the way."

That excites Emma all over again and a little permission is all she needs.

She uses her dick to pry apart Regina's lips and thrusts back in, a little slower this time.

She puts both hands into Regina's hair, gently guiding her up and down her length.

"Fuuuck. You're so hot."

Regina's seems to flourish at the compliment because she just begins sucking harder and a little faster making it a little sloppier.

Emma loves it dirty like this so she just closes her eyes and enjoys the sounds of Regina sucking her off, too afraid to look should she cum too soon.

It's usually not a problem but she worries that with how sexy Regina is, and knowing that she's fucking her virgin mouth, she'll cum before she's ready.

"You like this Gina?"

She moans loudly around her cock and the vibration from the sound drives her crazy.

She feels a coiling in her stomach and really worries for a moment that she's going to bust so she pulls out rather abruptly.

She slaps her dick a few times against Regina's lips and cheeks just to calm herself down. She surprised when Regina just closes her eyes and opens her mouth, as if eager for another mouth full.

_I guess we now know what kind of girl Ms. Mills is._

She strokes herself a few times before lifting her dick, exposing her smooth balls. She moves forward to Regina's open mouth and brings her mouth the rest of the way so that both of her nuts are sucked into the hot cavern.

Regina sucks her balls harshly then releases them to lick at them a little more. She thrusts her hips back and forth forcing her dick into her own hand and her balls into Regina's mouth and the dual sensation is just too much.

"Shit, baby, I'm going to cum."

Regina pulls back a little but she just uses it as an opportunity to push her dick back into her mouth as she reaches her climax.

Regina instinctively sucks her off until she can't take anymore, "Ughhh, you're about to suck the cum right out of me," she isn't sure if Regina really wants her load in her mouth though so she pulls out and begins fisting her dick quickly, still aiming at Regina's face.

She prepares for an objection to cumming on her face, but instead Regina surprises her by opening her mouth wide and gripping her hips to bring her closer.

And it's that image: the sexiest girl she's ever fucked on her hands and knees, eyes closed, mouth open all for her cum, that allows her to spurt ropes of thick white jizz all over Regina's face.

She usually cums an average amount, but this time she can't seem to stop herself from releasing all over her lips, in her mouth and on her cheeks.
"Oh my fucking God yes!" spurt after spurt right on Regina's beautiful face until she finally starts to come down, leaning forward to grip the girl's shoulder for support.

She strokes her sensitive dick a few times, feeling herself get hard again already.

She wipes a rope of thick cum from her cheek with her thumb before pressing her fingers to Regina's lips.

"Since I promised to feed you. Taste."

Regina immediately shakes her head.

"Uh uh," she grumbles, unable to open her mouth because the cum on her lips would've surely gotten into her mouth.

Emma throws her head back and laughs.

_Baby steps_, she thinks for the millionth time forgetting this is supposed to be a one-time thing.

She steps back slowly, making sure she doesn't lose her balance because that was truly a ground breaking orgasm.

She completely loosens her tie and then begins unbuttoning her shirt quickly. When she slips it off her shoulders, she approaches again and uses it to wipe her cum from Regina's face.

"Sorry about that," she says, wiping gently, making sure to get it all.

Once it's removed from her lips, Regina relaxes a bit.

"It's okay, I didn't mind that. I just didn't want it in my mouth. I've been told what semen consists of and it's just not 100% sanitary."

Emma wants to roll her eyes, but she has her own safe sex practices so she can't really judge.

Speaking of which...

She looks around for her jeans and searches for a condom.

When she finds it, she rips the package with her teeth and heads back to the bed. She prepares to slide it over her dick but Regina reaches out a hand to stop her.

"We don't need that actually. I've been on birth control since I was in high school."

Emma just shakes her head and continues her previous task.

"No, I'm good thanks. Not tryin to have babies and shit running around."

Regina doesn't say anything, but she doesn't try to stop her when she slides the condom on and strokes herself once or twice to make sure that it's secure before looking back up at Regina.

Her pupils are blown and she's staring at her cock hungrily. The look in her eyes makes Emma want her even more so she leans forward and captures her lips again.

They kiss passionately as Emma pushes her back onto the bed and climbs on top of her, hard on pressed into her thighs, so close to where it really wants to be.
She finally pulls away and looks directly in Regina's eyes, taking a second to just take in her beauty.

She pushes a few strands of hair from her forehead before asking "How do you want it babe?"

Though it's usually a very simple question, Regina looks up at her like she has no idea what she's talking about.

"I should tell you that I've really only had 'vanilla' sex, as some put it. My ex and I just did it the usual way, so I guess…we can do it any way you think I'll like best."

Emma's heart pounds at the thought. She has known since that night at the bar exactly how she would like to take the brunette, but she always lets girls choose how it goes down and never once has anyone said she can do it however she wants.

This is a first that excites her more than she's willing to show.

She runs her hands from Regina's tits to her thighs, making sure to brush against her sex, eliciting a moan from swollen, supple lips.

"Turn over."

Again, Regina obeys at once, flipping over to lay on her stomach.

Emma runs her hands over her smooth back for a minute before giving her next instruction.

"Put that pretty ass in the air for me."

The instruction makes Regina moan and grow impossibly wetter and she moves a bit until she's leaned forward on her elbows and knees and her ass is in the air.

Emma holds each cheek in her palms, rubbing for a moment before gripping the hem of her panties.

"Ready?"

"My god yes," she groans out and Emma smiles slyly before pulling her cotton panties off, maneuvering her legs to get them all the way off.

Her underwear are soaked and that combined with the smell of her sex only excites Emma more. Her cock is standing at full attention, pointed right at her pussy and though she would normally return the oral favor, she can't wait anymore.

"Tell me you want me to fuck you," she insists, rubbing the head of her cock over smooth, soaked pussy lips. It feels so good that she wants to slam inside, but she waits, knowing that hearing it from Regina herself will only make it sexier.

"I want you to," she moans and Emma can tell she does, but that's not what she wants.

"Say the words Regina." And she leans forward, body arched over her back so that she can whisper right in her ear.

"Tell me you want me to fuck you."

Regina whimpers, arching further into her.

"Please Emma. I-I want you to fuck me."
It's nothing more than a whisper and she almost sounds ashamed but Emma doesn't care.

She pulls back quickly, gripping her cock and without any hesitation, she slips into her tight hole balls deep and lets out a sigh of relief.

Never in her life has she felt something so tight and warm around her dick and it feels like heaven. She pulls out, preparing to slam back in when she hears Regina hiss.

She looks up at her face to find Regina's eyes slammed shut and a look of pain on her face. She stills immediately, half inside her, and runs her hands up and down her back soothingly.

"Whoa, you okay?"

Regina breathes deeply and nods. "I'm sorry, I'm just not used to this angle and you're... so big."

Emma smiles sympathetically, "Look at me."

She opens her eyes and when Emma looks into her deep brown orbs she feels her heart speed up.

And she doesn't know what makes her say it, because lord knows she's never given a fuck before, but she asks anyway, "Do you want me to pull out?"

She can't remember the last time she's asked someone that.

_Shit, probably not since my first time in college._

And what surprises her most is that she means it. She wants to fuck her, so badly, but never at the risk of hurting her.

Regina just shakes her head. "No, I want this. I just-Will you just go slow?"

She nods immediately. "Of course, but seriously, you can tell me to stop at any time, okay?"

Regina smiles sweetly and Emma places one more kiss on her back before slipping further in but very slowly.

She takes a few minutes to get all the way in, but when she finally does, Regina's face is one of pleasure this time instead of pain.

"You good, babe?"

Regina responds by looking back at her and smirking. "I'm great. Now _fuck me_ Emma."

Emma smiles back dangerously before taking off, starting at a slow pace and working them up to something more.

With each thrust she feels Regina clench around her, making it a little more difficult to pound into her.

"Oh my goodness, oh goodness. You feel amazing."

"Yeah, you like this dick?"

Regina clenches around her. "Yes, yes, ughh yes."

Emma reaches up to run her fingers through her silky hair before twisting her fingers and pulling.
"Ahhhh, Emma. Do that again."

Emma smirks and pulls again, slighter harder the second time around.

Regina only moans louder and arches her ass further in the air.

"You like that huh? You like me fucking you from behind and pulling your hair?"

Her pussy squeezes her dick again and finally Emma understands.

"Shit, you love this don't you Ms. Mills?" she leans forward so that she's again right next to Regina's ear.

"You love me whispering dirty shit in your ear, don't you? You're so fucking naughty, aren't you?"

Regina responds with nothing but a breathless moan and a nod.

"You want it harder?"

She nods. "And faster! You can fuck me faster!"

Hearing those words come from her mouth unprompted nearly drives Emma over the edge right then and there but she manages to refrain from cumming so soon.

Instead she remains bent over her and fucks into her harder and faster, each thrust pushing them both forward.

"Aghh, you're so fucking tight baby."

"Oh my god, I'm so close. Please don't stop!" She screams.

But Regina was in no danger of her stopping. At this point, she doesn't even know if she could.

She can feel the heat coiling in her balls and she knows she isn't going to make it much longer. She reaches around, running her hands down the expanse of Regina's stomach before reaching her clit.

"Oh dear Jesus!" Emma smirks, knowing that between her dick and her fingers, she's hitting all of Regina's spots.

She rubs furiously at her clit, while slowing down her strokes but going deeper than before and that's all it takes for Regina's tight walls to clench around her as she cums hard all over her cock.

"Ahhhhh, oh my fucking god" she screams out, white knuckles gripping the sheets and head pressed into the pillow.

Emma can't take it anymore. With one final thrust, she pushes in balls deep and cums. Hard.

She feels herself filling the condom, hoping that it doesn't overflow or something.

It's never been an issue before but she's also never cum so hard before. She's never felt an orgasm throughout her whole body like she has with the two from tonight.

As she watches Regina's body fall onto the bed tiredly, finally coming down from her own orgasm, she decides she can't just make this a one-time thing.
There's just something about her that makes me want to...be near her.

But instead of taking that as a warning sign, Emma finds herself accepting defeat and walking right into a trap. She leaves a trail of kisses from her waist to the side of her lips, watching Regina catch her breath as she does the same.

When she's finally back to breathing normally, she leans up and kisses Emma sensually, running her tongue over her lips and biting gently.

"I don't know how many women you had to be with before you became so good at that," she says in awe, "but I'd like their names and numbers so I can thank them each personally."

Emma laughs out loud, "Thanks a lot of phone calls and edible arrangements."

Regina just shrugs and her eyes close for a long minute, a serene smile pained plainly on her face. At the sight, Emma can't stop herself. She leans down to put her forehead against Regina's.

But breathing in the same air gives the moment a different vibe and the intensity of it all becomes apparent to both of them.

"Wanna know a secret?" Emma asks quietly.

She nods, bringing her hands up to stroke Emma's strong arms, flexed around her to hold her up so she doesn't suffocate her lover.

"All those girls...and somehow you're the best I've had so far."

Regina blushes deeply. "I'm sure that's not true."

Emma shakes her head defiantly. "I swear, I've never had pussy this good."

She laughs and brings her hands to cover her face, "You're so raunchy."

"And apparently so are you," Emma says leaning down, kissing each of the hands covering her face.

"I swear I don't know what came over me!" Regina says, at this point only somewhat embarrassed by her earlier behavior.

"Oh, that was me. All over your face," Emma says in complete seriousness and Regina bursts out in laughter.

She smiles down at her and finds herself staring yet again. She tries to memorize every inch of her face because, even though she's decided she'll definitely be calling again, she still wants this engrained in her memory forever.

Because girls like this don't fall for girls like her, so this is probably just sex.

Rebound sex at best.

And that's perfectly fine by her, but still...she thinks it wouldn't hurt to save this image for a rainy day.

Once it's successfully burnt into her brain, she rolls over so that she's lying next to her, contemplating whether she should get up and leave now or sleep for a bit. She is pretty tired but she also doesn't want to give Regina the wrong impression. She's not the sleepover type.
Yeah, but I'm also not the 'we can go slow if you want' type either, soooo what the hell.

She pulls the disheveled sheets out from under her naked body and prepares to get an hour or two rest, when Regina leans on one elbow and looks over at her questioningly.

"What are you doing?"

"Uhh...getting comfortable? You fuckin wore me out lady!"

"But I'm not tired. Plus...," she starts reaching her hand under the sheets and finds exactly what she's looking for, stroking gently. "I was hoping you could show me a few more positions."

Emma lets out a groan of half annoyance and half pleasure.

Who the fuck am I kidding? 20% annoyance and 80% pleasure.

And the percentage for pleasure only continues to increase as she fondles her balls then squeezes a little harder.

"Fuuuuck. Alright alright, but you're going to have to do all the work."

Regina immediately lights up and sits up a little.

"Just tell me what you want me to do."

"Well, first, grab a condom for me?" Regina gets up immediately and finds her jeans where a second, and last condom, lies in her pocket.

"Last one so make it count," she says throwing it at her as she climbs back on the bed.

"Don't you worry baby, I will," she slips in on with a little difficulty because she's only half erect right now, but she's not worried at all. For what she has in store, that will all change in no time.

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," she starts with an obnoxious country accent, "please secure all hats and other loose items as we prepare for departure."

"And where are we headed Miss?" She asks, playing along in a much better accent that makes Emma harden a little more without even being touched.

She pulls Regina over to straddle her waist and lines her dick up to her entrance before lowering her slowly, watching her face morph from pleasure to pain and back again.

"Well ma'am. We're headed to the wild wild west, so saddle up and hop on cowgirl!"

Regina opens her mouth, probably to laugh, but the only thing that falls out is a string a unintelligible words and moans that fill the room.

As she starts to raise her hips, she leans forward so her hands are on either side of Emma's face and leans in to give her a passionate kiss.

And all at once, she is lost.

And she supposes that though it definitely won't last forever, she's down to make it last as long as she possibly can.
Chapter 5

Present

She thinks about that first time often.

And when she does, she has to clench her thighs together to keep the throbbing at bay.

They have been doing this for almost three months and Regina could not be happier.

Well…

Well, perhaps she could be. But she knows not to ask Emma for too much. Because too much would surely scare her away.

Which is why she is very hesitant to do this. She has written out the text, but her fingers refuse to hit send.

Or maybe it's her heart that won't allow her to, fearful of inevitable rejection.

But Emma said to ask if I wanted something.

And she had yet to turn down a single request in the past. Not that Regina had ever asked for much.

Their very first time, she asked for patience and then two weeks ago, she had asked for Wednesdays and Fridays. And Emma had complied. And almost to Regina's surprise, she kept up her end of the bargain quite well.

She had come over the very next Friday, with a backpack of clothes and a tooth brush and Regina couldn't seem to stop smiling.

Emma had left rather early in the morning, claiming to be an early riser, but still, it was nice. Her only regret was that they hadn't cuddled or anything like that. When they were done, the both fell onto their respective pillows and sort of just shut their eyes and caught their breath until eventually, they had fallen asleep.

But still! It's more than what they've had in the past. And Regina hopes against hope that perhaps this text will move things forward.

It is no secret to her that she likes Emma. She likes how the tall blonde made her feel. Which is everything. She makes her feel everything.


She refuses dinner. Refuses to talk. All she seems to want or need from Regina is sex. She is insatiable. And though Regina really really enjoys that aspect of their relationship, she can't help but want to get to know her on a more personal level.

But Emma has always been so against that. Any effort made to engage in conversation is always struck down with a kiss.

Anything to avoid actually having to talk to me, Regina thinks, sighing to herself.

She looks back down at the text and reminds herself that if she ever wants that to change, if she ever wants Emma to see her as more than just a "friend with benefits", she needs to move them forward.

Even if that takes a few white lies and a little bit of force.

She stops thinking for just a millisecond and hits the blue send button, instantly regretting it.

But it's too late now, all she can do is wait for a response.

She stares down at her phone reading and re-reading her text.

Good morning Emma! I know we were supposed to meet tonight, but I have a dinner with a few coworkers that I just couldn't talk my way out of. :/

She finally lets out a deep breath when she sees the gray bubbles appear to signify that Emma has read her text and is replying.

But her heart sinks when a reply finally comes through.

Not a problem. See you Wednesday?

No, you idiot!

Her fingers ghost over the letters as she tries to think of what to say next.

Well, I was hoping to still see you. It's been a heck of a week.

She includes an emoji of a woman massaging her hair.

Ah, I see. Okay, well, call me when you're done and I will race right over! ;)

It's then that she's reminded again of how much Emma loves sex. She always wants it, always craves it and never turns it down.

So maybe that's just the motivation she needs…

She responds quickly, already having established a plan.

Can't wait!

She gives it about 20 minutes, and just before she goes to get her class from physical education, she sends another text before putting her phone back in her desk.

Just found out I could bring a plus one. Be mine? I promise to make it worth your while. *wink* *blows heart kiss*

When she's finally done for the day, and the last child is gone, she opens her drawer and removes her phone. She reminds herself that it's not the end of the world if Emma says no, and takes a deep breath before pressing the home button.

She's surprised to find several text messages, almost all from Emma Swan.

11:34 a.m.
Oh…well, that's honestly not my thing. You know that Gina.

11:56 a.m.

Like, I just don't want to complicate things. I like what we have now and I just don't want to give off the wrong impression, you know?

1:00 p.m.

Ugh. You can't seriously be mad. *annoyed face*

She has to smile at that. Emma has never texted her so much. Usually when she doesn't respond, Emma just waits it out. She doesn't send follow up texts, so Regina thinks that has to count for something.

She's about to text her back when suddenly she receives a phone call and her heart flutters when a picture of a swan pops up, the closest thing Regina could get because the blonde refuses to have her photo taken.

"Hello?"

"Hey," Emma sounds both fearful and relieved, all at once.

"Hi, I just got your texts. I just got done with dismissal."

Emma sighs a little, barely audible. "Oh, okay. That's…that's what I thought, that maybe you just got busy. But I-I wanted to call just to make sure we were cool?"

Regina rolls her eyes. She wants to say they're not cool, not even close. But she reminds herself that this requires small baby steps.

"Of course, I understand if you don't want to go. But...I just want you to know, I wasn't trying to ask you out and I wouldn't think of it as a date. I know that's not what this is. I just-I just do not want to go alone."

"What's wrong with going stag?" Emma asks, finally loosening up a bit, upon hearing Regina confirm they're just friends.

"You know how it is, you go alone and it's awkward. Because everyone at the table has someone and you just kind of become…invisible."

"So don't go. Cancel." she says simply.

"I kind of can't. They go out almost every Friday and I've ditched them the last two weeks to…do my thing with you, so…" she lies easily.

She hasn't actually agreed to go out with them yet. So there would be nothing to cancel. But she really wants Emma to feel like she won't see her tonight if she doesn't agree to this. She wants to know that their nights together mean something. So much so that she'd endure a dinner and some small talk.

There's a long silence before Emma speaks up.

"Technically, Friday's belong to you. The whole night. So I guess, as long as we both know it's not a date or anything, I could do the dinner thing with you. Like, if you want? So you're not lonely?"
Regina sits up straighter in her chair, heart beating faster, and she tries to formulate a response that isn't too eager.

"Uh, well, though I agree, Friday's are mine, I know this isn't really what they're for so I don't want you to feel pressured. Really, I don't want you to be uncomfortable."

She holds her breath as there is another long pause.

"Yeahhhh, but like I get it you know. Sitting at a table and looking around and feeling like you don't fit in. So, if I can spare you the feeling, why not? Plus...you still owe me dinner."

Regina laughs at that, but she is still aware of the sentiment behind the statement. She stores the comment away and vows to ask one day what Emma knows about not fitting in.

"You're right, I do. And I'm sure wherever we're going is nicer than that café so you're really lucking out."

"Sweet. Alright, well, so we don't have to take separate cars, I can pick you up at your place. What time should I be there?"

She's surprised by the offer, but isn't about to turn down more time with her.

"Uh, dinner is at 6. Wanna pick me up at 5:45? It's near my house."

"Yeah, for sure. Should I like…wear something nice?"

"Oh, um, no? Or…maybe? I'll ask and then text you."

Emma agrees to do that, then hangs up after saying goodbye.

She sets the phone down gently and leans back in her chair, beaming from ear to ear.

That was certainly stressful, but definitely a little easier than she thought it'd be.

She turns to her computer to try to get some work done, but before she can even finish typing in her password to unlock it, her door bursts open.

Kathryn, one of the two 4th grade teachers at the academy, comes barreling in talking a mile a minute.

"Okay, seriously Regina. I just found out you turned down dinner again! What the hell? What's going on with you?"

"I just-"

"No Regina, seriously, I don't get why all of a sudden you can't go out! Unless," she gasps! "You slut! Are you dating someone?!"

Regina laughs and gets up to go close her classroom door, not interested in everyone hearing their private conversation.

"Kat, please, keep your voice down!"

"Not a flat out denial…so you are seeing someone?!!"

She shakes her head as she resumes her seat at her desk, with Kathryn taking a seat on top of her
reading table for the kids.

"Don't worry Kat, I'm coming to dinner tonight."

She immediately lights up and she's so glad that Emma said yes because, though she would've happily skipped out on dinner for the third week in a row, she really has missed her best friend.

"Oh my gosh! Perfect! I was starting to think you were seeing someone because you always seemed busy on a Friday night and we alllll know what that means!"

She blushes a bit and she tries to hide her face by turning away but of course, Kat manages to see it.

"Unless…you are seeing someone?!!"

"Kat, there's no need to yell. Seriously."

"Well, I wouldn't have to yell if you weren't busy keeping secrets!"

"I'm not keeping secrets, I'm not seeing anyone. But, I will be bringing a plus one, if that's alright?"

Kat's eyes widen comically and she lets of a shriek.

"Oh my god, hell yes that's okay! You know, I didn't want to pressure you but I did think it was time to get back out there. I mean it's been awhile since he-who-shall-not-be-named anyway and it's not healthy to dwell. Anyhoo, what's his name? Is he hot? What am I saying? Of course he is."

Regina bites her lip nervously, anxious about disclosing her new…friend to her.

"Uh, well, we're not exactly dating. Just keeping things really casual for now, you know?"

"I completely understand," she says sympathetically. "You don't want to jump back on the commitment horse so soon. What's he like though?"

"Uh, he's sort of a woman…so…"

She's met with silence. A sort of awkward, not really sure what to do with that silence.

"Like…a Caitlyn Jenner type thing?"

"Oh, no no!" Although, that had also crossed her mind, if Emma was indeed transgender. But because Emma wasn't a talker, she had yet to ask.

"No, she's 100% female!" she says without thinking and then has to bite her tongue to keep from changing that percentage to 90.

"Wow!" Kat says looking really impressed. "You know, I never saw this coming, what with you being so…straight-laced," and Regina knows that's a euphemism for 'boring', "but I have to say, you've been glowing the last few weeks so she's got to be something special."

"Well, she's pretty great but like I said, it's just really casual."

"Well, that's okay. There's nothing wrong with taking it slow," she assures and Regina nods, despite knowing there's nothing slow about the two of them together.

Emma likes it fast and hard, and though she slows down considerably for Regina whenever she asks, Emma isn't a slow type of woman. But she finds that on most days, she doesn't mind. She's had slow
and steady her whole life. Fast and reckless is a surprisingly welcome change.

"So," Regina looks up to find that Kat has pulled the only other adult sized chair up to her desk and she's leaning forward with her elbows on the desk and chin tucked in her hands. "What's she like?"

Regina sighs. "Um, she's...," she tries to envision Emma and everything that she is. "Well, she just oozes confidence. Like, she's so sure of her ability to do...anything. And she's funny, when she wants to be. And super playful. She doesn't take anything seriously."

_Which is cute sometimes, but I wouldn't mind if she took us a bit more seriously._

"What does she do?"

"Uh," Regina tries to think if Emma has ever mentioned her occupation, "I...I don't know. Maybe she's self-employed?"

That seems plausible due to the fact that whenever Regina says 'come over', she never seems to have any conflicts, she just obliges.

Kat squints a bit at that. "How do you not know? How long have you two been seeing each other?"

"Almost three months?"

"And you don't know if she works?"

"Well...I mean, she has to work. She drives a very nice car and she's quite fashionable. And I've checked some of the labels while she's asleep or in the shower and—"

"Wait wait! So you two have..." she finishes her statement by making two v's with her fingers and slamming them together.

"Oh my gosh, Kat stop that! We're not in 6th grade anymore! You can say sex," but oddly enough when she says it, it still comes out as barely more than a whisper.

They share a giggle and Regina can't help but spin in her chair, excited to have someone to talk with about Emma.

It wasn't that she hadn't wanted to tell Kat, it was just that she didn't know _how_. She had just gone from a serious, committed relationship with a man to nothing but sex with a _woman_ and she wasn't sure how to broach the topic.

"Wow. I cannot wait to meet this woman."

Regina nods, "I hope you like her! She's really great!"

"Yeah, what sort of dates do you guys go on?"

That stops Regina in her tracks. "Well, actually, we've never really gone on any dates."

Kat's one eyebrow shoots up, "Then what do you do?"

Regina's cheeks flush involuntarily and Kat gives her a look of both awe and concern.

"That's it?! You just have sex?! For almost three months?!"

"Yeah, she...she likes to keep things casual. She told me straight away that she wasn't looking for
anything serious," upon seeing her friends look of pity, she elaborates, "which is fine by me! Because, you know, after everything that happened, I just…I needed this."

"Yeahh," Kat agrees skeptically. "So…you have no feelings whatsoever? You're just totally fine with just sex?"

"Yeah of course!"

"Bull shit! I can see it all over your face! You like her!"

"I don't know anything about her!"

"Well, we know she's really good with her hands."

And that's not all, Regina thinks as she laughs and covers her face.

"She really is. Like, sex with him, sex with anyone, just pales in comparison. She's shown me so many different positions."

It was true. In the course of three months, she had experienced a sexual awakening like no other. Emma had done it from behind, put her on top, turned her around on top, and spread her eagle and pounded into her. They had done so much and still Emma swore there was more to try. And Regina was eager to try it. Because for once, sex wasn't a daunting chore. It was like an adventure, with each time yielding different results.

Some positions she liked more than others, some positions had her cumming harder than others, but they all made her orgasm and that was more than what she could say about the three other men she'd been with in her entire lifetime.

"Regiiiiiiiaa. You're killing me! Now I'm wishing I had someone fucking me six ways to Sunday."

Regina laughs and shakes her head, "I'm sorry, I just get caught up sometimes."

"Hmm, well, just make sure you don't get caught up with her tonight! I'll never forgive you if you ditch me!"

"Don't worry, we'll be there. She's going to pick me up."

Kat nods and heads back to the door.

"Oh! One more thing, she was wondering what she should wear. Where are we eating?"

"Olive Garden, I think? Nothing too fancy."

Regina nods and she's almost disappointed that the dress code isn't formal. She absolutely loves seeing Emma in a suit that clings snugly to her body, hair slicked back into a high bun or low ponytail.

"Okay, I'll tell her. See you tonight!"

"See you, and your mystery lover, tonight!"

Regina shakes her head one more time then reaches for her phone to text Emma about the dress code.
It's going to be pretty casual tonight so wear whatever you want. :)

Two minutes later she receives a reply.

So can we both agree to be naked?

She laughs.

Why in the world would I agree to that? *blushing shocked face*

The response takes a minute, but eventually she receives a GIF that looks like it comes from the story of Little Red Riding Hood. The wolf, disguised as granny, is in bed continuously pulling her glasses down to her nose and winking up at her.

She's incredibly confused until she reads Emma's text.

All the easier to ravage you with, my dear.

Regina lets out a rather uncharacteristic giggle and sends one more response.

Only if you're on your best behavior tonight, Emma Swan.

The response is immediate.

Yup. Instant boner.

Regina flushes.

I'll leave you to it then.

Just the thought of Emma touching herself has Regina thanking her lucky stars it's a Friday and wishing they were back at her place.

That's another thing she would love to see change. There are times, outside of Wednesdays and Fridays, that she wishes she could see Emma. For sexual satisfaction or otherwise, she doesn't care. They don't text outside of those days and most times if Regina wants to find out where she is or who she's with, she has to go online. Which usually turns into an instant regret, as she feels nauseous thinking of all the things Emma does with other women when she's not with her.

She shakes those thoughts away though, not wanting to think about that. It's a Friday so Emma's hers for the night.

If Emma responds, she doesn't check to see. She has a lot of work to get done before her weekend can officially begin. Plus, she's realizing that it's kind of nice leaving Emma hanging.

"Wow, you look so good."

Regina smiles softly as she grabs her purse and shuts her door.

She isn't wearing anything particularly fancy, just a pair of black leggings and a long knitted sweater.

"Thank you, so do you. I don't think I've ever seen you in anything so dressed down."

"Ah, yeah. Thanks."
Emma is wearing a pair of black jeans with a white v-neck and a black leather jacket over it. She looks like a sexy biker and Regina almost lets out a moan just thinking about Emma bending her over a Harley and having her way with her.

Emma opens the door for her and they drive in a comfortable silence, neither quite sure what to say. Regina wants to ask about her day, but she isn't sure it's a safe question, knowing how private Emma can be.

Emma finally tires of the silence and speaks first. "What are your friends like?"

Regina looks over at her. She's facing forward, not taking her eyes off the road, but even still she can see the trepidation on Emma's face.

"They're very nice."

"And they're teachers too?"

"Yeah, they are."

Silence envelops them yet again. Regina stares out the window before remembering something.

"Thank you again. Or…maybe for the first time. I'm not sure if I said it earlier but really, thank you for coming with me."

Emma just nods. "A girls gotta eat, right?"

"I thought that's what I was for?" Regina shoots back immediately.

Emma smirks widely but doesn't turn to look at her.

"In my defense, you're still feeding me. Just in a different capacity. For now." Regina instantly delights in the possibilities of what they will do once this dinner is over.

They get to the restaurant right at 6 and find a space and Emma gets out first to open the door for her.

"You know you don't always have to get my door."

"Yeah, I know that. But I don't mind doing it," she says offering her arm to Regina.

"Yes, but I can open my own door."

"I have no doubt that you can," she replies, opening the restaurant door and smirking at Regina as she walks in, "you just shouldn't have to."

Regina sighs and shakes her head. How Emma manages to sleep around without every single woman falling in love is beyond her.

"Hi, we're with a party of ten. I'm not sure if-," she's cut off by her best friend's voice.

"Regina! You made it!" she pulls her in for a hug and really uses it as an opportunity to look at Regina's guest, who's staring awkwardly at the door, looking as though she could bolt at any minute.

Her eyes widen and she tightens her hold on Regina to whisper in her ear.

"You're sleeping with Emma Swan?!"
Regina pushes her away gingerly and smiles, ignoring the question and all of the surprise behind it. "Emma, this is my really good friend Kathryn Taylor."

Emma smiles and Kat does her best to smile back. "Pleasure to meet you."

"Same to you," though it's somewhat obvious Kat doesn't quite mean that.

Emma's eyebrows crinkle for a moment before she looks over to Regina for assistance. "Right, okay. Well, where are we seated Kat?"

She guides them over to the table where everyone is already seated and Regina goes around making introductions. For most of them, she can see the faint recognition in their eyes and she wonders if she's literally the only person in the world who didn't know who Emma Swan was when they first met.

They sit and Emma mostly looks at her menu quietly. On the outside, she seems calm, but by the bouncing leg that occasionally brushes against hers, she can tell she's anything but. She puts a hand on Emma's leg under the table and rubs it gently, hoping to relax her nerves.

Emma's leg stops moving and in fact her whole body freezes. "Stop that."

Now it's Regina's turn to smirk. She knows that voice. Sometimes when Regina's on top, her pussy just mere inches away from sliding onto her dick, Emma uses that voice.

Stop teasing.

I can't stand waiting.

Just fucking ride me Gina.

"Or what?"

Emma turns slowly to look at her, face riddled with disbelief that timid Regina Mills would challenge her like this.

Regina sees Emma's hand rise, probably preparing to go under the table. Perhaps it's to stop her hand from continuing its strokes or perhaps to return the gesture, but she'll never know because Kathryn's voice rings out, asking a question.

"So, Emma what is it that you do exactly?"

"Oh, uh, I'm just trying to find what I'm passionate about for right now."

"So, you're not thinking of being a doctor then? Like your mother?"

"Nope, I have my own things going on."

"Like what exactly?"
Emma stares at her for a moment and Kathryn stares back as Regina sits awkwardly in between them.

On the one hand, she's uncomfortable and wants to cut in but on the other hand she's curious. Already Kat has gotten more information out of her than she has in 3 months. But even still, she senses Emma's growing discomfort and decides to come to her rescue.

"Kat, stop with the third degree. She just sat down."

Kat seems to simmer down at once and so Emma does as well, rolling her eyes as soon as she looks away.

Regina leans over, hand still on Emma's thigh but now making small, innocent circles.

"What looks good to you?"

It takes Emma a moment to process the statement before she opens her menu.

"There's nothing with guac here, so I'll have to look. Have you made a decision yet?"

She laughs at that and leans a little closer to share a menu even though she has one right in front of her.

"Chicken & shrimp carbonara probably. Those are my two favorite so together it's just great!"

Emma nods and continues to examine the menu.

"Are you more of a sweet or savory type?"

Emma poses the question like it's nothing but Regina finds herself elated. She hates to say it, but this may be the very first non-sexual, slightly in-depth question Emma has ever asked her.

"Uh, I admit I have a bit of a sweet tooth. I love desserts."

Emma's eyebrows raise at that. "Oh yeah? I wouldn't have guessed that. What with the salad and all."

She rolls her eyes and leans away, finally opening her own menu, just to give herself something to do.

"What sort of things do you like to eat, Emma?" she asks as she sees the waiter return and start taking orders at the other end of the table.

After an extended silence, she looks over to find Emma smirking again.

*I swear, she can't go five minutes without thinking about sex.*

"Okay, forget I asked."

Emma still says nothing and it isn't until the waiter approaches to ask what she's having that Emma speaks up.

She looks up at him to find Emma slipping off her jacket as she orders and she can't help the drool that nearly falls down her chin.

"Alright, so we'll both do the chicken & shrimp carbonara and then it says it pairs well with
Chardonnay, so I'll do one glass of that and a glass of Roscato as well."

"Would you like those with the meal or beforehand?"

Emma turns to look her way briefly before just deciding for the both of them. "Let's do a glass of each beforehand and if she likes it, we'll order a second."

The waiter nods and then looks over at Kat, who is the last to order.

"I'll have the rosemary garlic chicken and uh, maybe I'll do a glass of wine too. Maybe a Pinot Noir?"

Before the waiter gets a chance to write it down, Emma speaks up.

"That doesn't pair well with chicken. Noir is more for dark meats. You may want to try a Sauvignon Blanc or Chardonnay."

Emma says it so smoothly that Regina has no choice but to swoon, but Kat is clearly less than impressed.

"I'll stick with the Noir please," she glances at the waiter and gives him a sure nod, though even he seems like he wants to say something.

Once they're left at the table alone again, another awkward silence takes over.

"How's Jefferson?" Regina asks.

"Oh, he's great! He just had to work late tonight, but he told me to tell you hello!"

Regina nods and is about to ask about his latest case when Kat leans forward and speaks to Emma again.

"So, how long have you two been dating?"

Despite her curious smile, everything about the way she says it implies that she already knows the answer.

Regina stares in disbelief but Emma sounds calm as she lifts her arm to put it on the back of Regina's chair.

"Oh, we're not dating. We just fuck. A lot." Emma's veracity and Kat's pale face cause her to stand quickly.

"Oh my goodness! Okay, I need to go to the restroom." And because they're both so out of line, she has a hard time deciding who she should take in there to scold. But she quickly decides on the instigator.

"Kat, join me?"

She stands reluctantly and they head to the restroom and the moment the door is closed behind them, she turns to her.

"What the hell was that?!"

"I'm sorry! But I was curious!"

"No Kat! You weren't! You know that we're not dating! You know it's just casual between us!"
"Yeah, you and half the women in New York City!"

"That's none of your business Kat!"

"You're right, it's not! And yet, I still know! Everyone knows! Everyone knows that she's a spoiled, rich, college dropout who sleeps around with a different girl every night! Please don't tell me you're seriously okay being one of those girls!"

She pauses for a minute at that, not realizing that Emma had ever gone to college to begin with. Though she has typed her name into google, she hasn't read her bio or anything like that. She has only looked at pictures. Pictures of her when she was first adopted by Ingrid Nolan. Pictures of her with her friends at clubs. Pictures of her with women. And that's where she usually stops.

"So what do you want me to do? Tell her I can't see her anymore? Because I just have soooo many other options?"

"Yes, you do! I know so many nice guys that would love to date you! And just you!"

"Kat, I know it doesn't make any sense to you, but I am so tired of these 'nice guys'."

"Are you kidding me? What's wrong with a nice guy?"

"Because I don't want nice! I want my heart to race when someone looks at me! I want someone who can't wait to get me into bed! I want someone who can't stop thinking about me and so they show up at my job in the middle of the day, just to see me, you know? And maybe I'm asking for way too much, but it's what I want."

Kat sighs and leans onto the sink, arms crossed, looking up at the ceiling.

"And you think that that someone could be Emma Swan?"

Regina sighs, realizing how crazy it sounds when she hears it played back to her, especially knowing what kind of person Emma is.

"I don't know Kat. But... I want it to be."

Kat shakes her head and she feels compelled to explain. Compelled to prove she's not crazy.

"I know you can't see it, at first I couldn't either, but sometimes when we're..." she blushes at the thought, "when we're in bed, she looks at me and it's like time just stops. And I can see it in her eyes, she feels something. And maybe she's too...scared or whatever she's feeling to admit it, but I can see it when I look at her. She looks at me like...like she wants to say something, but just...can't? Or... doesn't know how?"

"You're right. You sound crazy."

Regina lets out a breathy laugh. "I know. I know." She comes to stand against the sink with her friend.

"I just don't want you to get hurt again," she says quietly.

"I don't want to get hurt either," she admits.

Kat's arm finds its way around her and she leans in to rest her head on her shoulder. They sit there in silence for a minute when the sound of a toilet flushing startles them.
They pull apart immediately and turn to find a young woman, maybe in her mid-twenties coming out of a stall, looking utterly mortified.

The awkwardness is so intense that it's almost comical as they move out of her way so that she can wash her hands, then again when they realize they're now blocking the paper towel dispenser.

Eventually she leaves and once the doors shuts, they both double over in laughter, previous argument forgotten.

They compose themselves after a few minutes and prepare to head back to the table without another word, but a definite understanding between them.

Regina wants to get the girl. Kathryn is the best friend who is going to help her.

The rest of dinner flies by uneventfully. Kat realizes as she eats her meal that perhaps Emma was right, the wine doesn't pair well with chicken and so when they awkwardly hug goodbye, she at least has the decency to apologize. Both for her outburst and for not trusting her wine suggestion.

They make it back to the car by 7:45 and as Emma gets in on her own side after helping her, she feels giddy.

No, dinner didn't go off without a hitch, but it happened and Emma didn't look completely miserable. In fact, after they had returned, Emma held a couple conversations with her work friends, mainly discussing wine and the 2016 Presidential Election. And, as she just sat back and watched, she had been pleasantly surprised to find that Emma could hold her own in both discussions.

"I know you said you were full, but I could really go for some dessert right now."

"Yeah?" Emma's voice is quiet and so she looks over.

"Yeah…you okay?"

Emma sighs. "Yeah…look I'm sorry about what I said to Kat earlier. I just…I felt like she was provoking me, you know? And I'm just used to meeting a challenge head on and not giving a fuck about the consequences, but I can't imagine how embarrassing that was for you. So yeah…I'm sorry."

She stares, eyes wide with her jaw on the floor. Sure Emma's admission to them sleeping together had briefly mortified her, but the rest of the table either disregarded it with confused laughter or didn't hear it at all, so the fallout wasn't so bad.

"It's really okay, Emma."

"No, seriously, I don't want you to think you can take me anywhere because I behave like a child."

Regina's face lights up at the thought of doing this semi-regularly with her, but she reminds herself not to push too hard.

"Emma, you need to stop trying to get me to take you out. We're not dating, remember?"

She has a hint of humor in her voice and Emma smiles broadly, just as she had hoped.

"I won't stop until I've made you mine, Regina Mills."

The sarcasm is clear, but her heart flutters anyway at the mere possibility of belonging to Emma and
suddenly, she isn't in the mood for anything but the blonde.

"Actually, don't bother stopping for dessert. I almost forgot that I have something at home I can suck on. So let's just head back to my place."

She turns to look out of her window as she says it but the fingers walking up and down her thigh tell Emma that actual dessert is the last thing on her mind.

She immediately feels the car accelerate and her heart races as she thinks of what she has in store for Emma Swan.
This immediately follows the previous chapter.

The same warnings as always, with some oral sex and cumplay thrown in the mix!

Also, ask and you (occasionally) shall receive. This is for the guest that asked to see Regina exert some control. ;)

She is perched up in the center of Regina's bed with her back against the headboard.

Regina had given her strict instructions the moment they had walked through the door.

"Everything off except..." she boldly reaches her hand into Emma's tight jeans, playing with the hem of her boxers. "Leave these on. And then take a seat."

Her throat has been dry in anticipation ever since.

"You left this here at some point," she says, emerging a few minutes later from her closet with a thin red nightie on and Emma's thin black tie loosely tied around her neck. "And I've been saving it for a rainy day ever since."

Seeing Regina in next to nothing and her tie has her hardening in no time.

"But there isn't a cloud in the sky tonight," Emma smirks over at her from the bed.

"Well, let's say this is for good behavior then." She climbs up the on the bed and kisses Emma's toned calves.

"I can't say enough," she moves up to her knees and runs her hands up and down her smooth legs, planting more kissing along the way, "how happy I was," her fingers ghost over her waistband "to have you with me tonight."

She is nearly shaking with anticipation at this point. The sight of Regina crawling up towards her in a sexy negligee is the hottest fucking scene.

She can't control her growing erection, nor does she try. In fact, she moves her hand forward to rub herself through her underwear, but Regina's hand immediately slaps it away, almost hard enough to hurt.

And it just makes her even harder.

"Uh uh. No touching." Regina runs her hands over her clothed dick, squeezing firmly which causes her to jut her hips up to feel more of the sensation.

"Shiiit. Regina. You are so fucking sexy."

Regina's smile grows and she leans forward to place a kiss on her lips.

She absolutely loves kissing Regina.

Ever since that first time, she hasn't been able to get enough. Her kisses are always the perfect mix between sweet and sexy. It's so obvious when Regina kisses her that she wants her and surprisingly
she doesn't feel that with other women. Sure, girls kiss her like they're down to fuck but Regina kisses her like she could do it forever, and as overwhelming as it is, she always craves more of those kinds of kisses.

As Regina pulls away a little, taking Emma's bottom lip with her, she loosens the tie around her neck and wraps it around Emma's neck instead.

"Close your eyes for me," Regina whispers authoritatively against her lips.

A small part of her, the part of her that is 13 and scared and running again, screams not to trust her. But the part of her that has been sleeping with Regina for months, the rational part of her that says Regina would never hurt her, wins out and she almost immediately complies.

But then she feels something slips over her eyes and when they shoot open, she is still met with mostly darkness.

Her breathing quickens.

She can feel Regina leaned forward on her, probably to clasp the tie around her eyes, and so she tries to suppress her fears. But not even ten seconds later, as Regina is about to pull to make a knot, she raises her hands and pulls the tie down instantly.

"I don't—I don't like that!" She looks off to the other side of the room, blinking rapidly.

When Regina says nothing, she looks up at her to explain. Kinda.

"I'm sorry, I'm...sorry. You can do anything you want to me, just—just not that." Regina, who looked surprised just moments before now just looks apologetic.

She looks down at her intensely and Emma feels the urge to look away again, but she doesn't.

She thinks for sure that Regina's going to say something, or worse ask a shit ton of questions, but instead, she feels fingers threaded through her hair soothingly.

Regina pushes her hair back from her face and once that unnecessary task is complete, her hands come to rest on Emma's cheeks. Her hands feels so warm and when she leans forward and places a barely there kiss on her forehead, she can't help but feel so...well, not loved, but something like it. She just doesn't have a word yet. But she loves the feeling. And she allows her eyes to close momentarily, drilling this into her memory, as she has done so many times with Regina.

They sit like that for a minute in silence, with Regina straddling her waist and her arms wrapped securely around Regina's thin frame. Finally, Regina speaks.

"You know..." she pulls back to look her in the eyes, smiling mischievously, "I can understand why you wouldn't want to be blindfolded. If I were you, and I had me in your lap, I wouldn't want anything obstructing my view either."

She tosses her head back and laughs at that.

"Yes, well, thank you for understanding my dilemma." She says it looking directly at her so that she sees the thanks is genuine. She really does appreciate Regina being understanding, but for also dropping the issue and not turning it into a thing.

Regina lets out a chuckle of her own and lifts her hips a bit before grinding them lightly on her dick.
"I love that you're always so hard for me." Regina's forehead is on hers and they're so close that Regina is basically breathing into her mouth as she whispers.

And just like that, the air is electrified and the mood is back.

She grinds her hips a little more harshly. Emma's fingers tighten on her back, scratching lightly and Regina hisses.

"Comment about our sexual dalliances notwithstanding, I would say you were on your best behavior tonight."

Her eyes flutter closed and Regina's lips move towards her neck, sucking lightly and the thought of her leaving a mark makes her dick jump.

Regina giggles at the feeling and Emma's heart skips a beat.

"Shit, I love this dick." She can feel the heat from Regina's pussy hitting her dick and as much as she loves this cute thing Regina has going on, she wants to fuck her so hard and so fast right now.

"I need to be inside of you," she whispers into her hair.

She reaches down between them to pull her dick out, but Regina grabs her wrist.

"Nope. You were on your best behavior…" Regina shimmies down so that she's no longer sitting in her lap. Instead, she's laying so that her head is just above her belly button. She places a few wet kisses there before continuing downward. "So now you get me on my worst behavior."

Her eyebrows shoot toward the ceilings and her breathing picks up.

Yeah, okay, this is way better than my plan.

It was a fucking great day when Regina offered to suck her dick. She usually had to ask, seeing as Regina was never eager to do it, so this really is a reward.

"Ahh, are you gonna suck me?" She runs her fingers lightly through Regina's hair, watching her nod, causing her chin to brush against her cock.

"I'm going to take such good care of you tonight and all you have to do is follow my instructions."

Not that Regina's looking at her to see, but she nods profusely, ready and willing to do whatever she needs to to get her hard meat in Regina's mouth.

But Regina must be unimpressed with her nonverbal response because she looks up at her.

"Can you follow directions Emma?"

"Fuck yes!"

"Good, then no touching. If you touch me, I stop."

The thought of not being able to touch Regina or at least put her hands on her head to control the pace almost puts a damper on things. That is until Regina pulls her out of her shorts and now nothing but the warmth of her hand matters.

"Shiiiiit. Please don't tease today, Gina."
"You're not in charge here Emma. You don't get to tell me what to do."

Regina slaps her dick lightly and her hips thrust upward. Regina has never been so dominating and she's not gonna lie, this shit is fucking hot.

If she was allowed to touch, she would guide her cock to Regina's lips but instead she's going at Regina's pace and though it's not something they've ever done before, she's excited about where this is going.

After a moment, Regina finally has mercy on her and begins stroking.

The pace is rather slow but when she gets to the head, she runs her thumb over the slit and that causes more pre-cum to squirt from the tip. She rubs the cum all over her dick, and the extra lubricant allows her to stroke faster and harder.

"Ah, yes, baby. Just like that."

"You like me jackin' you off like this?"

"Fuck yeah, keep going." But those are the wrong words because immediately Regina stops. Her hand is still wrapped around her, but she refuses to move.

"I told you, I'm in control right now."

She nods quickly, desperate for more. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry."

But Regina shakes her head, smiling a fake sad smile. "No, I don't think you are."

"No no, I swear I am Regina!" She's never in her life begged like this. She's never had a reason to. Every girl she's ever been with has been more than willing to do what she's asked.

Yet here is Regina Mills, bringing her to her knees, with just the touch of her hand and the sound of her voice.

"Last chance Emma." And by the way she says it, Emma can tell that she means it.

She nods and tries to keep at the forefront of her mind that she cannot touch or give instruction. She just hopes that she will remember those two things.

Regina resumes her stroking, but at this point, the lubricant has worn off a bit, so she does something she's never done and Emma almost cums on the spot. She spits on her dick and continues to stroke as if she does this often, even though she knows Regina has only ever sucked one dick in her entire life.

That's right world. I fucked that pretty virgin mouth first, she thinks smugly.

The room quickly fills with moans and the sounds of her stroking her now wet dick, the spit making it easier to jack off. She sits for what feels like an eternity, watching Regina coat her dick with precum and spit, but she knows this isn't enough. She can't cum this way.

And when Regina stops again, it seems like that's all a part of her plan: to never let Emma cum.

But she doesn't have to wait long until she feels the next source of pleasure.

She watches as Regina pushes her dick forward so that it lays on her stomach, exposing her balls, which she eagerly takes into her mouth.
"Fuuuu-" but even that exclamation of pleasure is cut short when she feels Regina's hand back on her dick, jacking her off again as she sucks on her heavy ball sack.

"Shiiit, yes baby. Yes, you know how much I love that."

With both nuts stuffed in her mouth, Regina's mouth is too full to speak, but she moans and the feeling is orgasmic.

A little more of this and she could definitely cum.

But again, as if hearing her thoughts, Regina sucks hard then pulls away, taking the balls with her before finally releasing them from her mouth.

"Mmm, your balls are so full. I can't wait to have your cum all over my face."

Emma's dick twitches at the thought and that small motion must remind Regina of her neglect because she reaches for the thick meat again. But this time, she doesn't tease or stroke it.

She leans down and swallows the first three inches with no trouble and it happens so fast that Emma's hips thrust upwards in surprise.

"Holy shit Gina!" She lowers her hips and watches as her head bobs up and down on her cock. Her lips are wide open and saliva is falling from her mouth onto Emma's cock. The sound of her sucking fills the room as Emma bites her hand to keep from screaming out.

"Oh my god, oh my fucking god this is so damn good!"

Regina just moans around her. She groans even louder when Regina uses one free hand to stroke the remaining three and a half inches that her mouth can't reach. She strokes quickly and sucks hard on the head, hollowing out her cheeks every time she comes back to the tip.

"Gina, your mouth feels so good! Shiiiiit!"

Regina pulls away for a moment to say, "thank you," before continuing to suck her off.

Emma begins squeezing her own tits in a desperate attempt to keep her hands busy so that she doesn't try to lead and her efforts are noted and rewarded.

"You've been so good so far Em. Which is why I want to give you a gift."

She shortens Regina's name all the time but this is the first time she's call her anything other than Emma and she instantly loves it. Loves the way it sounds on Regina's lips.

"Is this not my gift?" She asks breathlessly.

*Because your mouth sure as fuck feels like a gift.*

But Regina just shakes her head.

"I know you're going to get excited but be gentle okay?"

Emma doesn't know what she's agreeing to but as usual it doesn't matter. What Regina wants she can have.

"Of course, babe. Whatever you want."
Regina smiles sweetly and leans down on her to kiss her nose.

"You're so sweet."

In any other situation, Emma would gag and protest that she wasn't sweet at all. She would then flip a bitch over and pound the shit out of her until she didn't know the meaning of the word. But coming from Gina, it makes her smile proudly, just happy that she's happy.

She almost rolls her eyes at the thought.

And then she does. But not because of her weird obsession with Regina's happiness. No, her eyes roll back as she feels something she hasn't felt since their very first time. Regina's throat.

She looks down to find that she has missed Regina swallowing five inches of her dick. It takes every ounce of control to remain completely still, not wanting to choke her again.

When Regina pulls up, she bobs up and down a few times, slurping eagerly and then takes an additional inch on the way back down. She does this twice more until she finally manages to get all of Emma's dick in her mouth and Emma can swear that she sees the outline of her cock in her throat.

She pulls up suddenly, taking a deep breath and Emma smiles at her reassuringly. That smile motivates her and she gets back to work, quickly becoming a pro, swirling her tongue and jerking her off when she isn't swallowing her whole. And each time her dick hits the back of Regina's throat she lets out a gagging sound that fills the room, turning her on even more.

"That's it baby, so good. You suck my dick so good."

Regina delights in the compliment and smiles around her. She sucks harshly before releasing her dick and stroking her hard and fast before licking her nuts again, caressing them with her other free hand.

"You like feeling your dick all the way down my throat?"

"God yes, you have no idea baby! Your mouth was made for my dick."

Regina doesn't disagree and gets back to work, taking her all the way again.

"Ughhhh, fuck yes, I can't-I can't last! I'm going to cum!"

She expects Regina to immediately pull away, knowing how much she hates the thought of cum in her mouth, but she just keeps sucking. And as much as she would love to cum in her mouth, she knows the brunette would be furious, so she breaks the rules and reaches out to grip her shoulders lightly.

"Baby, get off I'm about to-" but her warning is dismissed when Regina looks up at her and winks, then she swallows her like a pro and when Regina's nose touches her pelvis, she can't keep from exploding.

"Oh my shit, fuuuucking FUCK!" The only thing better than cumming in general is doing it in Regina's mouth because she sucks her cum from her dick like her sperm is the only thing she's had to eat all day.

She can't help it anymore, her hands fly to Regina's hair and press her down further and she thrusts her hips up a little, fucking each spurt into her mouth.

She wasn't given permission to touch or fuck into her mouth but as her balls swell and release what
seems like a never ending river of jizz, she decides she'll deal with the fallout later.

"Yes, yessss, take it all. Swallow it all baby."

She always cums a lot with Regina, so eventually she sees that Regina is forced to swallow some of her essence and she watches as her pretty throat bobs up and down as she drinks her cum.

Needing to breathe, Regina pulls back quite a bit so that just the tip is in her mouth and she jerks her as a few more spurts shoot into her mouth.

When she's finally done, her hips fall back onto the bed and she brings her hand up to wipe the sweat from her forehead.

"Oh. My. Fucking. God. Have you been practicing that? Because I have never ever been deepthroated like that."

Regina moans a little but otherwise says nothing. She uncovers her eyes and looks down to make sure she's okay and finds that Regina's mouth is open slightly and there is cum dripping from her lips and onto Emma's stomach.

As much as she loves the thought of Regina drinking her cum, she doesn't like it on her body. It gets sticky and dries and it makes her skin itch.

"That's so fucking sexy," she says, tilting Regina's chin so she can see the small pool of white floating in her mouth. "Swallow for me?"

Regina seems hesitant for a moment, but follows instructions flawlessly and her throat constricts as she gulps down the remaining semen in her mouth.

Emma almost hardens again, especially as Regina even reaches down to scoop up on her middle finger the small white glob that had fallen onto her abdomen. She makes a show of licking her finger and moaning and Emma can't stop herself from reaching out for her hips and bringing her closer until she's back in her lap.

Regina scoots forward until they're pressed tightly together.

Emma looks up at her and runs her fingers across her soft, swollen lips, mesmerized by her mouth and its many talents.

"I know how you feel about that in your mouth...so thank you for doing it for me. I loved it." she whispers.

Now that they're done, shy Regina is back and she fiddles her nightgown as she smiles at the praise.

"Well, surprisingly I loved doing it."

Emma's grin widens. "That's because you're the biggest closet freak I've ever met."

Regina's cheeks flush and she leans forward to hide her face in Emma's neck.

She uses this moment to smell Regina's hair, the apple scent she hasn't been able to get enough of. She brings her arms around her waist and strokes her back lightly.

"You don't have to be embarrassed, you know? It's just you and me here."

Regina nods slowly, breathing warm air onto her neck and she closes her eyes just enjoying this
moment.

She's not trying to marry Regina or anything. She doesn't believe in that shit. She doesn't believe that human beings are meant to be with just one person forever, but for a small millisecond in this moment, she can see why some people do.

####

Feel free to review, I love reading your thoughts!
Chapter 7

After that Friday night out with her coworkers, and the reward for Emma that follows, getting her to agree the next time is much easier.

12:31 p.m.

Would you be up for dinner again Friday night?

12:33 p.m.

What will be my reward if I say yes?

12:40 p.m.

Since I took charge last time…

12:40 p.m.

What time should I pick you up?

12:43 p.m.

5:30 please.

And Emma arrives right on time. And dinner with her coworkers goes more smoothly this time around. Kat is friendlier and Emma is livelier and everyone at the table is left laughing to the point of tears at her antics.

And because of her good behavior, Emma is rewarded with a night of having her way with Regina. And boy does she. Emma takes that same tie from the week prior and ties Regina's hands above her head and eats her pussy until the brunette is writhing underneath her, begging her to stop.

And so they continue along that path for a month. At least once a week, usually on Fridays, Regina will ask her to do something outside of the bedroom. Dinner, a movie, and now they sit in the living room for a small get together at Kat's house with a few close friends and their significant others.

It is her, Emma, Kat, Jefferson, and another couple sitting after the meal just talking and sipping on wine.

As she vaguely listens to Jeff tell a story from work, she looks around the room at the other two couples snuggled up close to each other and then up at Emma.

Emma has her arm around her and she is tucked safely against her with her head on her shoulder and they blend in perfectly with the other couples in the room. And when Emma laughs she can feel her whole body shake and vibrate and nothing has ever felt more right.

"You two are just so cute together," says…Izzy, if she remembers the name correctly.

She looks up over at her and smiles politely but says nothing. She appreciates the compliment but it also saddens her knowing that they're not actually together, something she has been forgetting more
"Thank you," Emma answers smoothly. Anytime anyone compliments them, Emma just smiles and politely thanks them. It's almost annoying how natural it comes out.

"How did you meet?" Kat asks, as if she's never heard the story. But she has. She has heard it from Regina's perspective but even Regina is curious as to what Emma would say about their first meeting.

"Well shit. Should I tell it?" Emma says, looking down at her, whispering against her hair.

She nods silently.

"Well, it's actually a little embarrassing. I originally saw Gina in a bar about four or months ago? I had been with a few friends just enjoying a night out and I looked up and saw her sitting at the bar, alone," as Emma tells the story, she subconsciously tightens her hold on her and Regina sighs happily.

"I had actually just been dumped, so I was completely heartbroken and drinking away my sorrows," she adds and where she expects Emma to continue, she is met with silence. And she realizes that she has never told Emma that. Mainly because Emma never asked. But also because, for whatever reason, she didn't want Emma thinking she was just a rebound used for sex and other physical comforts.

She squeezes Emma's thigh to bring her back to reality and immediately, she resumes the story.

"Right, yeah. But I, of course, didn't know that at the time. So I sit there just staring for like 10 minutes thinking for sure that her boyfriend or something is going to come back and join her. I mean because there was no way a girl like her was single, I said to myself."

Regina snorts at the irony and she can feel Emma looking down at her.

"Hush you. So...anyway, eventually I figured there must not have been anyone else and so I spend another 10 minutes talking myself up, trying to just convince myself to go over there. So finally, I do!"

"But when she finally womaned up and did it, I was just leaving!"

"Ah, come on!" Andrew, Izzy's boyfriend of 6 years exclaims, completely invested in the story.

"That's what I said!" Emma pointing at him in agreement jostles Regina a bit but she just laughs.

"So I tell her, like, were you leaving because I'd love to buy you a drink."

Regina sits up immediately and stares at Emma in outrage.

"You can't be serious right now! Emma, tell the truth!"

Emma looks back at her, eyes wide, but filled with mirth.

"That is the truth Gina! That's exactly how it happened!"

Regina puts up a hand to her and turns towards their friends.

"I need you to know that that is not the way it happened. She was not that smooth! I'll have you know when she finally did come up to me, she practically begged me not to leave!"
"WHAT?!" Emma is staring at her like she has two heads and she's not backing down, much to the amusement of everyone else in the room.

"It's true! She was like, oh no, please don't leave now that I've had a chance to actually say hi! But I told her, I am leaving, sorry."

"Yeah, except she wasn't leaving," Emma adds with sass. "She couldn't find her card to pay the bill."

"So I'm assuming you took care of it?" Kat asks.

"Of course, it was the right thing to do. Helping a damsel in distress."

"Oh please, you're no savior! She insisted on paying because and this is a direct quote, she wanted to "apologize for being a coward"."

Immediately, Emma's hand comes up to cover her mouth and she shakes her head.

"That is a very loose quote. Not at all verbatim."

Everyone in the room is cracking up at them and when Regina makes eye contact with Emma and receives a wink, she starts laughing as well. The sound is muffled however due to Emma's hand still firmly over her mouth.

She reaches up to take the hand away, but not before kissing Emma's palm.

"Yeah, of course it isn't. Anyway, so after paying she offers to walk me to my car but when we get outside I remember that I actually walked."

"So like a gentleman, I offer to drive her home. But she freaks out on me!"

"Oh, stop! I did not freak out! I just found it creepy! I didn't know you!"

"That's why I was trying to take you home! How else was I supposed to get to know you?! So she's like, 'Oh I'll just walk!'"

"But then she wanted to walk with me!"

"It was late! I wasn't going to let you walk alone! You can't be mad at me for that!"

Andrew and Jefferson both nod, on Emma's side. But Kat and Izzy interject about how her persistence is a little weird.

"So finally, I just gave up," she puts her hands up to demonstrate surrender. "I got her a cab, paid the fare and let her go."

"Yes, except you didn't. She slipped a note to the cabbie for her to give it to me."

Izzy and Andrew let out sighs of relief.

"What did the note say?"

"It just had her number so I could call her."

"Yeah, except you didn't!" Emma repeats back to her.

"You didn't call Regina?!!" Jefferson asks incredulously.
"No, she didn't," Emma responds on her behalf. "But it obviously wasn't in the cards for us to go our separate ways because then, about a month later, I ran into her while picking up my little brother from his school."

"No way!" Izzy and Andrew exclaim at the same time and Regina acknowledges that they are an incredibly cute couple. She wonders briefly if they're thinking the same thing about her and Emma.

"It's true. August Nolan is even a student in my class."

"It's like fate," Izzy whispers wistfully.

Emma looks over at her in that moment and she sees it. The look that Emma gives that says this could be something more. However, this is the first time she's ever seen it outside of her bedroom. And that makes her heart soar.

She scoots closer to Emma, who immediately lifts her arm to wrap it back around her shoulder, and lays her head back on her shoulder.

"Yeah, I have to agree with you Izzy. Feels like fate," Emma says shyly.

She feels another kiss to the top of her head, but this one seems to linger and by the sharp intake of breath, she suspects that Emma might be smelling her hair.

She smiles at the possibility.
You know the drill. NSFW. Same warnings as usual. Enjoy.

"Well that was fuuuun," Emma says as she weaves through New York traffic.
She waits a few minutes, occasionally looking over at Regina, then gives up.
This is the third time her statements have gone without response.
"You okay Gina?"
Regina finally looks over at the sound of her name and squints.
"Hmm?"
Emma takes her eyes off the road for a quick moment, "I asked if you were okay."
Regina feels a hand on her leg, stroking gently and she tentatively picks it up and laces their fingers together.
"Can I ask you something?" Her voice is quiet, barely loud enough to overcome the sound of the radio.
"Uh, sure?"
She inhales and exhales deeply twice before speaking.
"Why do you let people think we're dating when you know it's not true?"
"Uh…because it's easier than explaining we just fuck twice a week?"
Emma laughs a little but Regina doesn't. She just turns back to the window, but keeps their hands intertwined, not quite willing to let go.
"Well…you're very good at pretending."
"Pretending what?"
"I don't know…pretending to like my friends? Pretending to play the happy couple?"
But Emma shakes her head adamantly. "But I don't pretend! I do really like your friends, even Kat is growing on me. And I mean, I don't pretend so much as I… just play the part. I can only imagine what we look like cuddled up on a couch together. We look like the other couples in the room so it doesn’t surprise or upset me when people mistake us for a couple. It's cool with me because we both know what this is so I don't care what other people think, you know?"
Regina ponders that for a few minutes before nodding in what seems like agreement.
She just doesn't get it. If Emma is so capable of acting like a couple, why can't they just do that more permanently?
"Well you play the doting girlfriend very well…"
"Mmm…" She can tell the lack of response is on purpose but she refuses to let it stand.

"It makes me wonder why you don't believe in dating."

Emma smiles a bit. "Not believing in monogamy doesn't mean I don't believe in dating. I do. And I have dated before."

"You just don't believe in marriage?"

"More or less. For starters, I believe the institution of marriage is a fucking joke. I mean, half of all marriages end in divorce for fuck's sake. And I don't even think that it's meant for us as humans to spend our time on earth with just one person. I think that people are constantly evolving and wanting different things and you shouldn't feel tied down to someone who isn't compatible with you in a given stage of your life."

Regina can't help but turn towards her as she speaks. She doesn't think Emma has every spoken so much to her at once and certainly never anything this deep. If she's being perfectly honest, she didn't even know Emma was capable of thinking and articulating on this level.

The car is silent for a few minutes until they get to Regina's street.

"Still want me to come up?" Emma asks quietly.

"Why wouldn't you? Or..do you not want to?"

She shakes her head quickly. "No, of course I do. I just…I don't know, you seemed mad, I guess?"

Regina shrugs at that.

"I…I'm not mad."

Emma stares at her for a moment but Regina refuses to make eye contact.

"You're sure?"

"Positive," she nods and gives Emma a small reassuring smile.

"Damn. I was kinda hoping we could have angry fight sex."

Regina's smile widens exponentially. "Well…I could play the part of the angry girlfriend a little longer if you want?"

Emma laughs and pulls into a spot. "But if we're going to do this…we shouldn't half ass it."

"Oh absolutely not!"

"100% commitment. I want it to be Oscar worthy."

Regina just winks and then without warning, she throws open the door and jumps out.

"I am so done with you Emma Swan!"

Emma smirks as she rips the keys from the ignition and hops out to follow her.

"Regina, come on! Don't be like this!"

"Leave me alone Emma!"
"Babe, just wait!" The term of endearment almost has Regina wanting to listen.

Almost.

"Are you talking to me or the other girl who couldn't seem to keep her hands off of you tonight?" Regina throws back at her as she searches for her keys.

Of all the scenarios she could've chosen, she's kicking herself for choosing the one that ultimately was the biggest insecurity for her, but it's out there so now she just has to go with it.

Out of nowhere, Emma's hands cover hers to stop her motions, "Gina, you know as well as I do that she was just some random chick. And it's not like I can control what other girls do."

"I don't care who she is! I don't care what she's doing! You should have stopped her!"

Regina pulls her hands back from Emma's and tries to find her keys again, rejoicing when she finds them.

She turns towards her door and prepares to insert her key, but Emma's hands on her waist stops her immediately.

"Baby," her smooth, sultry voice is right by her ear and her legs almost give out.

"Don't worry about the girls with their hands on me. Just focus," her hands trail upwards towards her breasts. "On my hands," she squeezes each one in her hands. "That I cannot keep off of you," her hands begin to slowly descend south and Regina can't stop herself from shutting her eyes and leaning back into Emma's body.

But then she remembers that she's not supposed to be giving in so easily. This is all supposed to culminate into hot, angry sex.

So with every fiber of her being, she manages to pull forward and swat Emma's hands away.

"Don't think for a minute that you're forgiven Emma Swan. You don't get to just fuck whoever you want then touch me like you've done nothing wrong."

Emma's eyebrows rose at that. She loves when Regina swears.

Regina finally manages to get her door open and she attempts to shut it on Emma, but her strong arms stop the door from closing completely. Regina just rolls her eyes and turns away.

"I don't expect to be forgiven because I'm not apologizing. I'm not sorry about fucking her," Emma shrugs out of her black leather jacket and watches Regina remove her own shoes.

"Of course you're not! Because you never are! Do you even want to be with me Emma?! Because if not, we can just end this right now!" Regina throws her second heel onto the ground.

"Is that what you want?" Emma asks calmly removing her shoes as well.

"I want you to stop fucking other women!" Regina yells before turning towards the kitchen, but Emma reaches out to grab her and pulls her back hard enough so that Regina nearly collides with Emma as they stand face to face now.

Regina's breathing is heavy as she stares into Emma's darkened eyes and for a moment they just stare at one another, both challenging the other to make the next move.
Emma accepts the challenge.

She steps closer to Regina so that her breath is hitting her face.

"What, are you afraid she fucked me better?"

She moves closer, making it so that there is literally no space between them and Regina is forced to take a step back.

"Afraid that she sucked my dick better than you?"

Another two steps forward from Emma forces Regina to take two more backwards until she realizes that she has been forced against the wall.

Emma takes the last step forward and places her hands on the wall, on either side of her head. Her height making her quite intimidating and though she knows she has nothing to fear, her heart is pounding with pure excitement.

"Afraid that you won't be able to satisfy me like she can?"

Emma cocks one eyebrow in the air, throwing the ball into her court and she accepts easily.

She reaches up to the collar of Emma's shirt and pulls her forward, forcing their lips together in a harsh kiss.


And she loves it.

Emma was right. She is such a closet freak. She has learned so much about her sexuality since starting this thing with Emma and now she can't imagine going back to the same old boring sex she used to have with him...or anyone really.

At this point, she can't imagine sex with anyone that isn't Emma.

Emma who knows how to touch her. How to kiss her and make her scream. How to be the perfect balance between hard and soft.

But, she notes, there is no soft this time. Emma is pressing her into the wall, running her hands over her body, but Regina is craving a little control.

She wraps her arm around the blonde's waist and quickly flips their position so that Emma's back is now against the wall, never once breaking their kiss.

She is met with a satisfactory moan.

She grabs both of Emma's hands and laces their fingers together, but the seemingly intimate gesture doesn't last long as Regina lifts both of her arms so that their joined hands are above their heads.

She slams Emma's hands against the wall and holds them there with a fierce grip, before kissing down her strong jaw to her neck.

She nips a few times at her neck, biting her hard enough to leave an angry red mark and Emma lets out a harsh groan.

"Fuuuuuck."
She moves forward so that her entire body is practically laying on Emma's.

"Let me make one thing very clear..." she whispers into her ear before using a free hand to put her hand under Emma's t-shirt. She reaches her bra and squeezes her tit hard.

"No one is going to fuck you better than me."

Her hand pulls away but to Emma's delight, it only travels lower to cup her throbbing erection.

Then Regina squeezes harshly.

"No one's going to suck your dick better than me."

Her hand leaves her dick all too soon and moves upward now to Emma's hair, where she runs her fingers through it before tugging hard.

Emma hisses but by the look in her eyes, the pain is welcomed.

"No one, and I mean absolutely no one, is going to satisfy you better than me."

Regina takes a moment to lick her slowly from her neck to her jaw then to her lips, which she outlines with her tongue before moving in to kiss her again. This time, Emma loses control and forces Regina to release the hold on her hands.

And the moment she falters and lets them go, Emma leans down to get a firm grip on Regina's thighs before lifting her into the air. Her arms immediately wrap around Emma's neck for support, but she finds she doesn't need it as Emma turns them once more and knocks her into the wall with a loud thud.

"Ah! Shit!" Emma's mouth is all over her and the feeling is incredible.

That mixed with the realization that Emma is holding her up and pinning her to the wall has Regina grinding her pussy against her in desperate need of friction.

"Fuck." Regina's favorite word when they're having sex.

"Speaking of, are you gonna fuck me? Or will I have to find another girl who will bec-"

She's cut off by Regina's lips. They kiss for a moment and Regina pulls away, biting her lip hard enough to almost draw blood.

"This dick belongs to me. So fuck me with it. And only me."

Emma can't free herself fast enough. She puts Regina down for a minute so that they can both take off their clothes, quickly removing all the necessary items. Emma’s jeans are around her ankles unable to wait anymore and Regina still hasn't unbuttoned all the buttons on her shirt, but Emma is way too hard to wait anymore so rips the shirt the rest of the way and the buttons pop off. She quickly pulls it off her shoulders and then reaches down to pick her up again and slam her back against the wall again.

"Shiiit, not so hard baby."

But her plea falls on deaf ears.

Which is fine because Emma is running her fingers over her folds getting her ready and all she feels is that pleasure.
Just as she feels the head of her dick at her entrance, she remembers…

"Wait…we need a condom."

"Fuck that. You wanted this dick, then it's all yours. I want you to take it all. Feel it all."

She pushes forward harshly and in mere seconds, Regina is filled with her.

"Ahhh holy fucking hell," Emma sighs and shuts her eyes tight.

Regina completely understands.

They've never done this without the feeling of latex between them so to feel her bare dick rubbing against her clenching walls is like they're doing it for the very first time again.

The feeling is so warm and so tight that Emma takes a minute to compose herself.

"I knew you couldn't handle me," Regina cuts off her moment of stillness with her harsh, mocking words.

"Look at you, already about to blow your load. Pathetic."

She knows exactly what to say to get a rise out of Emma and so she isn't surprised at all when Emma's head rises from her shoulder.

Emma steadies herself so that she can hold Regina with one hand while her other hand comes to rest at Regina's throat. Her hold isn't too tight, but there is some pressure there and though she never thought she'd be into being choked, she feels herself grow even wetter and she clenches at the thought of being dominated in such a way.

"Tell me you want this dick. Tell me this pussy is mine."

Despite her shortness of breath, Regina meets Emma's eyes and refuses to back down.

"No."

Emma wastes no time slamming her hips forward, balls deep inside of her.

"Ahhh, yes," pours from Regina's lips before she can stop herself and she curses her lack of self-control.

"I'm not going to ask you again. Tell me."

But Regina still stands her ground, excited to know what will happen if she doesn't. "I wish I could but your dick just isn't fit for a queen, dear."

"Fine," Emma relents, pulling out slowly, "Don't tell me. But know this," she pushes back in slowly.

Regina moans and wraps her fingers in her hair, pulling it hard. But the tugging doesn't stop Emma from speaking.

"I'm going to ruin this pussy. Fuck it so hard and so good that nothing else is going to satisfy you."

Regina's first instinct is to nod and submit but she knows that's not what Emma wants right now.

She wants resistance.
"Good luck with that Miss Swan," she rolls her eyes and her voice sounds completely disinterested and that's what sets Emma off.

She immediately begins thrusting up into her at a brutally fast pace, pushing her higher against the wall before pulling almost all the way out.

She's slamming into her and Regina doesn't know what to do with herself. Her head is thrashing from left to right and her hands are desperate to grab onto something.

They find purchase on Emma's shoulders and her nails immediately dig into her skin.

"Ughh, fuck!" Emma screams into her mouth as they kiss.

"Fuck you feel so good, Emma."

"Funny, that's the same thing she said," Emma whispers to her without missing a beat.

The crazy part is that none of this is even real. There is no other woman. Emma hasn't fucked anyone but her all day today, but the thought of women saying it to her on days other than Wednesdays and Fridays, makes her blood boil and in an instant she sees red.

"Yeah? But was she this tight? Did she ride you like this?"

Emma keeps fucking her, a light sheen of sweat starting to gather on her forehead from both the thrusting and from holding up all of Regina's bodyweight.

"She didn't ride me at all. She knew exactly what I wanted."

Regina laughs at that because she knows what Emma is referring to. She knows exactly what Emma wants and what she's asking for.

In the months that they've been having sex, Regina has learned Emma's favorite position is from behind. She loves to see Regina's ass high in the air as she pounds into her, but for her to give in would be to lose this little game they're playing and she refuses to let that happen.

Regina releases her legs from Emma's waist and puts her feet back on the group, nearly collapsing when she realizes her legs are like jelly from being fucked so well.

"Too bad I don't give a damn about what you want," Regina says, surprisingly convincing too.

Emma smirks.

"How can you? You're too busy thinking about how wet you are. About how badly you need this dick."

She grabs Regina's arm and turns her around and bends her over quickly and forcefully. She grabs both hands and holds them behind her back, which is now facing her.

She has a perfect view of her ass from this angle and she runs her hand over the smooth skin before slapping it hard.

"Oh shit, yes."

Regina surges forward from the force and moans loudly.

She expects another slap, but instead she feels Emma rub her dick along her slick folds, preparing to enter her and when she does, she nearly screams. With her legs pressed tightly together like this, she feels everything. Every thrust, every pump, every little vein on the beautiful cock that always fucks
her just right.

Emma slams into her from this angle, still holding onto her hands.

"You like this baby?"

Regina nods, unable to pretend for a moment that this isn't the best sex she's ever had.

"So tell me. Tell me it's mine."

But she shakes her head this time. "You've yet to earn that."

Emma just laughs bitterly and she's shaking her head.

But then Regina feels herself pushed forward so hard she would've fallen had Emma not been holding onto her arms behind her.

"You want it so badly? Don't want anyone else to have it? Then that means you have to take it all. So fucking take it Regina."

She's thrusting harder than she ever has before, her pelvis grinding into Regina's ass as she pounds her pussy from a new angle.

Regina can hardly breathe. This is new for her but she could get used to this brutal, angry pace and for the millionth time, she thanks God that he left her. Because there's no way in the world he would've given it to her like this. But as it turns out, this is exactly what she needs.

"Emma, this feels so fucking good. You're hitting that spot so well."

Emma is breathing heavily and her movements are hard but they seem jerky and just as it seems as though she might be about to cum, she pulls out.

"What the hell Emma?!

She stands upright and attempts to turn around to see why she's stopped but Emma presses into her and walks them into the wall so that her tits and sex are pressed against the wall while Emma's chest and hard dick are pressed into her from behind.

"I'm about to hit it so much better. Then I'm going to pull out and soak this ass with my cum."

The thought makes her almost collapse.

"Assume the position."

Regina's hands immediately fly up to the wall, shoulder width apart, as she has done on a few other occasions when Emma has showed her this position.

But this time, instead of Regina spreading her legs, Emma attempts to enter her with her legs pressed tightly together. It's difficult at first, as it seems that Regina is too tight and Emma is too big. But with enough pressure that rides the border of pain and pleasure perfectly, Emma manages to sink her entire prick into her.

"Holy shit that is so tight."

Emma steps closer so that they are pressed against each other, with Regina sandwiched tightly in between Emma's hard body and the wall.
But there's nowhere in the world I'd rather be, she thinks to herself as Emma pulls out again, before she thrusts back in.

"Yes, yes, FUCK!" Emma isn't pounding her pussy like she usually does. Instead she's thrusting her hips upward and rolling them on each upward thrust and the feeling is like nothing she's ever encountered before.

"Take it babe. Take it all in this delicious pussy."

"You're so big. You fill me up so well."

Emma's hot breath is hitting her neck as she bites her shoulder and one hand falls from the wall to cup the back of Emma's head, forcing her closer.

"Oh my god, I cannot believe how good it feels to be inside of you. We're never using a fucking condom again."

"Fine, fine, just don't stop fucking me."

"Don't worry baby, I'm not stopping until you cum all over me. I want you to soak my cock."

Her finger nails scrape down the wall, trying impossibly to relieve the pressure growing in her stomach.

"Shit shit, I'm so close. Fuck me harder Emma. I need more."

Emma doesn't respond verbally, but she certainly increases the pace of her thrusts and the power behind them. All that can be heard are their collective moans and the sound their bodies colliding feverishly.

"Yes, yes, that's it. Harder. Fuuuck."

Emma raises her eyebrows, not knowing how much harder she can fuck into her without hurting her, but she attempts to give her what she needs.

"So goddamn tight. I love this pussy."

"It's all yours baby."

Finally.

The very thought excites Emma and she knows that she's dangerously close to cumming, but she needs Regina to get there first before she pulls out.

She reaches around and her hand struggles to find space in between the wall and the woman taking her dick so well.

When she manages to squeeze her hand into a small space, she immediately finds her clit and begins rubbing furiously.

"Holy shit, yes, fucking YES! Just like that! I'm-I'm gonna… yes, Jesus YESSSSSS!"

The hold on her dick is so incredibly tight that she can hardly breathe and it's amazing that she manages not to cum as Regina's tight walls clench and tremble around her.

Regina's shaking body continues to squirt all over her cock but she just continues rubbing and
kissing her sweaty back patiently.

Finally, her orgasm begins to subside and Regina wastes no time. She pushes her away with her ass and Emma takes a step back which gives her enough space so that Emma's large member is free from her tight channel but still stands proudly before her. She grabs her and turns her, so that the tables have turned with Emma's front now pressed against the wall.

She runs her hands eagerly up Emma's back, placing rushed kisses along her spine.

"Baby, please. I need it." She begs over and over again and Regina delights in the neediness in her voice.

Finally, when the pleas become too much, she presses her body firmly up against Emma's back and reaches around to firmly grasp her dick, way too big and thick for just one hand. But she jerks her like an expert, fast and hard just the way she knows Emma likes it.

And by the shuttering breaths and head pressed against the wall, almost hanging in shame, she can tell that she is beyond enjoying this.

"Jerk me baby, yeah."

Her voice is breathy and soft, but the words are said with so much force behind them.

"You like my little hand wrapped around this big dick?"

Emma is speechless and only nods against the wall and brings a hand down to rest on top of hers as they jack her off together and the moment is oddly intimate.

They stand there for a minute, just furiously stroking up and down, but as soon Regina leaves her meat to show some attention to her balls, Emma loses it.

She squeezes harshly and Emma's other hand bangs against the wall.

Emma is so desperate to cum and Regina is eagerly to let her so she wastes no more time.

With a sort of grace she didn't know she possessed, she lets go of her, slides down to her knees and slips between Emma's legs. And though Emma is surprised at first, her dick is in her mouth within seconds so that she's fucking Regina's face with one hand in her hair and one hand still clutching at the wall.

"Oh my god! THAT FUCKING MOUTH!"

Regina doesn't have to do any work considering Emma is thrusting her hips at a dangerously fast pace, but even amidst the chaos, she never chokes her with her dick. Though Regina certainly struggles to take her so deep without warning or preparation.

"Gluck gluck gluck," comes from the depths of her throat as Emma continues to fuck her face.

"Shit, shit, here it comes baby."

She pulls back a moment, "Pour it down my throat, I can't wait to taste you!"

As of lately, Regina has found that she loves the taste of Emma's cum. She never thought she would say it, but the salty taste of something that is so uniquely Emma feels like another intimate thing they share when she swallows Emma's essence.
However, Emma has other plans this time because after a few more thrusts she pulls out quickly and jerks her cock so fast that her hand is nothing but a blur to Emma. She waits all of two seconds before Emma lets out an animalistic scream and unloads all over chest, painting her in spurt after spurt of hot white jizz.

"Ah, ah, shiiiiiit. Yes, god!" Emma is staring up at the ceiling, afraid to look down and Regina just smirks knowingly. She had admitted once that seeing Regina covered in her cum was her biggest weakness and always kept her hard.

When Emma's balls finally run out of her seed, she takes a step back and releases a shuddering breath.

"Holy shit," she sighs as she wipes the sweat from her forehead.

"What's wrong? Did she not fuck you that well earlier dear?" Regina's eyes are closed as she leans her head back on the wall but she doesn't miss the sound of absolute wonder in Emma's voice.

"Baby, no one has ever fucked me that good."

Regina can't help the proud smile that brightens the room and so she doesn't even bother to correct Emma's grammar because that's the greatest compliment she's ever been given.

"And I have a feeling," Regina's eyes shoot open at the sound of Emma's voice coming closer and she is correct. Emma is now leaned back against the wall right next to her, smiling over at her tiredly.

"I have a feeling that no one ever will."

The statement is heavy. And when Emma laces their fingers together, she has to feel the change in the air.

But not wanting to spook her, Regina just sits there for a minute just enjoying the feeling on Emma stroking her hand softly.

Or at least it feels like just a minute, until she opens her eyes and finds herself surrounded by darkness.

She is terrified for a moment until she recognizes the feeling of her own bed beneath her. However, there is an unfamiliar weight on her stomach.

She turns her head just slightly to the left to find nothing but a pool of blond hair splayed out on her pillow. Emma is so close to her that she can only assume the feeling around her waist is Emma's arm and the thought is heartwarming.

Emma has never cuddled with her before. But she remembers that before falling asleep downstairs, they had shared a moment. It wasn't much, but it was enough to give her hope that perhaps Emma was interested in something more as well.

She turns to the right to see her alarm.

4:31 a.m.

She has plenty of time to continue to sleep but she can't bring herself to do it. Not yet. She wants to live in this moment just a little longer.

Or maybe forever.
She's not sure when she falls asleep, but she couldn't have been sleeping long because it's a small noise that wakes her.

The first thing she notices before even opening her eyes is that Emma is no longer tucked into her side.

The realization instantly sends a wave of sadness through her.

When she does open her eyes, she looks around the room at where the noise could've come from.

As suspected, Emma is the cause of the noise as she attempts to slip back on her skinny jeans that fit less like fabric and more like a second skin.

She sits up slightly and looks at the clock.

5:10 a.m.

"Where are you going? It's so early." Her voice is tinged with sleep and even in the dark, she can see a hint of a smile on Emma's lips.

"I've gotta get home."

"To what?"

"To my bed," she says like she's stupid.

"You were already in bed."

"Regina, I've told you, I can't sleep in other people's beds. Plus, I have an early morning."

"You were sleeping next to me just fine half an hour ago."

Emma sighs.

"Yes, but now I'm awake and I'd like to go home."

Regina shakes her head, fed up with this. Especially after last night and the moment they shared.

"I hope you realize that when I asked you to stay the night, this isn't what I had in mind. You sneaking out twice a week before the sun rises every morning? This isn't what we agreed to."

"What does it matter anyway Regina?" Her voice is slightly irritated. "The whole point of keeping me here for the night was to keep me out of someone else's bed, which you do. Not that you should concern yourself with what I do after leaving here anyway. But I stay because you asked me to. That's what we agreed to!"

Her words are growing louder and Regina knows it's too early to argue.

"Em, I don't want to fight. I just want you to stay. Just for one night. You can sleep. Or if you're not tired, I can get up and make us some coffee or breakfast. Just tell me what you like!" Regina throws back the sheets and with a newfound energy, she stands on her feet and grabs the robe near the bed.

"Regina, I would like to go home. Just let me. I don't want coffee or anything. I'm fine."

Emma comes closer to kiss her on the cheek before leaving, and maybe it's the lack of sleep or
maybe it's the feeling of making progress last night just to lose it all that makes her reach out for Emma.

"Emma, just…stay. Please."

Emma looks at her like she's physically pain.

"I…I can't Regina."

"Yes, you can! You don't have to drink my coffee or eat my food, we can just talk or cuddle and lay here…I don't care, I just want you to stay."

Emma's eyes immediately close tightly and she brings her hands up to rub them, as if she's tired but when she speaks her voice is laced with nothing but irritation and annoyance.

"Regina do you even hear yourself right now?!"

Regina is a bit taken aback by her anger. Emma has never so much as yelled at someone in her presence before, let alone yelled at her. Sure, she's yelled, but only good things. Never hurtful things like this.

"I don't want to talk to you or fucking cuddle! I'm not your girlfriend!"

Regina swallows thickly.

"I know you're not my girlfriend Emma. You've made that abundantly clear but why not just talk for a bit? I've known you for almost half a year and I know nothing about you!" She questions lowly. "What, I'm good enough to fuck but not good enough to hold a conversation with?"

"Because Regina, you're great and when we do talk, it's fine but that's not what this is! Please don't let these dinners and shit confuse you. Twice a week, I come over and we fuck. And it's good. And I'm not afraid to admit it's some of the best pussy I've had like ever, but that's all this is."

"But what's stopping it from being more? I mean, I know you like me! I can tell!"

She tries to sound sure of what she's saying and she thinks that maybe she's successful in confidently accusing Emma of having at least some feelings for her. But Emma rolls her eyes and her heart sinks even further.

"Regina, I love fucking you, seriously I do. But that's it. And the thing stopping it from becoming more is the fact that I don't want more. I…" her voice becomes gentler. Sad even. "I thought you understood that."

Emma hands come up to touch her but Regina coils away quickly.

"Yeah, no of course. I get it. You fuck me because I'm around and stupid enough to let you and it means nothing. I'm reading you loud and clear."

"What? No, that's not what I'm saying. I come over here because I like you, we have great chemistry! But I don't expect anything more than this from you. And I need to know you don't either."

"Or what?" Regina asks fearfully, already knowing what's to come.

"Or else… we should stop this." To Emma's credit, there is so much sadness in her voice at the thought and that makes Regina smile on the inside.
"I don't want to stop."

"But I don't want you falling in love with me and I think we both know that's where this is headed," Emma's voice and face are strong and stoic but when Regina looks closely in the dim light of the moon seeping through the window, she can see that there is something more. There is that look again. As if Emma wants to say more but just…can't or won't.

Regina leaves the silence for her to fill with all of her unspoken words but Emma still says nothing.

She shakes her head.

"You're probably right. I would've fallen for you and you would've probably broken my heart. And so this way, we're saving each other the trouble and ending things amicably."

Emma nods gently and after clearly warring with herself, she takes a step back.

"Yeah, exactly."

She waits. Gives her one more chance. One last chance to say something, absolutely anything. She could work with anything as long as they were still talking, but the moment Emma went silence, it confirmed all of Regina's worst fears.

She didn't care.

Despite the way she acted, she clearly didn't feel the same way about Regina.

And though she wants to be upset about it, she can't be. She knew from the very start that Emma didn't want a relationship. It was her fault for thinking she could change someone who clearly didn't want to change.

"I'm going to go," Emma sounds so awkward and uncomfortable and it's crazy to think that that's what Regina's feelings did to her.

She laughs sardonically and shakes her head. "Yeah, I'll let you get back to that."

Emma nods and heads towards the door. And just before she's out of ear shot, Regina does the hard, but necessarily thing.

"And Emma? Take me out of the weekly rotation and lose my number."

She lets her go.
Chapter 9

No warnings for this chapter. However, beware of shifting POVs.

That night, or morning rather, she cried herself back to sleep. She wasn't even sure what she was upset about. It's not like she could honestly say this had come out of the blue. She knew how this was going to end. And even if she hadn't, Kat had told her that Emma was going to end up disappointing her.

And she had been right. But like any good friend, when she had come over that Saturday with three bottles of wine and ice cream, she hadn't thrown out any "I told you so's". She had hugged Regina and apologized again and again. She had even asked if Regina wanted her to come up with a plan to get her back. But she knew there was no point in that.

Emma was long gone.

It had been three weeks. And in that time, she had called.

Once. And only once.

But still, it was more than what Regina had been expecting.

She had left a voicemail explaining that she was sorry for being so harsh with her. But it wasn't what Regina wanted.

Not even close, really.

She wanted Emma to say more. She wanted her to admit to having feelings. She wanted her to want to more.

But the 13 second voicemail didn't have any of that.

Regina. It's me. I just called to say sorry for the other night. I was a complete dick to you. And that's...that's not how I want you to think of me. So...yeah.

Upon hearing it, she thought of deleting it. But realized that it was the only reminder of Emma she would ever have.

That sent her into a fit of tears and she left work early for the weekend.

It's been three weeks. And if she's being 100%, completely honest, it's been a tough three weeks.

It's not like she was in love. It's not like she felt anything towards Regina really, but the lack of stellar sex combined with the constant reminder of how things ended has been driving her insane. She hates that Regina probably hates her now. She hates that her Wednesdays and Fridays have opened back up. She hates that she cares about any of that stuff at all.

She rubs her face in aggravation.

She's been so unlike herself these last few weeks, refusing to go out and opting instead to stay in and just play Halo or watch movies. But Ruby, her best friend of six years, had raised an excellent
question.

Why? Why not go out? Why not enjoy all of the beautiful women and the freedom to do whatever she wanted?

In her entire life, no one had ever expected as much from her as Regina. No one had asked for days and nights and actual real dates with other couples. No one had ever asked her for anything. Because they didn't want anything more and so Emma didn't either.

*Or so I thought*, she sighs loudly.

But then Regina had asked for a little more, bit by bit. Being with Regina had been like giving a mouse a cookie. It seemed like she was always asking for something else. But unlike the little boy from the silly story, she didn't mind the asking. In fact, she remembers encouraging it. *Telling* Regina to ask her for things. And she had been willing, if not downright eager to comply.

Despite her initial reservations, she liked hanging out with Regina’s friends. She liked blending in and doing normal couple things.

And she's not afraid to admit that she'd like to do those things with her more often. The problem was that she didn't want to be tied down and the likelihood that Regina would be okay with her dating her and still sleeping around seemed damn near impossible.

Her thoughts are interrupted by the sound of the door opening downstairs.

She sighs loudly, before pausing the game and getting up from the couch.

She heads down the stairs, nearly tripping in her socks, to see who it is.

"Oh my god, you're still in your underwear."

She rolls her eyes.

"No, I was just headed to the gym. I was about to get dressed."

"Em, I follow you on Instagram. I saw your daily gym post at 6:30 this morning."

*Fuck. That's right.*

"Yeah, well, two-a-days are how the pros do it."

It sounds stupid coming from the laziest person on the planet. She knows it and apparently Ruby does too. But she at least has the consideration to look sympathetic.

"Look, Em. You've gotta get out of the house." Emma opens her mouth to protest, but is immediately cut off. "And not just to the gym or Starbucks and Chipotle. I mean, you've gotta do something productive."

"You mean like go to bars with you?"

"Exactly! Which is exactly why I'm here! I'm dragging you out tonight."

"Rubes, I don't wanna go out."

"Yeah, which is why you're going."
She groans and throws herself down on a stool at the breakfast bar.

Ruby pulls out a beer and opens it with a bottle opener on her keys and takes a long swig, staring at Emma the whole time.

She falters under her gaze and wishes she had her phone to distract her from the awkward silence.

"What?" She finally cracks.

"What what?"

"Why are you staring at me?"

Ruby rolls her eyes. "Because I don't understand why you don't just call her."

"I did."

It's Emma's turn to roll her eyes.

Ruby had been in the car that afternoon when Emma had worked up the courage. Of course, she had commented on the cowardice of calling when she knew Regina was at work and couldn't answer. And she had mocked Emma for a week straight about the shitty voicemail.

"I called. Like you suggested. She didn't answer."

"You didn't want her to anyway."

There's no arguing that.

"Well, she could've called back but she didn't."

"And said what? Just kidding, I'm not in love after all and promise that I never will be."

Emma sighs. "She's not in love with me."

Ruby laughs. "Don't sound so upset, stud."

She sighs again. She's in no mood for this. "Whatever. I'll go out with you tonight. But I don't wanna make headlines. I just want it to be a chill night, okay?"

"Ugh, fine. You don't want to have any fun at all. Got it."

"Thank you." Emma stands and prepares to go get dressed. "I just want a nice boring night out."

For a while, she gets her wish. Her night is almost so safe and boring that Ruby considers leaving before 11. But Emma's having…fun?

_Is that the right word? I guess I'm not completely miserable._

She'd had a few drinks, to loosen her up, but she isn't looking to get fucked up. Tomorrow is Sunday and she has shit to do.

She dances a little with Ruby and a few other random girls but she isn't trying to take anyone home or anything.

That is until she sees one woman across the dance floor. She's sitting at a table with a few people and
even with her back to her, she knows that frame. She's had her hands on it and memorized it so well
that she could recognize her across Time Square, blindfolded.

Her heart skips a beat.

*Regina.*

She looks like an idiot. Standing in the middle of the club, surrounded by sweaty dancing bodies,
completely motionless.

But she isn't thinking about that because suddenly she's hit with two conflicting emotions. She wants
to say 'fuck her' and find a random girl to spend the night with. But…even more than that, she wants
to go over and say 'hi'…or something.

*Just to see how she's doing.*

She shakes her head. That's a dumb thing to wonder. Of course Regina is doing well. She was doing
well before meeting Emma and she would be fine after her.

And thinking that Regina was fine without her pulled at a piece of her heart. But nothing was worse
than seeing it. Than seeing him place his arm around her. Than seeing her lean in to his touch and
laugh at what she's sure are stupid ass jokes.

He's an older guy, with a receding hairline, but she guesses that if she were into nerdy Nasa looking
douche bags, he'd be cute.

She rolls her eyes and makes her way to the bar. The sight of Regina with a downgrade like him
makes her want something stronger in her system.

"Both of those for you or would you mind sharing?"

She looks over to her right to find a gorgeous brunette.

That's why she loves this club. It's known to attract gorgeous lesbians and they are not shy about
approaching her, making her job that much easier.

"I was just thinking I would have to find a beautiful woman to share this with me. Looks like she
found me." She responds smoothly, scooting the small glass over to her.

"Need a chaser?" Emma asks politely, but the girl throws back her head in laughter.

"I'm fine. Unless, of course…you need one?" She smirks at Emma, challenging her.

Emma smiles slowly. "I can take it, sweetheart. Don't worry."

Emma lifts her glass and the woman does the same.

"To a night of sex that's hotter than the Sarah in summer?"

Emma's eyes widen in surprise, not expecting such a blunt toast, but she clinks glasses with her
anyway and they both tip their heads back, swallowing the liquid in one go.

The burn warms Emma from her lips all the way to her stomach and the familiar feeling is a welcome
change from the sadness she's been feeling the last few weeks.
Out of curiosity, she subtly looks over towards Regina and finds her still sat next to baldy. Except now he's leaned over whispering in her ear. And she can't see Regina's face. She can't tell if she's enjoying his attention.

She can only remember being bent over Regina's back. She remembers her body draped over Regina's as she whispered the dirtiest shit in her ear. She remembers her shy smile that over the months began to dissipate into confidence and radiance. She remembers the look of pleasure and ecstasy on her face when Emma would whisper in her ear and she has to look away.

When she turns back to the bar, she sees the new girl in front of her, staring off in the same direction she was just looking in.

"Someone you know?"

Emma looks over again quickly and shrugs.

"No, not really."

And it's true. She doesn't really know Regina. She doesn't know her favorite food or favorite color or what she does in her spare time and she doesn't really care either.

But she knows things that seem more intimate than that.

She knows her face when she orgasms. She knows the look in her eye that clearly tells Emma she is in the mood. She knows when to go slow and when to speed up and when to touch her slowly and when to be rough. She knows her in a way most people never would and yet somehow Regina wanted more? What more was there?

She sighs and picks up her other drink.

"For someone you don't know, you sure seem hung up."

Emma shakes her head. "No no, I'm just surprised to see her. She never used to go out."

The woman nods slowly. "Maybe this is her moving on. Aaaand maybe you should do the same."

She steps closer into Emma's personal space and places both her hands on her hips.

"Yeah, I just need to get my mind off of it."

"Perhaps I could be of service?"

Her voice is barely louder than a whisper but between the touching and body language, she hears her clearly.

"I think you could."

"Perhaps we should go then?"

Emma nods and downs the rest of her alcohol.

"Your place?"

"Sure." The girl shrugs. "And just out of curiosity, what name should I scream out when you make me cum?" She smiles widely, a mischievous glint in her eye.
"I think you know very well what my name is."

The brunette smirks and winks. "Okay then Miss Swan, let's get out of here."

She grabs her hand and immediately, Emma wants to pull away. The hand is small and soft but it's… it's not hers.

And that's how the night progresses.

She blows her (barely) and Emma thinks of how it's nothing like Regina's warm mouth.

She fucks her from behind and manages to pretend for a few minutes that it's not some random girl she picked up at a bar, but in fact, Regina Mills.

She rudely leaves when it's all over at the end of the night and never once gets her name. And she couldn't care less because all she can think of is how wrong all of that felt.

She spends the next day alternating between lying in bed and emptying the contents of her stomach. And when Ruby drops by to check on her, she tells the story of how she drank too much.

But they both know that's a fucking lie.

These are just the side effects of living without Regina.

A month and half later and she doesn't cry about it anymore.

But that doesn't mean she doesn't think about it.

About her.

She thinks about her often. Nightly, in fact.

When she's lying in bed alone, she thinks of how satisfied Emma always left her.

And when she's not lying in bed alone, she's wishing she was because she'd rather be by herself than with anyone that isn't Emma.

That had happened only once.

She had gone out, per Kathryn's request. And because she hadn't hated her date, she invited him in at the end of the evening and they had sex.

And immediately after, when he tried to wrap his large mannish arms around her (something she used to find comforting), she explained that she had an early morning the next day.

There was an awkward silence, until he finally took the hint and climbed from the bed to find his clothes.

And once he had left, she spent the night washing her sheets and scrubbing his touch away in a scolding shower.

Yeah, maybe Emma didn't want her but unfortunately, she wanted Emma.

And she was quickly realizing that as awful as Emma could be, there was no replacing her.

And so the lamb fell in love with the lion.
She wonders if the phrase works the other way around and is so caught up in her thoughts that she fails to notice the yellow mustang parked outside of her house.

And when she hears that voice calling her name, she ignores it.

She feels absolutely awful and that's why she's off today. And so she knows for a fact that she must be hallucinating. Because there's no way that Emma is anywhere near her house at 11 in the morning on a weekday.

But as she slips her key in the lock, she hears it again.

And even though it's just wishful thinking and she knows it's going to hurt so much more to turn around and see nothing, she can't help herself.

She turns and yelps in surprise when she sees Emma Swan standing in front of her, closer than she expected. Her first instinct is to reach out and touch her but her aching limbs remain at her sides, unable to move for some reason.

She looks up into those damn eyes and sees something in them she doesn't recognize.

It almost looks like concern, but her vision is a little blurry and so she can't be sure.

In fact, her legs feel weak as well, and the last thing she sees before her eyes shut is Emma Swan reaching out for her.

*My savior,* being her last coherent thought.
Chapter 10

She has no clue what she's doing here.

*That's a lie.*

Okay, well, she has no clue why she's been here so long.

*Another lie.*

She sighs. She knows exactly why she's here and exactly why she stayed.

Two days ago, she had heard in passing from her little brother that his teacher, Ms. Mills, had left early because she wasn't feeling well.

Emma had acknowledged it in her subconscious but hadn't started to worry until she had dropped him off at school today to find that yet again, he had a substitute teacher.

And she couldn't help but wonder…and worry about Regina. No, she may not be in love. She may not be looking for anything too serious. But she still has a heart.

*And it has quite the soft spot for you, Ms. Mills.*

She looks down at Regina sleeping peacefully.

Initially, she had been terrified when Regina had passed out, falling almost perfectly into her arms.

She had looked around, lost for a moment, with a limp Regina slumped against her before finally deciding to carry her in. She hoped against hope that no one had seen that series of events, only imagining how sketchy it looked.

She had carried Regina up the stairs and placed her in bed before calling her mother in a frenzy.

After describing all apparent symptoms, Ingrid had explained that it sounded like an untreated flu.

The flood of relief that swam through her was impossible to ignore.

Her mother had instructed her to pump Regina full of cold & flu medicine and fluids and let her rest until she could see a doctor.

Two hours ago, that seemed like easy advice to follow. She had found some flu medicine in the very bag that Regina was holding but the longer she sleeps, the more concerned Emma becomes.

**Emma: She's still asleep. Is that normal? Is she supposed to sleep this long?**

Her mother responds almost immediately, as she always does.

**Mom: Sweetheart, it's fine. In fact, it's great that she's sleeping so soundly. Would you rather she have trouble getting rest?**

**Emma: Okay. I guess that's fair.**

**Mom: The only thing you need to worry about is chills or a fever. Are either of those present?**
She's laying on her stomach watching Regina's chest move as she breathes slowly. She leans forward to feel her forehead. It's a little warm but certainly not a fever.

**Emma: No chills I don't think. And definitely no fever.**

**Mom: That's perfect. Just keep doing what you're doing and call if you need anything.**

Emma nods firmly, feeling better after talking to her mother.

She sets her phone back on the nightstand and lays back down, facing Regina's sleeping frame.

She reaches out tentatively to remove a strand of lose hair from her face and as Regina sighs and moves into her touch, she feels like she's discovering her for the very first time.

"You are so beautiful, Regina Mills."

She gets no response. Not that she expected or even wanted one.

"I probably should've told you more. Complimented you more. Because you…" She pauses to ask herself what she doing.

Talking to a girl that's practically unconscious and incredibly ill? Complimenting her and flirting with said girl?

In the hopes of accomplishing what exactly?

"She can't hear you Emma," she berates herself quietly as she rolls onto her back and stares at the ceiling.

But at least Emma could get these thoughts out of her head. The things she's thought about Regina since day one that she's always wanted to tell her. But she knew that saying those things would confuse her. Sometimes it was so glaringly obvious that Regina wanted more and because she hadn't wanted to hurt her or lead her on, she had kept all sorts of things to herself.

But the truth was,

"I find you so attractive. And not even in that, your body is gorgeous, you look good naked sort of way…," she turns briefly to make sure that Regina is still fast asleep first. "I think you're the prettiest when you have clothes on. And not even fancy, teacher clothes. Just like some sweats or something. You are so cute in sweats."

She laughs at herself involuntarily.

The first time she had ever seen Regina is something so casual, she had wanted so badly to pull her into her arms and tell her how adorable she looked.

But she had refrained. She had recognized what that might look like to Regina, so she held that desire back.

"But sometimes, all I want to do is hug you. You look so huggable. Is that a word?" She laughs to herself.

"That's another thing I like. You're so smart. You always know what's a word. And it's like you know all these random facts—well, I guess they're really not random. They're things everyone with a degree probably knows but still…you know so much about so much. Sometimes, August will ask
me something and I swear I almost call you to get the answer."

She chuckles, remembering all the times he'd stump her (which wasn't hard to do) and she had considered calling Regina. "But...I didn't want to call on a Monday or something. I thought that'd be weird since we only..." she lets herself trail off.

Only what? Only fucked twice a week? Only went on group dates pretending to be a couple?

She sighs.

She shouldn't be doing this, emotionally unloading onto a sleeping Regina. It isn't fair to her. It wasn't fair to hug her or compliment her then and it isn't fair now to be so much of a coward that the only time she can admit to these things is if Regina can't hear her or respond.

But what is Emma Swan if not a coward?

She sighs again and decides to stop talking. She isn't doing anyone any favors by continuing on this mini rant.

She closes her eyes and drifts off next to Regina.

She is awoken by the sound of retching, coming from the bathroom she determines. She quickly gets up to inspect and what she finds is quite possibly the saddest sight she's ever seen, next to August being sick, of course.

Regina is slumped onto the toilet, looking pale and sweaty and she feels so bad for the woman. She doesn't get sick these days. Her mom is a firm believer in preventative care. But when she was younger, before she was adopted, she had gotten sick often from eating from the trash or sleeping on the ground. And she remembers clearly wishing so badly that someone would take care of her. Rub her back and tell her everything was going to be okay, just like moms and dads did in the movies she would sneak into.

So even though Regina's hair and shirt is splattered with vomit and the thought of touching it kind of repulses her, she does what she wishes someone had been there to do for her. She leans down anyway and pulls the tangled, sweaty hair from her face. Using the hair tie on her wrist, she quickly puts Regina's hair in a ponytail until she can make sure she's actually done emptying the contents of her stomach.

Regina doesn't acknowledge her as she crouches down next to her and tentatively rubs her back.

"It's okay. Let it all out."

As if waiting for the command, she lurches forward again and vomits into the toilet, all while Emma is rubbing her back and whispering soothingly to her. She's not sure if it's helping or even if the motion is wanted, but she is desperate to help and this is the only way she knows how right now.

She can only hope that it's enough.

Finally, after about an hour, Regina nods in the affirmative that she is finished. She attempts to stand, but nearly falls over and Emma almost has a heart attack.

"Here, let me help you." She stands with her and helps her rinse her mouth before sitting her back
down on the toilet.

"Alright, let me get this off of you."

She goes to lift Regina's dirty shirt, but her hands are quickly pushed away.

"I don wanna have sex, Emma."

Emma's eyebrows raise in surprise. "I-I'm not trying to have sex with you Regina. I'm just trying to take off this dirty shirt and get you a clean one. Come on, arms up for me."

She reaches again for the hem of the shirt and meets resistance again when Regina's open palm hits her square in the chest in an attempt to push her away.

"You are tryna have the sex with me. You wan me naked. It's all you ever wan."

Regina is sick and weak so the hit to the chest doesn't hurt. But the words themselves? Knowing that's what Regina thinks about her? That causes something inside of her to break.

She stands there for a minute, at a lost. She's sure it's the medicine talking.

Or at least I hope so.

She rubs her hands across her face trying to figure out a different plan since Regina is unwilling to cooperate.

She considers for a brief moment just saying 'fuck it' and leaving her in the shirt, but she knows that when Regina finally returns to her normal self, she will be furious to find out that Emma let her sleep in bed with vomit on her shirt.

She looks down to find Regina's eyes closed. She could really quickly just yank the shirt off and fight her until it's done.

Eh, that feels a little rape-y.

She finally makes an executive decision and heads downstairs to the kitchen. She finds what she's looking for then returns to find that Regina is drifting in and out of sleep.

Swiftly, she uses the newly acquired scissors to cut the shirt from bottom to top, trying to miss any of the food chunks. Once she's done, she pulls the fabric gently off of Regina's shoulders, met with pretty much no trouble.

Now she feels bad for cutting it, but she just shrugs.

What's done is done, she figures as she picks up the shirt with only her thumb and pointer finger and drops it into the bathroom trashcan.

She removes Regina's yoga pants with minimal effort but when she tries to take off her bra and underwear, Regina awakens just in time to put up another fight.

"Stop it," she says it so half-heartedly, but Emma still feels weird about pressing forward.

She pauses her motions and crouches down to explain.

"Gina, I have to take these off so you can-" But Regina will hear none of it.
"I said stop! I don wan you here!" Her eyes are closed and her head is lolling from side to side as she speaks and Emma's almost positive she has no clue what she's saying, but it breaks her heart nonetheless.

The feeling of Regina not wanting her to stay, not wanting her around, makes her feel like shit. She had grown so accustomed to Regina always enjoying her company, always craving it, that now she feels incomplete without that desire from her.

It crosses her mind that that makes her a selfish, shitty person but she shakes her self-deprecation away for the moment.

She looks up at Regina and sighs. She lifts her head and carefully pushes some hair back from her face. She shakes her head, because she knows that despite Regina's apparent desire to be left alone, she cannot leave her like this.

"Regina, look at me."

Her head tilts again, but she doesn't respond. She seriously is starting to wonder what this medicine has in it.

"Baby, look at me."

That seems to get her attention, at least a bit. She slowly opens her eyes and Emma takes advantage of the moment.

"Baby, listen, I have to clean you up. You will feel so much better after you take a warm shower and get in some clean clothes. Okay?"

Regina's eyes droop again.

"Hey, hey, try to stay awake for me, okay?" But it's too late. "Regina?" It becomes pretty obvious that Regina has fallen back asleep and she has no clue where to go from here.

Truthfully, Regina does need a shower and probably would feel better after. But how in the hell is she supposed to get a mostly unconscious woman into the shower, hold her up, wash her hair, and not slip and kill either of them in the process?

The simple truth is that she can't. So as much as she hates it, she's going to have to let Regina sleep this off and try again a little later.

She makes sure that Regina is situated on the toilet and then cautiously lets her go to see if she can go wrangle up some towels or baby wipes or something.

She checks under the sink and in the linen closet and eventually finds a few helpful items.

Returning with the towels, she runs them under warm water and then washes Regina's face, chest, and arms gently. She groans lightly but makes no other noise and Emma works mostly uninterrupted. She uses a new towel to run through her matted hair to clean it up a bit and then rubs the hand sanitizer onto Regina's hands and arms, hoping to minimize the spread of germs until she can get her into the shower.

It's not great and she will definitely need to change the sheets afterwards, but it will do for now.

_Hell, Regina would probably be impressed._
Once done, Emma easily scoops her up bridal style, which causes Regina to wake up for a few seconds and her arms loosely wrap around her neck for support and Emma can't help but stare at her as she walks them back to the bed.

Even when sick and covered in a light layer of sweat, she's still the most beautiful girl Emma's ever seen.

She places her gently down on the bed, or at least tries to, but Regina's grip suddenly tightens around her neck.

"Noooo," she groans out. "Don wanna you to go."

It's the first positive thing that Regina's said to her since she's arrived and Emma smiles involuntarily at that. Not only is delirious Regina adorable, but hearing Regina say that she wants her there gets Emma's pulse racing, even though she's well aware that it shouldn't.

"I'm not going anywhere babe, I just need to get you a fresh shirt."

Regina doesn't respond so she tries again to put her down. This time, her grip slackens and Emma drops her gracefully onto the bed, leaning her against the headboard, maneuvering her legs and placing the sheets over her waist.

After that small feat is taken care of, she heads to the dresser to get her a clean new shirt.

She's not exactly sure what Regina likes to sleep in, since the only times they've slept in the same bed, Regina has been naked but she finally settles on a long sleeve thermal and with some difficulty she gets it on her body, with absolutely no help from Regina as her heavy, limp limbs flail around.

Once redressed, she maneuvers Regina's body so that she's laying down in the bed again, with the sheets covering her entire body.

She doesn't awaken at all and Emma figures that's probably a good thing. Like her mother said, good rest is preferred.

She stands there for an extra minute or two, making sure that Regina's comfortable before she sighs and heads back to the bathroom to take care of that shit show.

It still smells disgusting and she almost vomits herself. She turns on the ventilator and uses the Clorox wipes from under the sink to wipe down every surface in the bathroom that Regina may have touched. After she feels satisfied that the disinfectant has served its purpose, she heads back to the bedroom and looks around.

Regina's now laying on her side with her mouth slightly ajar, snoring lightly.

"So fucking cute," she whispers to no one.

She checks her watch to find that it's about time for another dose of medicine.

She almost thinks better of it because Regina seems so out of it, but she figures the doctor knows more than she does about this type of stuff so she gets the liquid sludge and pours it into the small cup before heading to Regina's side of the bed. She lifts her up and sits behind her, supporting her weight then tips Regina's head back just so and opens her mouth.

Please don't vomit on me. Please don't vomit on me.

She repeats it over and over to herself as she pours the medicine into her mouth, hoping that Regina's
involuntarily bodily reflexes will just take over. Thankfully, they do and she administers the medicine for a second time without incident.

She contemplates what she should do now.

Hands on her hips, she looks around the room.

She's already picked up the dirty clothes. She's already tidied up the few things out of place. At this point, there's nothing else for her to do so she crawls back into the bed gently, not wanting to disturb the sleeping brunette.

As if she'd wake up anyway, Emma snorts to herself. Regina's snoring is slightly louder, but not obnoxious.

She reaches for the remote on her side of the bed and turns on the t.v., putting the volume on the lowest possible level while still being able to hear.

She's never watched t.v. at Regina's house. She's never really done anything at Regina's other than fuck, sleep, and go to the bathroom. She once grabbed a granola bar on the way out the door but that was about the extent of it. So today had been one of many firsts for her. She's only been here about 6 hours but that is rapidly approaching a record.

She turns back to check on Regina and finds her snuggled up into the pillows, even when sick looking beyond words beautiful.

She shakes her head.

"It shouldn't be fair to look that good." Emma turns on the Netflix and puts on a random movie and divides her attention between that, her phone, and Regina for about an hour until she, too, falls asleep.

The first thing she feels when she emerges from her sleep is a feather touching her skin.

It's running back and forth on her cheek and she wants to swat at it but then it is accompanied by whispering and she knows that voice and loves it and can't bring herself to stop what is happening. Especially when she awakens enough to know that the feather is actually a hand and she can make out the words being whispered so closely that the air is hitting her cheek.

"You are just a piece of art."

Emma smiles internally. Regina's voice is thick with sleep and something else she can't make out.

"Of course everyone wants to buy you and hang you up in their bedrooms."

There it is. She's figured out what that 'something else' is. Regina's voice is tinged with deliriousness, evident even more by the stream of consciousness thoughts that flow from her mouth. Whether the deliriousness stems from her being tired or the medication, she can't say. But it's actually adorable.

"I would love to hang you up too, you know, but I don't want to share a work of art. I want to be the owner. Not like I want to own you though, I just want…to have you. To know you."

It's so hard to keep her eyes closed and her mouth shut, but she manages and she's rewarded when Regina tucks her head into her neck so that Emma has a face full of...

Her eyes shoot open.
Regina's hair lacks its usual apple scent. And, in fact, the hair in her face smells like puke and she gags instantly.

She sits up abruptly and scares Regina, who yelps and scoots away from her.

"I-" she reaches out to put a hand on Regina's leg. "I'm sorry! I didn't mean to scare you, I…"

"It's okay, are you okay?" Regina asks cautiously.

Emma places a hand over her rapidly beating heart and nods. "Yeah yeah, I'm totally fine. I just wasn't…expecting anyone to be in bed with me." She lies easily.

Regina nods understandingly, "Sorry…again."

Emma chuckles a little and shakes her head. "It's fine. Not your fault."

The silence extends for longer than she would like but she also doesn't know how to politely say, "You smell like old vomit so let's get you in the shower."

She finally settles on something simple. "I'm feeling kind of grimy. Wanna take a shower with me?"

Regina's eyebrows raise instantly.

"Not for sex or anything!" Emma feels the need to clarify, especially after the earlier shirt confusion. "I just want to feel clean again and I thought maybe you would too?"

She doesn't want to sound pushy or forceful but she wants to make this shower sound as enticing as possible.

After a long, semi-awkward silence, Regina nods. "Yeah, you're probably right. I would love to shower."

There's a brief pause before she comes back once more with, "with you. I would love to shower with…with you."

Regina is awkward and cute and she smiles back at her, getting weirdly excited for this shower.

She's showered with women before, obviously, but it was 100% sexual. This wasn't. And the idea of yet another first with Regina makes her skin tingle with nervous anticipation.

"Right…okay," she pulls the sheets off of her, "I'm going to go get the water running and warm."

She hears Regina mumble a thanks before falling back onto the bed. She takes her time getting the water ready and stripping naked before calling out to Regina that everything is ready. When she doesn't get a reply, she worries that Regina has fallen asleep on her again.

She peaks her head out the door, but doesn't find her in bed at all. Instead, she's leaned against the wall with her eyes closed.

"You okay Gina?" She opens the door a little more and walks out naked as the day she was born.

Regina's surprise when she discovers that fact is evident, as her skin turns her a shade of pink Emma has never seen before.

"Uh…yes, I'm sorry. I just…I tried taking a few steps but I began to feel a little woozy."
Emma steps closer, placing her hand around her waist. "Here, we'll walk together."

Regina wraps an arm around her as well as they slowly walk towards the bath.

"Hey, sit here for a sec. And go ahead and take everything off."

Regina follows the instructions well and she leans over the shower to turn it off.

"What are you doing?"

Emma looks back at her briefly before turning the water back on.

"Nothing, I just don't want you to have to stand. So I'm going to run you a bath instead."

"Oh, okay." The disappointment in Regina's voice is hard to miss.

"I can still stay, if you want."

Emma smirks to herself and she pours her fancy bubble bath soap into the tub, watching bubbles form instantaneously.

"Well...you are already naked..."

Emma laughs at the horrible logic, as if it's impossible to put her clothes back on.

"That's true. But no funny business, alright missy?" She looks back to see her smirking.

"We'll see Miss Swan. We'll see."

Emma feels her dick stir and she reminds herself that no matter what she says, Regina is too sick to have sex.

Aaaand also, we said we weren't doing that anymore.

That one, she had forgotten about.

She sighs and swishes the water around with her hand to test the temperature.

"It's ready." She stands to find Regina standing as well.

"Uh, here, I'll get in first if you want? Or did you...?"

"Yeah, that's fine."

The exchange is so awkward and so unlike the them that she's used to.

In the past few months, they had fallen into an effortless rhythm. They had overcome any awkwardness and had created quite a sex routine of sorts.

But this? This is so new, to not just them, but also to Emma.

As she slips into the perfectly warm water, she tries to think of the last time she even took a bath. Surely, it must have been in her teens.

But when Regina nervously slips in in front of her and leans back into her tentatively, she feels all of that nervousness and tension float away.
It may be her first time taking a bath with Regina, but she knows this body well. She probably shouldn’t but she wraps her arms around her waist securely and feels Regina exhales and lean further into her.

They sit for a moment, just enjoying the closeness. It's been over two months since they've been this intimate and Emma suddenly feels her heart fill up again.

*Why does this feel so damn good?*

She shakes her head in disbelief and refocuses on the moment in front of her, choosing to enjoy it rather than overanalyze it.

"We should wash your hair, baby."

Regina puts her hands up to feel it.

"Oh gosh. Is it awful?"

She laughs. "Define awful?"

"Geez! It's that bad?"

"Well, I tried to clean it earlier, and I did okay, but I mean…trust me, we should wash it."

Regina sighs in exasperation, but stands. She retrieves the removable shower head and shampoo from the top shelf and resumes her spot.

"May I?" she asks gently.

Regina turns to look at her and their eye contact makes Emma's heart flutter.

Regina says nothing but hands her the showerhead and turns back around.

She turns on the water and Emma uses extra care when running the water through her hair.

"Is that too hot?"

"It's perfect," Regina moans out, tilting her head back.

They sit in silence as Emma gently rinses her hair until Regina finally speaks.

"Why did you come here?"

"Because I missed you," is her immediate reply and she feels like she should be embarrassed or something but there's none of that.

Because what's so shameful about the truth? She has missed Regina. Like crazy actually.

"You have?" Regina whispers.

"Yeah, like fucking crazy."

She runs her fingers through her hair, massaging Regina's scalp. She sighs at the soothing motion and that sound, in turn, soothes Emma as well.

"I…I'm happy that you're here, believe me…but nothing has changed. I still want more."
Regina sounds so upset about that fact that Emma feels instantly guilty.

"I'm sorry about before. Really."

Regina nods but says nothing.

*Because that's not what she wants to hear you fucking idiot.*

She sighs and tries again.

"Look…to be honest, I don't know what I'm doing here…what all of this is supposed to change or whatever, but I know that I fucked six other girls in the time that we've been apart and it was…unsatisfying to say the least."

Emma nods proudly, feeling like she's just bared her soul but the tension emanating from Regina tells her that her revelation isn't exactly what she was hoping for.

"I meant that as like…a compliment."

Regina snorts. "It's a compliment that while I was here, missing you, you were having sex with tons of other women?"

"It wasn't tons," she defends.

"But it was none or one! It took six women to realize…what exactly? That I am exceptionally good in bed? *That's* why you came here?"

"No no, you're not understanding me." Emma's voice begins to raise and Regina leans forward, away from her.

"Well, you're not being clear. I don't get it Emma."

"I'm just…trying to say like…yeah I fucked those girls but it wasn't what I wanted."

"Are you suggesting that someone *forced* you?"

"NO! I mean like…" she struggles for words and briefly considers how awkward this fight is, as it takes place in a bathtub with Regina straining to face her.

"I just mean that I thought I wanted to fuck other women. I wanted to be able to do what I want, without being tied down. But I realized that I don't want that if it means I can't have you too. I…I really enjoy sex with you. But also doing all the other stuff wasn't so bad either. But I'm going to be 100% honest with you, I don't know if I could just do that all the time. I don't know if I could just be with you and not think about other women. That's…just not my style."

Regina takes a small breath and then turns around, her back to Emma once more.

After the silence becomes crippling, she speaks again. "Tell me what you're thinking?"

Her voice is soft and light and doesn't portray any of the agony that she feels.

"I…I don't know what to think. On the one hand, you're saying exactly what I want to hear. I love that you love going to dinner and movies with my friends, but on the other hand, that doesn't mean you like spending time with *just me*. You've never done that before. And even if you did enjoy just being with me, you wouldn't *just* be with me at all. You'd want to be with other people at the same time?"
"Well…yes and no. I mean, it's not like I would be going out every night with a different girl. Typically in the past, when I was seeing someone seriously, we'd both sleep with other people but we wouldn't do any of the other stuff with strangers. That's what makes this different from anything I may be doing with someone else."

"So you sleep with me and go to dinner with me and you'd considered that dating…and, and still would sleep with other women?"

Emma reaches out and tentatively takes the shampoo from Regina's hands, lathering up her own before rubbing it into her wet hair.

"Look, I don't want you to dwell on that. Right now, I don't even have a desire to see anyone else. I just think that in order for this to seriously work, or even stand a chance, I have to know that I'm not stuck. I-I hate that feeling. Like this is the only option."

Regina leans back into her a little more, placing her hands on either of Emma's thighs and drawing small patterns.

"So having the title of an open relationship is just so you don't feel trapped with me? But it doesn't mean that you will be with other people?"

"Exactly," she leans down to kiss Regina on the neck sweetly. "I can't predict the future, I don't know who's going to come into my life. But I do know that right now I'm just interested in being with you. Getting to know you better and spending more time with you."

She kisses her neck again, slightly rougher this time and Regina moans quietly and grips her thighs. She swallows and pulls away though. This isn't about sex. Not only is Regina unwell, but she's also desperate to prove that she is capable of wanting more. She's capable of giving more than just the physical.

"I know this may not be exactly what you want but it's the best I can do for now. And we can take the relationship thing slowly. There's no need to rush anything," she begins washing the suds from her hair.

Regina is silent for a few minutes until Emma whispers that she's all done.

"My conditioner is leave in." She responds in her own soft whisper.

She stands then, the bath certainly helping her regain some clarity and balance, and steps out grabbing a towel.

Emma continues to sit awkwardly, not really sure where to go from here.

She had done it all, hadn't she?

She had admitted to having feelings, she had admitted to wanting more, and she had been honest through it all.

Maybe too honest, she thinks morbidly.

She stands herself and grabs what Regina always referred to as the guest towel, though she knew she was about the only guest Regina ever had.

They both dry quietly and Emma leans down to let out the water, turning to find Regina gone.
She wraps the towel around her waist, tucking it snugly before re-entering the bedroom.

She finds Regina slipping on panties and a tank top and doesn't know what to do with herself.

Should she get dressed and go? Get dressed and stay?

Regina then begins taking the sheets off the bed to prepare them for the laundry and she feels like she can't just sit back and watch so she silently helps.

They remove the sheets and while Regina goes to put them in the washer, Emma heads to the linen closet and grabs a new set of covers. Regina returns to find the bed remade and thanks her quietly before crawling under the sheets again.

"Uh, here…it's probably time for more medicine. Let me get it."

Just to keep herself busy, she takes her time pouring the liquid into the cup and handing it to Regina. She doesn't know what she's supposed to do now. She knows what she wants to do, but she's not sure what right she has to do it.

She takes the cup back from Regina after she downs the medicine.

"I hate being sick."

It may not necessarily be the olive branch she was looking for but she'll take whatever she can get.

She crouches down in front on Regina's side of the bed. "Yeah, me too. And I really hate seeing you sick."

"You didn't have to stay," Regina responds sharply, obviously misinterpreting her words.

"No, I didn't mean it like that. I meant, it makes me feel awful for you. Trust me, there's nowhere else I'd rather be."

"Really?"

She brushes some hair out of her face. "Really really."

Regina's eyes close tiredly and she wants to kiss each eyelid so badly that she almost vomits at the thought.

"Your hair is still damp baby."

"I love when you call me baby."

Emma swallows, unsure of how to respond.

"I..., okay."

Regina smiles at that. "And I love how awkward you are."

Emma laughs, sensing that the medicine must be kicking back in pretty fast, having the ability to make Regina a little loopy and carefree with her words.

"Yeah, I am pretty awkward. Especially with you. I just never know what to say or do."

Her brutal honesty is rewarded when Regina reaches out and strokes her cheek reverently.
"Say you'll stay?"

"Yeah..." she tilts her head to kiss Regina's wrist. "Of course, baby."

"I'm just going to borrow some shorts and a shirt."

"Anything you want...baaaby."

Regina's lazy smirk confirms the medicine is doing its job. She stands and places a quick kiss to her forehead before heading to grab some clothes. She pulls off the towel and begins dressing quickly, eager to join Regina in bed.

She can feel Regina's eyes on her as she dresses but neither of them say anything until she's headed back to the spacious bed.

"We've never done it before, but...do you ever cuddle? Do you know how?" She asks as Emma slips back into bed.

She laughs loudly and throws her head down on a pillow, sighing at how good it feels to lay in clean sheets on a comfy bed.

"Yes, Regina. I do know how to cuddle. And I'll have you know I make a wonderful big spoon."

"Can I be your big spoon?"

"No, that's not a thing."

"Pleeeeeease!"

"No," she scoots closet and wraps a muscular arm around Regina's waist, pulling her as close as they can be, silencing the discussion.

"Ooooh," Regina groans, "you do make quite a nice big spoon!"

She settles into Emma and she uses it as an opportunity to place a few kisses on her neck and bare shoulders.

"See, I told you babe. Plus, you make a much cuter little spoon than I would."

"The cutest you've ever spooned?" Regina's voice sounds casual but the words themselves betray her apprehension.

"The sweetest, most beautiful little spoon I've ever had the privilege of scooping into my arms."

"Ahhh, I get it! Because spoons scoop things!"

Emma, not meaning it as a joke, just chuckles and pulls her impossibly closer.

"Go to sleep Gina."

"Promise not to leave?"

And though it's against her nature, though she's always been an unpredictable runner, never in one spot for long enough to get attached to her surroundings, she breathes in Regina and cannot help herself.
"I promise not to leave."
Chapter 11

She runs her fingers over her smooth, flawless face, as if in utter disbelief.

It's so hard to believe that Emma is here in front of her now, after everything that they've been through.

Which, in the grand scheme of things, isn't much really.

They've had sex, or fucked if you asked Emma, for 6 six months. And sometimes hung out in groups.

That was it. And yet, it had felt like nothing short of an uphill battle for Regina.

Getting here had taken so much work and so much of her energy.

But...where are they now anyway?

Sure, Emma had come over.

Sure, Emma had told her she missed her.

Sure, she told her she wanted to try. To take things slowly.

But what did that even mean?

Sex? No sex? Same amount of sex, slightly more talking? Less sex, more talking?

She felt like, though she wanted to agree to whatever Emma could offer, she needed to know more.

She needed to know exactly what she was agreeing to.

She watches as Emma breathes in and out slowly and cannot tear her eyes away.

This is what I'm agreeing to, she thinks to herself.

She runs her fingers across Emma's face and she stirs.

"Mghhh," Emma groans as she begins to awaken.

She's instantly met with green eyes that flash open and dart around the room quickly to take in all of their surroundings before she settles on Regina's soft smile and visibly allows herself to relax.

Regina can't help herself. She reaches out to cup Emma's face and has to ask, "Who made you like this? So guarded? So on edge all the time?"

Emma squints, first as if she doesn't understand the question, but then her eyebrow lifts in surprise.

"Wow, that's what you start with?", her voice is still husky from sleep. "I wake up from a nap and you're just ready to dive right into my insecurities?! Who starts there?" Emma's tone is sharp enough to tell her that the question is inappropriate, but she follows it up with laughter. "Who does that?!"

Regina has to laugh as well, realizing how inappropriate the question is.

"You're right. I'm sorry. I just..." she stares into her eyes, heart rate speeding up just looking at her,
"I just want to know you."

Emma sighs and rolls onto her back. And just as she fears she's ruined things between them, Emma speaks.

"I get it. I want to know you too."

"Great, so then," she scoots a little closer, cuddling into Emma's body. "Let's get to know each other a little. I'll go first and you can respond with whatever information you're comfortable giving me."

"And if I don't want to answer something?"

She kisses her sleeved shoulder gently. "Then you don't have to. I'm not trying to push you, I agree with you. We should take things slowly. There's no need to rush."

"Yeah, there's no need to rush," Emma repeats as if reassuring herself.

"Exactly. So...let's see here. Uhh, we'll start slow and simple. My favorite food is enchiladas. What's yours?"

"Really? I wouldn't have guessed that!" Emma laughs at little as she turns towards Regina, resting her head on her hands.

"Yeah, my mother is Italian, but my father was half Hispanic and he made the best enchiladas."

She smiles wistfully as the smells and sounds of her father cooking in the kitchen come back to her as if it was just yesterday.

"Was?" Emma interrupts the memory quietly.

"Yeah, was...he died the year before I graduated college."

Emma sits unmoving for a moment, completely still.

"I want to hug you. I want to tell you how sorry I am. Can...can I do that?"

Despite the intense sadness she still feels over the loss of her father, she can't help but laugh at Emma's adorable hesitation.

"You can if you want to."

Emma surges forward and awkwardly wraps her up in a tight hug. And Regina holds back. Tightly.

She has never really hugged Emma before and so she takes a moment to appreciate the strong arms holding her fiercely and the gentle whispers near her ear, apologizing for something she had no control over. And yet...it comforts her in a way she has never experienced.

They continue holding on until Emma pulls away and apologizes again, this time for getting carried away.

"It's fine. I liked it."

"Me too. Hugging you is so nice. Even better standing, I bet."

Regina can't help but throw her head back a little in laughter, "Yeah, probably!"
They sit staring at each other for a few more minutes before Emma falls back onto her back and laughs.

"What?" Regina wonders aloud. "What's so funny?"

"I love hugging you!" she shouts so loudly and so randomly that it almost scares her.

She sounds crazy, as if she's on drugs, and Regina would swear she was if she wasn't feeling the exact same way.

"I know, it's nice."

"It's so much more than nice. It's awesome!" Emma exclaims again excitedly and sits up suddenly.

"Okay, okay. Let's keep going! What's your favorite flower?"

Regina can't keep the smile off of her face as she pushes her pillows up a little higher so she can lay sitting up a little.

"Wait wait, you haven't told me your favorite food yet! This is a trade-off remember?"

"Oh," Emma lights up again, "Right! Uh, pizza, for sure! Any kind of pizza!"

Regina rolls her eyes, completely unsurprised by that admission.

"Of course it is. Okay, my favorite flower is the lily. Or tulips. That's a very close second."

Emma nods seriously, and she can just tell, she's storing this information for later. And the very idea of 'later' being a possibility sends a chill down her spine.

"I like roses. But not red. Red is too cliché."

Regina nods, storing the info as well.

"Do you like ice cream or frozen yogurt better?"

"Oh, uh," she has to think about that one. "I guess ice cream because it has so many flavors?"

"I like ice cream better too! We should go sometime!"

"Uh, sure!" She's still not feeling 100% but Emma's enthusiasm is certainly rubbing off on her.

"Okay, it is definitely my turn young lady. Hmm," she hopes that this next question isn't going to ruin things completely. It's just that Emma is in such a good mood and seems to be open to sharing so this does seem like a golden opportunity.

"What's your mom like?"

Emma's eyes soften immediately and it's so obvious that she loves her.

"She's amazing. Like…can't-even-begin-to-tell-you-how-great-she-is great."

"Yeah? What does she do? She sounds like a doctor?"

Emma's face crinkles at that. "Uh, I mean, yeah she is but…I mean…how do you not know who she is? Everyone does."
That information doesn't surprise her at all knowing how Emma herself is so in the public sphere and she seemingly hasn't done anything to warrant such attention.

"Well, I know her name is Ingrid Nolan, but honestly that's about it. I work with kids Emma, not much time to google people."

*Only a half lie, she tells herself. Technically she has found the time to google Emma and her mother. She's seen photos of them out and about but she's tried to shy away from articles and tabloids. Knowing how private Emma can be, she's always felt guilty reading up on her. It's always felt like snooping.*

"Oh…," Emma shakes her head a little and smiles softly. "Well, in that case, yeah she's a doctor. Uh, kinda. She used to be an actress. That's why I thought you would have known. She used to be on a Grey's Anatomy type show and it was super popular. She even won a couple Emmy's. But after like 6 seasons she quit. She said she wanted to do something more meaningful than just *pretending* to save people."

Regina smiles at how kind Emma's mother seems to be and imagines briefly all of them out for brunch laughing and drinking mimosas, getting along as if they've known each other for years. And a part of her allows herself to think that maybe a few years down the road, they could be like that.

"She sounds really great. Would I ever be able to meet her?"

Emma sighs at that. "Well, she's not really here much these days. She's in West Africa right now, building wells and teaching English and stuff."

"How does August feel about that?"

Emma shrugs. "She actually had her epiphany just after he was born. I would…" she lays back down, putting her head down in Regina's lap and settling in before continuing, "I would never tell him this, but he's the reason why she left. She had him and just…wanted to make the world better. She told me the night before she left that she was doing this to make the world better for us. And I'm proud and everything, I am…"

"But you'd also like to have your mom around." Emma nods, glad that she's understood.

"I get that. I'd do anything to see my dad just one more time."

Emma rolls her eyes at that. "Ugh. You can have mine. If you could even call him that."

"You have a dad? You've never mentioned him!"

"Uhh, how does one casually mention their father during sex?"

She nods at that. "Fair point. But seriously…what's he like?"

Emma rolls her eyes again. "First of all, David's not my dad. Not even close. When my mom first adopted me, it was just me and her. He's just a useless piece of shit. The best thing he ever did for any of us was help make August. He basically just sucks. He was an actor on mom's show, honestly some extra that no one even noticed, and he just sort of weaseled his way into her spotlight. But I-I don't want to talk about him."

Regina nods quickly and tangles her fingers in Emma's hair, massaging her scalp.
"Well we don't have to talk then."

"I'm not having sex with you Regina! You're sick!"

"That's not even what I meant!" she laughs. "I realize you're not familiar with the medium between sex and sleeping, but I just meant we could cuddle."

Regina pushes the pillows back down and lays with her arms with open, inviting Emma to be her little spoon. And for a moment, she looks to be mulling it over before she rolls her eyes.

"Nice try Gina."

"The day we stop trying is the day we stop progressing."

"Ugh, you're such a fucking teacher."

Regina goes to laugh again but instead ends up coughing deeply. Emma moves closer to rub her back and when the coughing fit finally subsides, she gets up.

"It's probably time for more medicine."

Regina throws her head back on the pillow in defeat. "It makes me sleepy."

"Well that's true," she starts as she begins pouring the liquid into the small measuring cup, "but I want you to feel better."

She places one knee on the bed as she leans over to hand Regina the medicine. She takes it hesitantly and with a pout, but doesn't complain. And for that, she rewarded with a kiss on the cheek.

But as Emma is pulling away, she leans in close enough to share breath with Regina, their lips almost touching.

"I want you feeling better because the second you're back to normal, I am going to fuck you so hard. We have so much making up to do."

Regina swallows thickly and falls back on to her pillows. She may be sick, but her whole body reacted to that. She shivers just thinking about all the ways Emma is going to make this up to her.

"Cold?" Emma asks as she makes her way back over to her side of the bed and crawls under the sheets.

Though she's pretty comfortable actually, she simply nods because it's easier than trying to explain the real reason behind her sudden chills. Emma finds a comfortable position and then opens her arms for Regina, who quickly scoots over and cuddles into her side.

"Wanna watch some tv?"

Regina nods against her chest but already the medication kicks in and she knows she'll be out in no time.

"Have you ever seen Bob's Burgers babe?"

Another shake of her head as her eye lids start to droop.

"Well, you're in for a treat," she looks down at Regina, "Ah, just kidding. You're in for a treat whenever you wake up."
She turns on the television anyway just for background noise and pulls Regina in a little closer. She could get used to this. She knows she could.

It would be an adjustment sure, she's not use to the added commitment but the thought of doing more with Regina has her just as excited as knowing her better.

**It's kind of cool knowing more than just like sex stuff. I could bring her flowers and ice cream if I wanted. Because I know exactly what kind of stuff she likes.**

And that thought makes her giddy. She falls asleep thinking about all of the ways she could surprise Regina with her favorite flowers and ice cream.

###

She's awoken by the doorbell ringing nonstop. The last thing she wants to do is detach herself from Regina but she has to, otherwise she knows the older woman will surely wake up.

She slips out of the bed without any trouble and makes it down the stairs in record time, not even bothering to check the peep hole before swinging the door open like a crazed maniac.

"Jesus, what?!" Instantly she's met with the cold glare of Kathryn Nolan.

"What the hell are you doing here?"

"I could ask you the same thing but I don't care so….."

Kathryn rolls her eyes.

"You're a piece of shit, you know that?"

"Excuse me?" Emma's eyes narrow at her outburst.

"Oh, don't act so surprised. We're best friends, she tells me everything. She told me how you fucked her and left."

"I didn't—"

"No, but you did. You tricked her into thinking it was something more than what it was so she'd keep sleeping with you and then when it got too serious, you ran."

"I—"

"Tell me it's not true Emma. Tell me that I'm wrong and that this was all some big misunderstanding."

By now, Kathryn has pushed her way through the threshold and she and Emma are in the entry way, toe to toe.

"It's not true Kat. I do care about her."

But she only scoffs. "Whatever. Save it for someone who actually buys that bullshit."

"It's not bullshit Kat. Trust me, I-"

"You know Emma…that's the thing about trust. Once you've lost it, that's it. Regina did trust you and look where that got her. So how about you just go? Because the last thing she needs is more of
She's pissed and utterly offended. Or…at least she wants to be but she knows that Kat is right. She bites the inside of her cheek to keep from saying something that will ruin any chance of getting back into Kat's good graces, but freely rolls her eyes.

"Fine, whatever. I'm going to go. Her medicine is on the side table, she's supposed to take it every couple of hours but like..it's all on the bottle." She explains everything quickly as she slips back on her boots and grabs her keys from the hook.

"Yeah, got it. I'm actually capable of caring about others so I'm sure we'll be fine here."

Emma only rolls her eyes and heads out the door, but just as she's preparing to shut it behind her, she turns back to Kat who's removing her own shoes.

"Look, just so you know, I realized how shitty everything was before and we're working on it. But you're not going to get rid of me. I know you won't believe me but," she takes a deep breath, running her fingers through her hair and refusing to make eye contact. "I like her. A lot. Took me forever to realize it, but she does make me happy. So…yeah."

She quickly turns around and rushes towards her car, not caring to see Kat's expression.
Chapter 12

After 4 days of being stuck in bed, forced to succumb to the drowsiness induced by her medication and left only with the company of Kat, she's more than ready to get back to work.

She's not feeling exactly 100% but her doctor assured her yesterday that she was no longer contagious and so she takes a seat at her desk early Monday morning ready to tackle her missed emails.

She works for a total of 10 minutes before deciding to text Emma. They haven't talked at all, short of a brief conversation about her well-being on Saturday night. She's dying to know where they stand and what the next step will be for them but she also doesn't want to push Emma. Their conversation had been short, but thoughtful on Emma's part.

11:36 a.m.

How are you feeling?

11:38 a.m.

Better, that's for sure! I have a doctor's appointment tomorrow. At noon.

11:41 a.m.

Okay, well I'm glad you're feeling better. Hope it goes well!

She had obviously hoped for a little more. Maybe Emma would want to see her afterwards or maybe even tag along? But she had been rather disappointed to find such a short, and relatively useless, reply.

So texting now is taking all of her courage because these short responses feel like a segue to a "This just isn't working for me" talk that Regina isn't even close to ready for. But she takes a deep breath and just hits send, without thinking too hard about the text.

Doctor said I'm no longer contagious so I was thinking dinner tonight? I'm not up for cooking but take-out maybe? To thank you for taking such great care of me.

She sends the message at 7:36am knowing full well that Emma wouldn't be up at this hour. So she answers emails and gets through half her day with the kids before she has a chance to check her phone again. But even at 12, she still has nothing. She's fairly certain that Emma would be awake but has no way of knowing so she places her phone back in her desk but turns the ringer on and just puts the volume down. Just in case she texts back.

It's just before 1pm when she finally makes it to the school. After arguing with Lilly for half an hour about it, she had finally won. She was going to pick August up from school today. She just hoped that Regina would actually be there.

She had received her text when she woke up around 11:30 and just as she was about to reply, she thought about the possibility of calling, just to hear her beautiful voice. But she knew she may have been in class teaching, since she seemed to be feeling better. But then the thought of hearing her voice turned into dying to see her. And so after a brief battle with the babysitter, she's walking into
the office of the school with a bouquet of flowers in one hand and a bag in the other.

After the parent in front of her is helped, he moves to reveal a cute looking blond behind a large desk. Emma approaches as the woman continues to stare at her computer and sets down the flowers to sign herself in, as Lilly instructed her to do.

"Hi there...what's the name?"

"Emma…Swan," she says slowly as writes the date and time of day.

"Oh, hi Emma!" She glances up briefly to smile at her and catches a familiar look in her eyes.

"Hi Ms…Richards." She responds politely, intentionally using her last name to remind the young girl that they aren't friends.

"Oh, please, please you can call me Callie."

Emma just smiles, having no intention of doing that.

_She's definitely into me_, she thinks as she internally rolls her eyes.

"Cool thanks. Um, I'm here to pick up August a little early. I know he's still in his specials until whenever but I just thought maybe I could hang in the hall until they get back so we can leave right away?"

She doesn't know the policy at this uptight school but she can imagine that she's not allowed to just waltz around while kids are still in class. But she leans forward a little and broadens her smile and waits patiently as Callie blushes and tucks some hair behind her ear, obviously flattered by Emma's attention.

"Right well, technically we're not allowed to let anyone just hang out but uh…if I give you a pass this once…will you tell me who those beautiful flowers are for?"

She thinks about that for a moment, genuinely impressed with this girl. She's definitely smooth. But Emma's surely smoother. She reaches into the bouquet and pulls out a single tulip that has started to bud and extends it to the blond.

She lowers her voice and smiles sweetly before answering. "For you, of course. A flower for the most beautiful girl in the room."

As she says it, she acknowledges that it's not technically a lie, since she's the only woman in here but definitely not hotter than Regina.

"Aww, thank you Emma." She eats it up, reaching to grab the flower and intentionally grazing her fingers in the process.

It briefly crosses her mind that there's no spark there when they touch. It's nothing like Regina's touch that sets her on fire and gives her chills and frees her and consumes her all at once. But she tosses that thought aside as she glances at the clock. 12:33. She needs to hurry.

"You're very welcome. Ugh. And I really hate to rush you, but I just want to grab August before the crowd gets crazy."

As if shaken from a trance, she tears her gaze away from Emma's lips and quickly gets her a name tag printed.
"Right, here you go. You know where you're headed?"

"I do." And just to set herself up for any future visits, while grabbing the sticker, she briefly grabs ahold of her hand and says quietly, as if they now share a secret, "I really appreciate this Callie. I'll see you later."

Her name feels wrong on her lips and as soon as she turns, she tears the charming smile from her face but she can hear her sighing longingly as she's walking away and she knows she's set.

*That poor girl would probably hand me the keys to the fucking building.*

She rolls her eyes at how easy women can be sometimes and heads down the hall, on a mission. When she finally makes it to the classroom, she sees no students, which was to be expected. She listened well enough to know that p.e is August's last special class of the day before dismissal at 12:50.

But unfortunately, she also doesn't see Regina. She opens the door quickly and looks around, finding nothing but an empty room.

"Well shit." She sighs and thinks briefly of leaving a note, but she knows that wouldn't have nearly the same effect.

She also considers waiting for her but thinks of how awkward it would be to have to deliver the flowers in front of a class of kindergartners.

Fortunately, before she has to decide on what to do, she hears that voice. The one that infiltrates every dream she has these days.

"Emma?" Her heart beats faster at the sound of her own name and, suddenly, standing in front of Regina renders her incapable of speaking.

"What...what are you doing here?"

She had a little thing planned, not quite a speech but definitely a thing. She had some words to say. She was going to say something about missing her and how she was glad she was feeling better, but she can't quite formulate those thoughts because somehow seeing her now is like breathing again and drowning at the same time. So instead of speaking she steps forward and drops the bag and the flowers onto the tiny tables before pulling Regina into her arms and finding her lips.

She kisses her slowly, allowing Regina the opportunity to push her away for any reason, but there is passion behind it. She opens her mouth to allow her tongue to graze over Regina's bottom lip as they move their lips languidly together.

And a feeling hits her that she has only ever felt once, in the arms of her adoptive mother. As Regina's hands grasp at her shirt and then inch their way up to lock around her neck...she feels at home. She feels at peace.

All too quickly, Regina pulls away, breathing heavily. "Uh, what's...what are you doing here?"

Emma moves forward, refusing to let her go completely, slipping one hand around her waist while her other hand wipes at the smudged lipstick on Regina's face.

"I missed you. Wanted to check on you. Had to see you. Thought I'd surprise you."
It's everything she feels and it all accidentally comes tumbling out and she worries it may be too much or too honest, but Regina's eyes light up and her smile says she doesn't mind. And Emma's heart flutters at the thought that Regina may have missed her too.

"Emma, this is so sweet of you. Those are my favorite flowers." She reaches down to grab them and the bag and shoves them somewhat unceremoniously toward her.

"Yeah, these are for you. Your favorite things. Except, I didn't know what kind you like specifically so I got like…a couple."

Regina's eyebrows shoot up and she opens the bag to find several containers of ice cream, probably half melted at this point.

"I honestly didn't think it through, but you'll definitely want to put those in a freezer."

But Regina only laughs, "I cannot believe you brought me ice cream. You are…," she looks up and Emma can see the water in her eyes, as if she's never seen such a thoughtful gesture and Emma vows to do this more often, just to see that smile that shines from her soulful brown eyes.

"I love seeing you smile."

Regina's smile widens, if possible, and she falls forward to rest her head on Emma's shoulder.

It's Emma who pulls her in further and squeezes, moaning as she does, just delighting in the feeling of having her close again.

"What in the world have you done with my Emma?" Regina asks as she holds tighter as well.

"Ha, I think a better question is what have you done with Emma?"

They both laugh a little at that and pull away lightly.

"Right, well…thank you again, so much! This really is so sweet. I've never had anyone bring me flowers." She brings them to her nose and smells them, inhaling deeply.

"And ice cream." Emma adds.

"Yes, no one has ever bought me ice cream. That's for sure."

"Good." She leans down and places a gentle kiss on her cheek. "I know you have to like go get the kids in a minute but I just wanted to confirm that we're on for dinner yeah?"

"Oh, yes! That sounds great. I'm excited! Maybe around 6? I could order pizza."

"Perfect, then I'll see you at your house around 6? Or…did you want me to come a little earlier?"

"Uh sure? Should I have them deliver around 5?"

"No, 6 is fine. I was just thinking we could just chill for a bit? It's been forever since I've touched you." She lifts her eyebrow as a way of asking while simultaneously slipping her hands to Regina's ass.

She blushes and removes them, checking around to make sure no one saw that inappropriate moment.

"Oh, yeah, sure. That sounds good."
Emma beams and kisses her soundly once more. "Agh, awesome. I'm officially so excited. Okay, okay, I'll let you go and then I'll see you tonight. Well," she starts backing away, "I'll actually see you in a few minutes. I'm picking up August. But then I'll see you later!" She winks and sashays away, and she doesn't hope that Regina is staring. She knows that she is.

"Wait wait, she said what?!"

"Kat I kid you not, I invited her for dinner, she said yes. Then she asked if she could come over a little early and it was obvious that her reason for doing so wasn't innocent, which was fine by me. I mean, I'm not exactly 100% back to better but I won't lie and say I haven't missed her and her body. I mean, it's been over a month since we did anything. But then, after basically giving her the green light for sex, she said "Now I'm officially excited". As if spending time with me was a lame offer until I put something else on the table."

Kat shakes her head for a moment. "I can't even believe you're giving her another chance after she basically said she could sleep with you and then cheat on you without no warning or remorse. And now this shit? Regina, you know what you need to do?"

"Okay, first of all, that's not exactly what she said!"

"It's what she meant!"

"No, she just wants to feel free to be free."

"To have sex with other women!"

"No Kat! Look, I've already explained this to you and you said you would try to understand. I need you to do that for me. Just understand that I don't want to overwhelm her and then lose her."

"Asking her to not cheat compulsively is overwhelming?! Sounds to me like she's not ready to be in a relationship then." Kat rolls her eyes, and upon seeing Regina grab her purse and personal belongings, she grabs hers off the small children's desk and prepares to leave as well.

"Yes, she is ready. I know you don't see it, but when we're alone, she's so…" she flails her full arms around, searching for the word. "She's so into me! I mean, that's probably exactly how she would describe it. She just likes me so much. When it's just us two, she listens and she cares about what I'm saying. I know she's ready because 6 months ago, she never would've brought me flowers and ice cream at work. That's progress, Kat."

Kat only shakes her head, silently acknowledging that this Emma does sound much different than the one she had previously met.

As they're walking out, the administrative staff is leaving as well and the young receptionist walks right by her, deep in conversation with another girl. But what causes her to stop dead in her tracks is the flower she's holding tightly.

It's a tulip. And it looks just like every other tulip that she's holding in her hand. And when she counts her tulips, she has 11….but there are 12 lilies. And Regina feels sick to her stomach.

"No fucking way did she give another girl a flower from the bouquet she got for me!" She whispers to Kat, barely containing her whisper.

"What? What are you talking about?"
"The front desk girl, Caitlyn or whatever! She has my flower!"

Kat squints and picks up the pace to see if it is in fact Regina's flower.

"Eh, I don't know, that one hasn't even bloomed and how would you know if it was yours anyway?"

"There are a dozen fucking lilies in here and only 11 tulips Kat!"

"No!"

"Yes! I cannot believe her. I mean, what is that?" Her anger is the only thing keeping her from crying right now.

"That...is Emma Swan. And you know what I think? I think if she wants to act like it doesn't matter to her, and give your flowers away to any other pretty girl that passes by, then you should do the same."

"What do you mean?" She asks as they reach her car.

"I mean, call her and cancel dinner. I mean, show her that giving your flowers to other women isn't acceptable."

Regina bites her lip. "I...I don't want to cancel dinner but I mean, I probably should talk to her about it."

"No, no Regina. Listen, if it were Jeff, he'd be on the couch for a week with absolutely no sex. If you're seriously about being with her, you're going to have to take the same approach. Some women, just like men, have to be trained."

"She's not an animal, Kat."

"I don't know, it seems to me like she is. At the very least, she's a child in a grown woman's body. And just like you punish the kids for poor behavior, you have to do the same for her. There has to be a consequence, Regina. You can't let her treat you like you don't matter and still fall into bed with her at the end of the night."

Regina nods, knowing that Kat is absolutely right. She wants to deny Emma nothing, but she also doesn't want to be with someone who treats her like she's only good for sex. She wants Emma to try just as hard as her to make this work.

"Yeah, you're probably right. I should probably lay down some ground rules or something."

"Exactly! If she wants an open relationship then you have to establish what that means for both of you."

Regina nods, agreeing completely. "Yeah, I'll talk to her when she comes over."

"But no sex?"

"No sex," she sighs. She understands the reasoning behind it, she knows that Emma needs to learn her lesson. But still...her body has been tingling with anticipating for the last two hours so this is a bit of a disappointment.

She waves goodbye to Kat and slips in her car thinking all the way home about what she's going to say to Emma. She practices her little speech over and over again in the shower and then once more as she's looking over the deep-dish pizza menu of the place up the street.
She runs through it so much just to make sure that when she's standing in front of Emma, tempted to give in, she still remembers what she needs to say.

Aaaaaand it seems like a foolproof plan until she's standing right in front of Emma. She opens the door to Emma Swan in tight black jeans and a leather jacket holding a motorcycle helmet in her hands and her panties are all but ruined.

"Hey, Gina."

"Hi." She stands in the doorway just admiring her physique until Emma steps forward enough to push her backwards and away from the threshold. She kicks the door closed with her foot, never breaking eye contact with her.

"I…I didn't know you owned a motorcycle."

"I do."

"Well…I'm glad you wear a helmet. They're extremely dangerous. I was actually reading an arti—" Her mindless rant is cut off by Emma backing her up into the wall and taking control. She presses up against her, with her hands on the wall keeping her in place and she is so desperate to give in.

But she knows what giving in will do. It will give Emma exactly what she wants and none of what she needs.

She feels Emma's hands glide off the wall and onto her body, trailing from her chest all the way down to her ass and squeezing which only causes her to fall further into Emma's arms. She rests her head on Emma's chest, but the position is more intimate than sexual and Emma must sense that because instead of continuing, she wraps her arms around Regina's shoulders and kisses the top of her head.

"Hey there beautiful."

"Hi. Is hugging while standing everything you thought it would be?"

Emma laughs gently into her hair, "No, it's way better than anything I could imagined."

She only sighs and holds on tighter. She knows that anyone else would've run in the other direction from Emma. She knows that any reasonable person would've traded Emma in in lieu of something easier, something less complicated.

But as they stand there for several minutes, Emma suddenly seeming like she's in no rush, she can't imagine trading this for anything.

She finds that she would rather have something complicated and crazy with Emma than something easy and safe with anyone else.

"Thank you for my flowers today."

"You're welcome, baby."

She smiles involuntarily and pulls away just slightly.

"I love when you call me that."

She looks up into Emma's eyes and watches as her timid smile reaches them.
"I love saying it. It's nice."

"Am I…," it's now or never, she thinks. "Am I the only one you say that to?"

Emma's brow furrows. "What? You mean like little stuff like babe and baby?"

She nods, holding her breath.

"Yeah, of course. I wouldn't say that to anyone else."

That comes as a relief to her, but it doesn't change the fact that a few hours ago Emma was flirting with the receptionist.

"I only ask because I…saw Callie with the same flowers as me earlier. One of my flowers to be specific."

Emma at least has the good sense to look embarrassed and even…apologetic?

"Oh yeah, that. That's definitely not what it looked like. I was just trying to kind of…soften her up, you know? I could tell she didn't really want to give me the pass during school hours so I just kind of turned on a little charm. But that's all, nothing happened."

Emma sounds adamant about that and it's definitely comforting.

"But still…why would you give her my flowers?"

"It's not a big deal, Gina. It was one flower. I just wanted to make sure she'd let me bring you the flowers. I did-"

She pulls away, shaking her head, refusing to let her finish that thought.

"No, Emma, actually it is a big deal. And you can't tell me how to feel about it. To me, it's a big deal. Maybe to you they're just flowers, to you it may not mean anything, but to me it says you were thinking of me. Flowers say to me that even though you didn't have to, you went out and bought a dozen of my favorite flowers and took the time out of your day to bring them to me. To me, that means a lot. And I don't want to find out after the fact that you took something that was supposed to belong to just me and gave it away to the first girl who waltzes by. Do you get that?"

She pulls away and runs her hand through her hair, preparing for the inevitable argument. She readies herself to fight with Emma, steeling her resolve. She's used to her dominance being met with more dominance, more arguing. But instead of fighting back, Emma pulls her back into her arms.

"Yeah, no, you're right. I see how I fucked that one up." Emma hugs her tightly and kisses her hair before pulling away again.

Emma looks down at her, holding her face in her hands so that neither of them can break the eye contact. "I'm really sorry. I won't do that again. Promise."

She nods, surprised at how she's already accepted the obviously sincere apology.

"It's okay," and to prove she means it, she leans up to kiss her soundly on the mouth.

"I'm kinda new at this," Emma adds before moving in for another kiss.

"I know," she laughs into Emma's lips.
"I feel like I have a lot to learn. About like…the do's and don't's of everything."

"Good thing I'm a teacher then."

"Ha! Good thing," she leans down again for another kiss.

"Are you ready for your first lesson, Emma?"

Emma pulls back, eyebrows quirked, curious and excited all at once. "Yes, Ms. Mills, I am."

She leans up to kiss her once more before circling a hand around Emma's neck and drawing her in closer, so that she can whisper in her ear.

"Lesson number one Emma: Every action has a consequence."

As she pulls away, she can see Emma's face is riddled with confusion so as she sashays away towards the kitchen, she yells out, "Your action was giving another woman my flowers."

"One fucking flower," she hears Emma mumble as she follows behind her.

"So there should be a consequence. And what do you think that consequence should be?"

Emma squints, obviously wary of answering. "Uh, I don't know?"

"Well, what do you think is a fair punishment?"

"Um, maybe I pay for dinner?"

She can't help but laugh at that as she digs through the draw for a few of her favorite take out menus.

"Try again, baby."

"Uhh, I pay for dinner and you get to pick what we watch on tv?"

"Mmm, no because I was going to choose anyway."

"God, I don't know Gina. I can't think of anything."

"Fine then, I'll choose for you. We're having dinner, you're paying. I'm choosing the movie. Then, at the end of the night, I'm giving you one kiss and that's it."

Emma's face immediately scrunches up in disgust.

"What?! How is that a 'fair' consequence? How am I supposed to sleep next to you all night and not kiss you?"

"Oh no no. Perhaps I was unclear. You're not staying here. That one kiss comes at the end of the night as you're leaving."

"But wait….what?! I packed a bag. I was going to stay here tonight. I…I missed you."

The way Emma says it makes her feel sad for her and it almost makes her cave. Almost.

"You should've thought about that before you handed my flowers to someone else."

"It was one flower, Gina!"
And that is the mantra for the rest of the night. Each time she begs to stay the night, each time she apologizes, she's forced to gently tell her no and Emma continues to shout that it was "just one little flower!"

And as much as standing her ground hurts because she's just as desperate as Emma for a night together, there's something so incredibly satisfying about having the upper hand for once.

And, though it's hard to shut the door on Emma just before 10:30pm, the pathetic puppy dog eyes that Emma gives her as she says 'goodnight' tells her that this won't ever be an issue again.

*Lesson learned.*
Wait wait, she did what?!”

"She…” she hangs her head, utterly embarrassed. "She pretty much kicked me out."

"No!"

"Yes!"

"For one flower?!"

"That's what I said! But apparently that was not cool."

"Well, shit Em. What are you going to do now?"

"I don't know. Probably just jack off and then watch a movie or something. Wanna come over?"

"I mean—well, first no because ew and second no because Belle and I are having a date night."

She nods, knowing there's officially no way to get her friend to hang with her.

"You're so whipped."

"Eh, but it looks like you could learn a thing or two from me."

She grunts, thinking that though she does really like Regina, she's in no way interested in being at her beck and call the way Ruby is.

"Look, Belle just walked in so I gotta—"

She hears a muffled talking, just away from the phone and she vaguely hears Ruby retelling her the story of Emma's unfortunate evening.

Then there's the sound of a scuffle, before Belle's beautiful Australian accent washes over here.

"Hi Emma."

"Hey, B."

"So I hear you're having a bit of girl trouble? Wanna tell me about it?"

Emma sighs, but relents. "I just…I didn't mean to make her mad, honestly. I swear I only did it to kind of soften up the stupid receptionist!"

"I understand."

"You do?" She falls onto the couch with a beer in hand.

"I do. I know you Emma, and I'm sure you didn't mean to hurt her."

"..but?"

"But…you did. And so, though I'm sure you've apologized already, that's a small bit of trust lost."
"Over one flower!!"

"Em, think of it this way, when I met Ruby, she was a wild child. Out drunk every night of the week, usually with you. She was sleeping with anything with a pulse-

She hears Ruby yell with indignation in the background, but nods knowing that it's true.

"She had no clue how to be with me when we first started dating and given her history, trust had to be earned first. It wasn't just a given. And every time she went out at night, I worried that she would fall back into old habits. But then, you know what she did to reassure me? To earn that trust?"

"What?"

"She would text me while she was out with her friends. She'd give me updates and send me goofy pics and she would call me when she got home and we'd talk until we fell asleep. That was her way of gaining my trust. And now, when she goes out, I leave her be. Because I trust that she's where she says she is doing what she said she'd be doing."

"Oookay, well that's all well and good but I mean…I can't text Regina every second of the day to prove I'm not cheating or something."

"No and I don't think she'd want you to. Belle laughs gently, "But, I'm sure there are other ways to show her that she can trust you. Get creative. We simple girls love a little creativity."

Emma nods absently, already brainstorming ways to show Regina that she can be true.

"Alright, hey look. Thanks for this."

"Of course Emma. Wanna talk to Ruby once more?"

She hears Ruby yelling in the background that she's hungry so she says "yes", just to fuck with her.

There seems to be a heated whisper argument between the two of them before Ruby speaks right in her again.

"Whaaat? I'm freaking starving!"

"Freaking…nice. God, you're disgusting with her. But…she's a keeper."

"Don't I know it?" Her voice is gentle and Emma can hear it. She can hear the love and affection she has for Belle.

"Alright, well, I'll let you go. Have fun on your date."

"Have fun winning your girl back! Let us know if you need back up!"

She laughs and hits the end button. Determined to figure something out, she grabs her computer but forgoes the porn. Instead, she pulls up Pinterest to brainstorm.

*Girls love Pinterest, right?*

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It's 11pm.

She should definitely be asleep.
But every time she closes her eyes, she imagines hugging her. She imagines Emma's arms draped over her shoulder and Emma kissing her forehead and Emma running her fingers through her hair. Not sexually. But just because. Just because she knows how much she likes it.

She sighs and turns over towards her night stand.

Her phone sits, charging and calling out to her.

She's sure that Emma's up. Emma has told her more than once that she's a night owl.

*She's probably out.*

The thought saddens and sickens her but after denying Emma sex and, at the very least, company she has no clue what to expect.

Her gut tells her that Emma's trying but her tired mind keeps suggesting otherwise, which only makes her want to succumb to sleep even more.

She closes her eyes and lays for a minute before she hears that standard iPhone ringtone. Her eyebrows furrow and she sits up quickly, figuring that late night phone calls are never good.

But as she looks down at the caller, she sees a photo of Emma leaned in close whispering something to her as she stares at her attentively. It's a photo Kathryn had managed to snap while at her house for couples date night. When Kat had sent it to her the next day, when she was sure she was alone, she nearly cried. It was such a candid photo taken at the perfect angle, so that you could see the smile on Emma's face and the glow in her eyes. She immediately saved it as Emma's contact photo.

And after blinking twice, to be sure she's seeing the photo correctly, she swipes to answer.

"H-Hello?"

She's not sure why she's so hesitant. She should've expected this really. Emma calling to apologize.

"Gina? Are you-were you asleep?"

"No, no. Laying in bed but…" She trails off.

"Right, me too."

"You too what?" She asks, genuinely confused.

"I…I can't sleep either."

"Oh, yeah. Why not?" She expects the typical answer. The obvious answer. But instead, the truth and vulnerability that reaches at her through the phone stuns her.

"Because I feel terrible. I…I don't want you to think you can't trust me. I feel like this whole thing is a test and…I just don't want to fail."

She had expected Emma to say she missed her. She expected a standard sorry. But this is so much sweeter, so undeniably genuine.

"You're not failing Emma. Not at all! You're just learning. We both are really."

"Yeah, I guess." She doesn't sound very convinced and for the first time, she regrets sending Emma home.
"Maybe we should've talked a bit before you left tonight."

She hears a sudden rustling. "What? No, look…Regina I know that I literally suck at this and I know the flower thing was a major fuck up, but I really don't want this to end before it even really gets off the ground, you know?"

She realizes that she probably should've used different words to describe what she had in mind.

"No, Em, not a bad talk. I just got you…I'm not trying let you go so easily. I just meant…I don't know maybe we should've discussed some boundaries. Things I'm not comfortable with, like you giving away my flowers, so you know. I mean, I thought that was a given, but it seems we may have different expectations or ideas about all of this. I just…I don't want little misunderstandings to be the things that ruin it. Does that make sense?"

"Yeah," she hears Emma sigh deeply. "Yeah, of course. Alright, well, you can tell me now if you want?"

She lays her head back on her pillow and stares up at the dark ceiling.

"Well, I mean, it's not a long list by any means. I'm not the jealous type really. Or at least I wasn't. It's just that…my ex…I know he found me to be a bit dull. He told me that when he left me. He…he just didn't find me very fun or something. I mean, we were both nearly 30 so I'm not sure what kind of fun I was supposed to be, but…so I think now I worry about it. I worry that I'll bore you. You, someone who's already used to late crazy nights and doing whatever you want. And I just…I think the reason I took this all so seriously is that I want to be able to trust you. I don't want what he said and did to impact us. I don't want to have trust issues, you know? I don't want to be the worrying type. Because it's really not me."

There's silence. For a long, long moment. And she pulls the phone away from her ear to make sure that Emma's still on the line, which she is.

"Em, you with me?"

"Of course," comes a hoarse whisper.

"Good."

Silence fills the room a little more and she really wonders if she's been too honest.

"I swear if I ever meet this guy, I'm going to kick his ass. Seriously."

The quiet fury surprises her, but brings a smile to her face at the same time.

"That's not necessary, dear."

The gesture enough means more than anything.

"No seriously. I'll do it. Because he's out of his fucking mind. You're not boring. At all. You're so smart and fucking witty. And you know, fuck that guy."

"Emma," she cuts in but she's not even sure why because it's really true.

Fuck that guy, she thinks to herself with a satisfied smirk on her lips.

"I'm sorry Regina but Fuck. That. Guy. He didn't deserve you. And you know what else? I'm glad it didn't work out with him, he's a fucking idiot. But it's cool because I'm more than happy to take his
place. And, like, if it'll make you feel better, I can text you when I'm out and…and send photos and stuff. Not nudes! God, that sounded like nudes. I just meant like of me and where I'm at…so you know. If you want. And I'll call you when I get home so you know I'm alone. I'll do whatever you want as long as you promise me one thing?"

Her smile is so wide hearing Emma rant about her ex, the "fucking idiot".

"What's that?"

The line is quiet for a few seconds, only their slow breathing to fill the space.

"Promise me you'll forget about him. Promise me that he's in the past. And if you can do that, I'm going to do everything he was supposed to do but better."

There are tears in her eyes. The big, fat ugly ones and they're threatening to spill over. No one has ever said anything like that to her. And maybe she should be skeptical, especially when those words come from someone who has no clue how to be in a closed, committed relationship.

But for some reason, it gives her a glimmer of hope. It provides her with an extra ounce of trust.

Because Emma surely doesn't say these things to just anyone.

"Yes, I promise, I'll forget about him. If you can make me a promise too? One more?"

"Anything. It's only fair." She tacks on the last part as an obvious afterthought, as if she can't believe she said the first part.

"I just want you to promise that…if, for any reason, you decide this isn't what you want…I want you to tell me that. Please don't…please don't do anything behind my back?"

"Absolutely. I promise Gina. Relationships are built on trust and trust requires complete honesty."

She nods, happy to know that Emma agrees with her on that front.

"I couldn't agree more."

Silence envelops them again and just as Regina starts to drift off to sleep, Emma whispers softly.

"Do you have Spotify babe?"

"Huh?"

"Spotify? Like the music app?"

"Oh, yes yes. Sorry. Why?"

"I…I made you a playlist. Well…us kinda."

She's stunned to silence.

"Well, I mean, it's like songs that remind me of you I guess. Or songs that feel like us maybe? I don't know. I just thought maybe—"

"How do I find it?" She finally finds her voice, all of a sudden desperate to know what sorts of songs could possibly remind Emma of her.
"Oh, right well, what's your Spotify username? I'll find you and share it with you."

"Oh, um, let me check." She pulls the phone away from her ear and opens the app, impatiently waiting for the large green icon to disappear so she can check her username.

"It's—are you ready? Okay, it's R-e-g-i-n-a and then M-i-l-l-s, then the numbers 123."

There's another silence.

"Did you need me to repeat it?"

She barely gets her sentence out before Emma is laughing loudly in her ear, the sound seems like too much in the quiet of the night but it's such a beautiful melody that she just doesn't care.

"What is so funny Emma?"

"Baby—," she pauses to catch her breath, "baby, it's just your name. It's literally the simplest username on the planet, there was no reason to spell it out."

She only rolls her eyes. Normally, she would defend herself but she's still so interested in this supposed playlist that she doesn't even bother.

"Okay, shut up. I'm sorry. Did you share it yet?"

"Yeahhh. I just did. Can you see it? It's…it's called "Us". I know it's not at all original but I didn't know what else to call it."

She chuckles softly to herself as she leaves the playlist screen, then returns to find a playlist that is, in fact, labeled "Us" right at the top of her list.

She immediately clicks it and is met with a collection of about 10 songs.

"Should I…which one should I listen to first? Or…should I go in order?"

"It's up to you," Emma sounds timid and she smiles only wider.

She swipes through the list, some titles seeming familiar, while others like Home To Mama and Lost Boy by Troye Sivan, she's sure she's never heard.

Finally, one catches her eye.

"What's The Matrimony by…Whale?"

Emma laughs softly, maybe even nervously, in her ear. "It's pronounced Wale. And…just click it. Listen to it."

"I can't, I'm on the phone with you."

"Oh, I thought you were on your laptop. Okay…uh, give me one second."

She lays patiently waiting for just a minute or so before she hears her laptop ding. Her Mac sits over on her desk, open but the screen dark. She climbs out of from under the sheets, not even upset to leave the comfort of her bed.

She swipes her hand over the mouse and the screen lights up, immediately informing her that Emma Swan would like to FaceTime.
She immediately hits accept and grabs the computer from her desk.

"Hi!"

Emma's cheery voice instantly causes her to forget that she has to be up in just 6 hours.

"Hi!"

"Alright, now that we've remedied that problem," she looks down to her phone to see that her call with Emma has ended, "You can listen to whatever songs you want. And…this works better anyway because now I get to see you. You look…beautiful by the way."

Regina blushes, though it's surely too dark for Emma to notice. She turns on her bed side lamp.

"Ah, even better. Fucking flawless in the middle of the night."

This time, she's certain Emma sees her cheeks tint.

"Hi."

"You already said that." Emma holds her computer up a little higher as she seems to settle back in bed.

"Because I meant it. Hi."

Emma finally rolls her eyes. "Are you going to listen to it or not?"

There is a bit of nervousness to her voice, but mostly obvious excitement which only makes her more eager.

"Yes okay, dear. I'm starting with this Matrimony by Whale."

"Wale," Emma corrects with another eye roll, but with no real irritation.

"Right…" she hits play and is instantly greeted by Jerry Seinfeld's voice.

"Mn, are you sure this is the right one?"

"Yes, Gina. Just-look, just lay back and listen to it. Okay?"

Instead of responding, she moves her laptop to what is Emma's side of the bed. She turns her Bluetooth speakers on and waits for a moment before the song begins to fill the room.

There are a few more seconds of talking before a melodious voice penetrates her soul with the opening lines.

*If there's a question of my heart, you got it. It don't belong to anyone but you.*

It gives her chills. And knocks her right in the chest. Because it's way too close to home.

A slow rap begins the first verse and she's not exactly sure how much of it is supposed to relate to them but she listens anyway.

She doesn't particularly like rap music, but Emma chose this song with her in mind and so she can't help but like it. Or at the very least, she appreciates it.

They sit, both saying nothing, as the speakers produce a loud enough sound that Emma can hear the
words clearly on her own computer.

They listen to each verse in silence, but Emma is staring straight at her the entire time, likely gauging her reaction. To avoid the heavy stare, she closes her eyes and lets the melody wash over her.

She relaxes into the pillow and just enjoys it, up until the last verse. She faintly hears Emma singing softly along.

*If there's of question of my love, you got it. Baby, don't worry I got plans for you.*

She smiles faintly, eyes still closed.

As the song ends, her eyes flutter open to find that Emma has now laid down and has her head propped on her hand.

"I liked that one."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Sometimes I wonder…about how you feel. So it's nice to know."

Emma nods, almost unnoticeably and after a minute or two of nothing, she speaks up again "I'm getting sleepy but I want to keep listening."

"Me too."

She just nods, getting too tired to reach for the phone.

"Hey, you wanna do just one more?"

She nods again.

"Okay, last song. It's the third one from the bottom. Romantic by Stanaj."

She finds the strength to lift her phone and scrolls down to the song. She presses it and is instantly hit with soft piano notes.

With her eyes closed, the words surround her and seem to transport her elsewhere.

*You make me want to be romantic. You make me want to be a star. You make want to act different. I love you for who you are. You make me want to run circles around you. So glad that I found you.*

She imagines them on a boat, a yacht. Theirs maybe? Emma's arms are wrapped securely around her as they gaze out at the night, the moon reflecting off the water.

She imagines Emma introducing her to her mother, who seems to be the most important person in her life, apart from August. She imagines Ingrid giving Emma a nod of approval and Emma sinking to one knee, pulling out a velvet box and asking the timeless question: Will you marry me?

She imagines an intimate wedding, with just their closest friends and family. She pictures, so clearly that she can hardly believe it's a dream, Emma twirling her around on the dance floor, unable to stop kissing the bride.

And the last thing she sees, just before slipping into the unconsciousness of sleep, is a little boy. He's five, maybe six with dusky brown hair. His big brown eyes are hers but his smile is so distinctly Emma.
She sees them perfectly, the little boy in between them walking along the beach. He stops to pick up shells and asks his mama to hold them, and Emma does so happily, an effortless smile on her face.

They walk aimlessly along the shore until the little boy either becomes tired or bored and he asks to be carried. Emma’s hands are full of their bags and the numerous shells he has acquired along the way and so he stretches out his arms to her, expectantly.

She must be accustomed to this because she lifts him easily and they continue along the path. She rattles off useless facts to him, answering all of his questions about how oceans are made and what lives in the ocean and if he could live there too.

Emma pouts at that. *What about me and mommy? We would miss you if you left us to live in the ocean.*

He reaches his hand out to Emma and she nibbles on it playfully. He laughs loudly, and so wholeheartedly. He throws his head back and his whole body shakes as he giggles. He is so like Emma in all the best ways and she finds herself wishing to savor this moment forever.

*You can come too mommies. I need someone to feed my rumbly tummy!*

The whole scene, or rather life, laid out before her is perfect, she decides then and there. It is so beautifully romantic and she is desperate for more, but she manages to force her eyes to open once more and finds Emma staring back, a look of longing on her face.

"I wish you were here," she admits tiredly.

Emma nods, "Me too. I know why I'm not. It's my own fault and I can respect that. I just…just want to be near you. I miss you."

"I miss you too baby. But it's okay. We've got our whole lives ahead of us."

"Yeah…I have a feeling you're probably right."

The air is filled with silence for a moment, before a new song begins, the opening chords catching her attention.

This one she is familiar with.

"Go to sleep love. I'll still be here in the morning."

"There's one you probably don't say often," she chuckles a little, already half way back to sleep.

"No, I do not." she says good-naturedly, "But you…you are the only exception," Emma sings along gently as she drifts off and slips back into her dream with the nameless brown haired boy that she has already fallen in love with.
"To what do I owe the pleasure of a call this early?"

She puts the phone on speaker as she tucks in her shirt and buttons it into her pencil skirt.

"Did you add a song? Daisy?"

"Well good morning to you too!"

"Ha, sorry babe. Morning."

"Good morning Emma. And yes, I did…is that okay, dear?"

"Yeah, totally! I'm excited to hear it!"

"Good…great." She rolls her eyes at the image of herself blushing.

"I have to ask, what are you doing up so early?"

"Oh, I'm taking August to school today."

"Why, is Lilly alright?"

"Uh, yeah? I guess? I don't know, I just volunteered to take him."

"Well, I'm sure he's excited about that! He loves you, you know? Talks about his big sister in class and draws you art all the time."

She groans loudly and Regina has a feeling she's still in bed.

"Oh come on! We all know I only volunteered so I could have an excuse to see you but don't make me feel guilty!"

"I'm not trying to make you feel guilty! I'm just saying here really looks up to you and works really hard on that art for you so I hope you've at least hung a few of them up."

There's a silence that tells her she probably throws them away the moment August isn't looking.

"I don't doubt that he works hard but he's a little kid….his art is literally just scribbles and everyone's head is always largely disproportionate to the rest of their body."

She whispers the last part, obviously not wanting him to hear.

"You don't have to tell me that, Emma. But he took the time to make it for you, so I bet he'd really appreciate it if you hung one or two up."

"Mmm, sure sure. Anyway,"

She sighs, knowing that's the end of that discussion.

"Anyway, I've gotta get going, but I'll see you in a bit?"

"You definitely will."
"Okay, bye."

"Bye," Emma says softly before disconnecting.

She looks at herself in the mirror, taking extra care to make sure she looks good now.

She breathes deeply and then reaches for her purse, most excited to start her day off with Emma.

She sees Emma and August before they see her.

She's holding his left hand with her right and his backpack in the other hand, nodding at whatever he's rambling happily about.

It reminds her of her dream from two nights ago, as if she really needs a reminder. She can't stop thinking about it.

She stares until they are right in front of her on the playground.

"Hi Ms. Mills!"

He waves up at her cheerfully and she smiles back softly at him with a fondness she admits she doesn't possess for any of her other students.

"Hi sweetheart!"

"Emmy brought me to school today!"

She smiles up at Emma, who is staring back down at him with sweet smile of her own.

"That's right, I did! Alright buddy, go put your backpack with your line or whatever. And then you can go play."

He barely lets her finish before he's ripping his transformers backpack from her hands and racing to the line to put his stuff in their class basket.

"Soooo…" Emma's hands are stuffed into her jacket pocket and she's bouncing on her toes.

"Sooo?"

"How have you been?"

Regina smirks, "You mean since we fell asleep on the phone last night? Or since our call an hour ago?"

Emma blushes and laughs awkwardly, clearly out of her element.

"I mean…Yeah. Okay, nevermind."

She decides to put her out of her misery, reaching out to quickly grab her hand.

"I'm really good. Happy to see you."

"Yeah? This isn't…too much?"

Regina squeezes her hand, reassuring her. "You do realize that you're talking to a girl who spent months hoping you'd drop by my job and awkwardly chat me up. It's definitely not too much."
"Am I really being awkward?"

She knows that Emma's probably feeling vulnerable right now but she can't help but laugh.

"Oh goodness, you have no idea dear. But don't worry," she steps a little closer, "I happen to think it's adorable."

"Ugh, shut up. Anyway, I only really came by to...to ask if you wanted to go on a date tonight?"

Her heart stops beating for a moment. She knows she should've seen this coming. Emma was agreeing to try. She was agreeing to making them an "us" but still she hadn't expected her to come around so fast.

But then again, she thinks back to when Emma had told her one night that she wasn't opposed to dating and had done so before. So really, this probably isn't new to her, she's just clearly a little rusty.

"Um yes! Absolutely. I'd love to go on a date!"

She can't keep the smile off her face now.

"Cool," Emma squeezes her hand back before letting go. "Alright, well, I'll let you work."

"Okay," she barely whispers back.

"Okay. I'll pick you up at your house at 6, okay?"

"Sure. Oh, and what should I wear?"

"Clothes, preferably the comfortable kind."

"Got it. Comfy clothes, I can do that."

"Good, then I'll see you tonight."

"Are you not picking August up?"

"Nah, I've gotta get ready. Plus, I want to kind of want the "haven't seen your face in a bit, picking you up" experience. It won't feel the same if I just saw you. The kid will be fine, Lilly will get him."

"Wow...if I didn't know any better, I'd think Emma Swan was a secret romantic."

Emma laughs and leans forward a little, not close enough to raise any suspicions but close enough that it feels like they're in their own intimate space.

"Well, what can I say? You make me want to be romantic."

She bites her lip, thinking of the songs she's had on repeat for over 24 hours.

"See you tonight babe."

And with that, Emma walks off, leaving her to her students that she's definitely been neglecting for the last few minutes.

It's going to be a long day and, if the throbbing between her legs is any indication, an even longer night.
"Wow…you really did mean casual…,"
She immediately feels overdressed in jeans and a tank top with a cardigan.
"I actually said comfortable, not casual. Sooo…"
"But sweats?"
"They're not sweats! They're joggers!" Emma tugs at her soccer pants, starting to look slightly self-conscious.
"That feels like the same thing!"
"It's not! It's not even the same material."
"Well, nice to know you're not taking me somewhere too nice! Thank goodness!" She rolls her eyes and steps out onto her stoop, before turning to lock her door.
"Don't be ridiculous, of course I'm taking you somewhere nice. I went all out for tonight."
"Well are you going to change?" She turns to her and they head down the steps towards Emma's mustang.
"Are you going to nag me all night?"
"Isn't that what girlfriends do? Nag?"
She doesn't mean to say it. She really doesn't think they're there yet, it just slipped out.
She immediately opens her mouth to apologize but as Emma turns back, passenger door opened wide for her, she doesn't look upset at all.
"I have no idea what girlfriends do," she smiles playfully. "But I'm sure you'll teach me."

The drive isn't too long and after about 20 minutes of small talk, they pull into a garage at a high-rise.
"Where are we?"
"I told you I was taking you to a quiet little place."
"Here?"
"Yes, here." Emma pulls to the doors and a gentleman who looks like a hotel door man comes around to open her door.
"Good evening Miss Swan," he greets.
"Hey Danny," she chirps back cheerfully and hands him the keys.
"Shall I help the lady, as well?"
"No thanks, I've got it!"
She see her pat Danny on the shoulder before running around to her side, offering her hand to help her out.
"M'lady."

"Thank you," she grabs her hand and laces their fingers together as they approach the double doors that are opened for them by two more doormen.

"Hey Arnold, Pat. Thanks so much."

"Of course Miss Swan, have a wonderful evening."

"Thanks, you too guys."

The casual conversation between them feels so quick and natural, which surprises her given how utterly nice this place is. She knows Emma's parents probably have quite a bit of money but Emma taking her to dinner at an upscale place sounds like the least Emma thing in the world.

"Come here often?"

"Well, I feel like you were trying to be funny but the joke's on you. I live here so yes, I do."

She stops walking abruptly and because their hands are still connected, Emma is forced to a halt as well.

"You brought me to your place?" She says quietly, not interested in causing a scene.

Emma cocks a half smile at her obvious trepidation, but she can tell that within that smile there is some hesitation, "Yeah, is...is that okay?"

"Why? I thought you said we were going on a date?" She realizes the way she's said it sounds like she's talking to her kindergarteners. But her tone is justified considering Emma had promised her a date. An actual, totally normal date. And yet...she had brought her home? To do what exactly? Was sex her obvious end-goal?

She tucks her hair behind her ear with her free hand, awaiting Emma's answer as skepticism begins creeping under her skin about Emma's intentions.

"Yeah, but I figured we've gone out and done the date thing. Dinners, a couple movies, so I thought we could switch it up. Just...come on Gina. You're ruining everything with your questions."

She rolls her eyes and Emma's response does nothing to quell the fear that this is all some sort of elaborate scheme to get her clothes off, but she feels a tug to her hand that's hard enough to get her moving towards the elevators again.

"This is such a nice place," she comments as they step into the glass elevators that provide a gorgeous city view.

"And this view...God, I'd ride the elevator all night just to see this view."

"Yeah," she sees Emma turning to look at the cityscape as well, but they're so close that she can tell Emma's gaze never makes it to the window, but instead it focuses on her and nothing else, causing her cheeks to heat.

"Yeah, the view is pretty breathtaking."

_Dear Jesus. At this rate, she's going to have no problem getting me naked._

Regina turns towards her and blushes. "Stop looking at me like that, dear."
"Like what?" Emma leans up against the glass, smiling easily.

"Like…I-I don't know really. No one's ever looked at me like that," she doesn't mean for it to sound so pathetic, but she can't exactly help it. It's the honest to God truth.

*He never looked at me like…like he could've done it for the rest of his life,* she muses.

She looks away though, not willing to say that out loud. She knows Emma is trying for more but she also knows that would have her running for the hills.

But Emma, of course, seems unfazed, only smiling wider.

"Good. Whatever this look is…" they both turn back towards the elevator doors as they come to a stop. "I don't want anyone giving to you but me."

Her eyebrows quirk at that. She should probably be affronted at the fact that Emma apparently wants no one else looking her way, and a small part of her is, but she also can't help but find it sweet.

Her goal was to keep Emma's focus on her and it appears to be working so she counts it as a small victory.

The doors open and she feels Emma's soft hand loosely grabbing hers, leading her down a long hallway, with art and abstract murals on the wall.

"The cool thing about this place is that the floors have themes, kinda. Like, on the third floor, their hallway is this incredible replica of a library, with books on shelves that have real literary titles. And the further you go down, there are books with pages open with like actual excerpts from the books. It's actually super cool. My best friend's girlfriend actually lives on the third floor too, she's a librarian so…good fit."

She just nods, not exactly sure what to say. She has a feeling that Emma's talking out of sheer nervousness, especially considering her last statement had gone entirely un-responded to.

"Wow, that is pretty cool. I would love to see that sometime, dear," she means it sincerely and squeezes Emma's hand to show that.

"Yeah, I'll take you down sometime." They come to a halt in front of 1420 and she watches as Emma fishes in her pocket to grab her wallet.

"So, what's the theme of this floor?"

"Ahh, I really think by the 14th floor," she pulls her key out, "they kind of just gave up and said 'fuck it' because the theme is just sort of artsy, eclectic, all over the place."

"Hmm, so good fit for you then."

"Ha…ha. Alright, here we go." Emma swipes her card and gives the door a firm push holding it open with her right hand and guiding Regina in with her left.

"Home sweet home."

She silently takes in her environment, walking in further to look around at the expansive and open layout.

If she thought the view in the elevator was something, it was nothing compared to the large wall to ceiling windows overlooking the city with a perfect view of the rapidly setting sun that casts a soft
orange glow on everything around her.

As she walks around the black leather couches in the living room, she glances around. There's a game controller on the glass table and a motorcycle magazine flipped open. But otherwise, everything to have been neatly, put away in its rightful place.

She runs her hands over the couch before taking a step up into what appears to be the dining room. There is a rectangular table that seems too big for just one person and fresh tulips as a centerpiece.

"Those are for you. All 24 of them. You can count them if you want."

Regina turns to her, surprised, having momentarily forgotten she's not alone.

"That's…that's alright, I believe you," she says it quietly because there's still some apprehension to believe her.

Of all of the things she pictured about Emma's life or her apartment, she didn't think this. It's a little sterile and plain and nothing about this place says Emma.

But if there's any skepticism in her voice, Emma ignores it and heads to the kitchen.

Because of the open layout, she can see Emma opening cabinets and the pantry and the refrigerator, clearly looking for something.

"Gina, you want a glass of wine?"

"Sure sure." She throws out as she heads over to the bookshelf to find standard books like To Kill A Mockingbird and the Odyssey. And then a large textbook at the bottom of the shelf labeled Introduction to Comparative Politics and another titled World Religions. She can't help but chuckle at the thought of Emma reading the odyssey, a book even Regina struggled with. All of this only fueling her suspicions.

"Alriiiight, here we go." Emma hands her a glass of red wine.

"For you," she hands over the glass.

"Thanks."

"So, may I propose a toast?" She gives her a small smile.

"Please do."

"To a wonderful first date. And many many more."

She holds out her glass and Emma softly clinks them together.

She takes a small sip before feeling eyes on her.

She looks up from her glass and confirms that Emma is staring down at her, a frown on her face.

"Okay, I feel like I have to ask…is there something wrong? Seriously, if bringing you to my place was too soon, just say so."

"No, no," she adamantly shakes her head because that's really not the problem.

The thought of seeing Emma's personal space excites her more than it should but…"I just…just
have a hard time believing this is your apartment. I mean, no offense but it's so neat and clean and...I don't know how someone who doesn't even work could afford something like this. And there are no pictures on the wall or anything. And it just seems so...unlike you. I mean, the Odyssey? Comparative politics?"

"So...what, you think I asked a friend to borrow his apartment to what exactly? Impress you?"

She can hear the incredulousness in Emma's voice with a tinge of irritation but it only makes her more defensive, not wanting to be made to feel like she's crazy.

"Well, I don't know! Did you?"

Emma throws her head back and laughs, clearly not taking too much offense after all.

"No! That's the dumbest plan ever! What am I supposed to do anytime you want to come over? Tell him to clear out and then race over here? And how am I supposed to tell you in 6 months I downgraded to some super shitty apartment?"

"I don't know Emma! People do crazy things to impress others!"

"Yeah, I know! I actually cleaned my house for you! Not even like had the lady come do it. I actually did it myself just so I could stand in front of you and honestly say I cleaned it myself." Emma rolls her eyes as if remembering how much of a pain in the ass it was to clean the whole place without help.

She takes another sip of wine and looks around again.

"So this is your house?"

"Yes, it's mine. Most of the furniture came with the place, I think to keep with the theme or whatever, but the bedroom stuff is all mine. Want to see?"

She narrows her eyes, feeling like that's an obvious trap.

"Maybe later."

Emma only lifts her hands in surrender, "Alright, later. So...you hungry?"

The change in topic is abrupt and it makes her wonder if Emma is dying to move on because she's guilty of hijacking someone else's apartment for the evening or if there really is just no merit to her claims.

"Starving actually," she retorts, working hard to convince herself that it's the latter.

"Great! Well, if you'll walk this way mademoiselle." She turns towards the kitchen and sets her glass on the marble island in the center of the square space.

"So, I was thinking pizza? Buuut, I know how much you like to eat healthy, so I picked up a few fresh ingredients so we could make them ourselves! Best of both worlds!"

Regina's smile widens as she considers that this isn't just a ploy to get her in her bed, but that Emma put actual thought into this evening.

"Wow, that sounds like fun! I haven't made pizza since I was a young girl," she claps her hands together, suddenly excited to cook with Emma, another first for them.
"Oh yeah? Cool, then this will be good. Let me just grab everything."

She watches as Emma bends over and leans down and reaches up to grab the necessary ingredients and can't help but admire how attractive she is. Of course, she knows she looks good naked but, even clothed in soccer pants and a sleeveless Nike t-shirt and barefeet she feels like the luckiest girl in the world that she gets to call Emma hers.

Although it's probably premature to think that way, she considers that this is probably a discussion they need to have. She had thought about her own girlfriend comment in the car during their few moments of silence. Emma hadn't reacted poorly, but she still didn't want to push it. She didn't want to do too much too fast.

She finally comes out of her own head when she notices Emma standing in front her, looking down.

"Uh, hi," she whispers lamely, unsure how long Emma's been standing there.

"Hi." She's so close that their breath entwines. "You okay?"

Without a response, Regina leans up to kiss her squarely on the mouth. Her arms wrap around Emma's neck as their heads turn to deepen the kiss.

After a full minute of exploring each other, Emma's hands roaming her body, almost too respectfully, she pulls away.

"Hmm, I see the thought of homemade pizza has put you in quite a mood," Emma whispers conspiratorially as they pull apart.

"Yes, that's exactly it." Regina rolls her eyes and pulls away slightly. "I don't know what it is about your lips, I just love kissing you."

Emma smiles widely and leans down to peck her lips once more.

"Same. Alright, come on, you're starving right?" She nods, she really is quite hungry.

"Then let's do this. Oh, you know what, let me set the mood."

She flicks on a few more lights and grabs her phone, putting their playlist on shuffle so that it can be heard throughout the entire kitchen and living room.

"Nice," Regina smirks.

She kisses Emma quickly on her cheek and then quickly gets to work opening packages and sorting the ingredients on the counter.

"So, how was your day?" She asks pulling her crust from the plastic wrap.

"Good, yours?"

"Just good?" She crinkles her nose a little having hoped for a little more.

"Uh, yeah? Just...good. How was your day?"

"Well, I mean, what did you do today?"

She pushes again, not sure why Emma's so hesitant to fill her in on their time apart.
"Uh, I cleaned all day. That's pretty much it. How was your day?"

"It was good," she considers just saying two can play that game but decides maybe Emma just wants her to go first or needs her to show her how it's done.

"The kids were a bit of a handful though. Usually they're pretty good during the week, it's Friday's you have to look out for. But I don't know, it's like they were all just so…whiny today! Except August of course!" she adds quickly, feeling weird complaining to Emma about her own family.

"You don't have to say that for my benefit, he's not my kid." Emma laughs as she takes the cap off of the pizza sauce.

"But isn't he a little?" It's something she's never really considered until now, that while Emma's parents seem to be away a fair amount of the time, there's just a 5 year old boy that someone has to take care of.

But Emma's face contorts at the thought, "No, he really isn't. Our mom maybe be gone half the time, but he's got Lilly. She's the one that watches him most days. I only do it when she can't."

"Well, I find it hard to believe that you don't see him often, you two seem close."

"I didn't say that. I see him all the time," Emma hands the sauce to her after pouring some onto her own crust.

"I was saying that he's not my kid. I don't know, I don't feel responsible for him or whatever." "He's your little brother…how do you not feel-," but Emma cuts her off, clearly regretting her choice of words.

"I don't mean that exactly. I just mean…I don't feel like his mom. I'm not anyone's parent. I watch him sometimes and we hang out a lot but if he's being at whiny at school, you can say that and I won't be offended. That's…all I meant."

She ends with a huff.

A long, considerably awkward, silence lingers between them and Regina isn't sure how to stop it from spreading like wild fire.

"It's alright dear, I get it. So, anyway, it was just a mess. And I really need to start setting up parent teacher conferences which means my days are about to get even busier."

When "Hmm," is all she gets from Emma in return, she stops sprinkling cheese to look over and to find Emma placing each pepperoni down carefully.

"Are you listening?"

Emma looks up and nods, reaching over Regina to grab the green pepper.

"Yup."

"Well then?"

"Well then…what?" Emma reaches for the knife, looking completely confused.

"Well, do you have anything to add?"
She doesn't look up from her quick cutting, "Uh..about your day? What would I add about your day?"

She rolls her eyes, wondering if Emma is actually as dumb as she sounds right now or if she's just that inept at conversation. "Well, I obviously don't mean that literally. I just mean…you know what, forget it."

She doesn't want to ruin tonight, their first official date, with a fight. So she reaches for more cheese and angrily sprinkles it over her pizza, but Emma must hear her irritated tone and stops chopping the pepper to look over at her.

"No, what? What would you like me to add?"

"It's nothing."

"Well, you're mad so it's obviously not nothing." She can practically feel Emma rolling her eyes and decides to give her the fight she's so obviously looking for.

"Well if you really want to know, I just…," she turns to face Emma completely. "After the day I've had, I'd like to hear that maybe tomorrow will be better or at least an acknowledgement of what I've said. 'Hmm' doesn't count as conversation about my day."

"But…I just really don't get why we have to talk about our day at all?"

She barely manages to hold in her scoff. Even after the day she's had, nothing has tested her patience quite like Emma has in the last two minutes. And her first instinct is to yell. Because it's the dumbest question she's ever heard and she works with 5 year olds.

But she supposes this is new to Emma. The fact that Emma has brought her to her house to make dinner and brought her flowers at work is proof that she's trying, not how well she asks follow up questions and so she decides to let her anger go.

And at least she's honest, she figures as she takes the cut up green peppers and places them on her own pizza.

"Because Emma, if we're going to do this, talking is a huge part of the deal. Just like you love getting to know me and asking me about my favorite flowers and foods, I like being able to come home and discuss my day with you, whether it was good or bad. And I would love to hear about your day. And even if you have the most boring day in the world, I still want to know about it."

She watches Emma nod, but she doesn't respond and she wonders if she's upset or just feeling chastised.

She suffers through a few more seconds of silence before she cleans her hands on a paper towel and reaches out for Emma, turning her by the hips so that they can face one another.

When Emma looks down at her, she can see that she doesn't seem upset at all and, in fact, she looks downright embarrassed. She's quickly coming to realize how sensitive Emma is about getting this right.

"Look I'm sorry that I'm not good with small talk. I'm not trying to make it seem like I don't care. I do care, I just…never know what to say."

She nods, understanding completely, "No, I get that and look…I don't want to fight with you about this, we're having a great night. But like we talked about the other night, I just want you to know
what I expect. Okay? I've been with guys who smile and nod when I talk but it's so obvious they're not listening. I don't want to talk at you, I just want to have a conversation, you know? And you can say whatever you want, there's no formula to this."

She knows it's a low blow, mentioning the other guys, but it seems like nothing spurs Emma to be better than the reminder of how inadequate her predecessors were. And, as expected, the look in her eyes morphs into sheer determination.

Emma nods as she leans down, kissing her softly. "Yeah, okay. I'm sorry then. If a conversation is what you want, I can definitely do that." She whispers against her lips and Regina can't stop herself from leaning in to steal another.

"You're forgiven," she lets the words fall right onto Emma's lips as she squeezes her waist and she can feel Emma smiling into their kiss.

"Thank god," she says, pulling away finally. "And, listen, I promise tonight with me will help you forget about your rough day, okay?"

Regina gives her a smirk, "Eh, if you say so."

"Oh, I can guarantee it. Alright, here take your disgusting green peppers."

"Thank you," she strategically places a few more peppers on her pizza and they work in relative silence, adding meats and veggies and more cheese to the pizzas before placing them in the oven.

"So, what now?"

"I actually have a fun game that I think you're going to like!"

"Is that so?" She dries her hands on kitchen cloth before giving Emma her full attention.

"Yes, but first let me top these off." She grabs the wine and fills both of their glasses higher than what's appropriate.

"Okay so," she starts heading to the living room and she eagerly follows, watching Emma grab two pens and paper off of the counter on the way.

"So Ruby, that's my best friend, she and I play this game all the time."

She sits on the couch and tosses one pen into Regina's lap.

"It's called truth or drink! Have you played?"

The way her eyes widen in horror at what's to come is probably an indication that she hasn't.

"Alriiightly, well this is going to be good then! So, it's super easy. You write questions, maybe 2 or 3 for now? Whatever you want and I have to answer them. I do the same for you. I'll ask you some questions that I've been curious about and then you'll answer. If you decide you don't want to answer, fine, but you have to down your glass to get out of it."

Her eyes dart over to her very full glass of red wine and she swallows nervously, just imagining how drunk she'll be if she has to chug a whole glass of wine.

"So…wanna play Gina?"

She considers it for a moment. She loves opening up to Emma and more than that, she loves Emma
opening up to her, so she can't imagine any cons to this.

"Yes, let's do it."

Emma rips off a piece of paper and hands her the rest of the notebook.

"Here, pen and paper. Let's do 3 questions."

"Thanks," she mumbles before quickly writing down the numbers one through three on the blank sheet.

There are so many things she wants to ask Emma, so many things she's been desperate to know that now, only choosing three seems so difficult.

As their playlist continues to play in the background, she finally narrows her questions down.

"Done?"

She nods and Emma lets out a deep breath before gesturing towards her. "Then ladies first."

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I appreciate your comments and kudos!

Until next time!
Chapter 15

There are so many things she wants to ask Emma, so many things she's been desperate to know that now, only choosing three seems so difficult.

As their playlist continues to play in the background, she finally narrows her questions down.

"Done?"

She nods and Emma lets out a deep breath before gesturing towards her. "Then ladies first."

She tucks her legs underneath her and chooses her easiest, softball question.

"How was it growing up in foster care?"

Emma rolls her eyes, but smiles. "If this is what you start with, I can't imagine these other questions. I feel like you're trying to get me drunk."

She laughs and leans back on the couch. "Come on, this is an easy one!"

"That's what worries me!" She playfully slaps Emma on the thigh and they both share a laugh before she starts again.

"Alright, uhh, well it was…not great. I mean, I think that for as awful as the system can be, I think there are a lot of nice families out there. It's just that…with my condition or whatever, there were medical costs, check-ups, specialists I had to see and…and a lot of parents didn't want to deal with that. So I got sent to some pretty shitty homes where they were obviously just interested in a check."

She listens quietly, watching Emma pick at the miniscule pieces of lint on the couch.

"It was hard growing up in those sorts of environments. They were abusive." Her eyes widen and she can't stop the sharp intake of breath, but Emma quickly reassures her, "No no, it was mostly verbal."

She's only slightly comforted but the word "mostly" doesn't sneak past her.

"They just seemed to get pleasure out of tearing us down. Telling us no one wanted us or that we would never have families. Shit like that."

Emma makes eye contact with her finally and her heart breaks at the thought of a small, child-sized Emma Swan being told that no one loved her.
"And on top of that, I obviously was a pretty easy target, already feeling out of place in my own body. So...yeah."

"How...sorry, am I allowed a follow up?" Emma smiles gently and shrugs her shoulders.

"So, how did you end up with Ingrid?"

She watches as Emma's face goes from sullen to silly in a matter of seconds.

"If you can believe it, I stole money from her."

She throws her body forward, "What?!"

"Yes, it was awful! It's still like the most shameful thing I've done to this day so please don't tell anyone but yeah. I'd been hanging out outside of a grocery store one day, just kinda not wanting to go home and she was busy talking on the phone or something. She was trying to get her keys out of her pocket and her credit card just fell right out. I picked it up and honestly, I had every intention of giving it back but then I just...I don't know, I thought to myself the world never paid me any favors, never gave me anything. So I just assumed I had to take it."

She doesn't say anything, but instead she reaches out and laces their fingers together, feeling nothing but sympathy.

"It seemed like a great plan, but then I ended up in jail and all of a sudden, it didn't seem so great anymore. And she could've pressed charges and left me there, but instead she took me to lunch. And we just talked. I mean, this complete stranger and she bought me a decent meal and pair of jeans that weren't ripped because she said the weather was getting too cold for ripped clothes. She gave me her number and address and told me to call if I ever needed anything and I still remember thinking that I didn't need anything or anyone so I never called."

"Then...how did you end up in her care?"

"She found me," Emma says with a smile that looks like she's barely holding back her tears. "On Christmas Day, she found me at the house I was staying in. She brought me a gift. A coat. She said she was worried I'd freeze to death in my ripped jeans and couldn't let the holidays pass without making sure I was okay."

"She sounds so kind," she says, voicing her thoughts aloud.

Emma nods, "It was the first Christmas gift I'd ever been given in my entire life. It was the most thoughtful thing anyone had ever done for me. She sat with me, with her heels and fancy clothes on in that dirty, shitty house, for hours. She asked me about school and my eating habits and homework and when she asked me if I'd like to stay with her for a few days, it took everything I had in me to say yes. I had so much pride, I had been looking out for myself so long that I thought I was the only person that would ever care about me. But when she told me we'd look out for each other, I believed her. She just looked like...she looked like she had a good heart."

One tear falls down Emma's cheek and she rubs at it furiously, throwing her head against the back of the couch.

"Ughh, alright, my turn."

She understand Emma wanting to change topics but she also wants her to know that she isn't judging her for loving her mother. "It's okay to get emotional Emma, really. She sounds like such a wonderful woman, I hope to meet her one day. I mean, I saw her on the first day of school but I
haven't had much interaction with her since."

She leans forward to play with Emma's hair, knowing how much she enjoys it though she'd probably never say so.

"Yeah, she's really going to like you. You'll have a lot in common."

She smiles broadly, already excited to meet the woman that unknowingly brought Emma to her.

"Alright baby, your turn."

"Now I want to change mine to something that will tear you apart emotionally."

"Nooo," she whines, "give me an easy one."

Emma looks down at her paper, lips pursed.

"Alright…well, it's not exactly a hard one or anything. Well, I don't know, maybe a little hard for me to hear. But…well, whatever, I'll just ask."

Now her curiosity is peaked.

"Did you see anybody else while we were apart?"

She swallows deeply and considers downing her glass just to avoid saying yes.

She knows that she's done nothing wrong, but she really only hesitates because she doesn't know what a yes will do to Emma. Will it anger her? Discourage her? And truthfully it had only been 2 dates. She had slept with him once and then effectively ended it by refusing his calls.

That couldn't really be considered "seeing" anyone, right? She rationalizes.

But at the same time, did she really want to lie? Did she really have the gall to punish Emma for her dishonesty when she couldn't even tell the truth herself?

And it's not like she can be mad, she slept with half the city while we were apart.

"I'll take your silence as a yes," Emma says quietly.

"Yeah, I went on a couple of dates." Her heart pounds in her chest as she refuses to make eye contact.

"Yeah, well, that's fair right?"

She nods a little and just prays that they can move on without broaching the topic of sex.

"Did you…did you sleep with him?"

Fuck, she rarely curses outside of the bedroom but she can't stop the word from nearly flying out of her mouth.

"Yeah, I did. But just once."

Emma nods and subtly inches away from her as they sit in complete silence, avoiding each other's gaze.

Emma sighs and when she finally does look back at her, she looks downright pitiful. "Alright, your
"Well, did you…want to talk about it? Ask a follow up?"

Emma's face morphs into one of pure disgust. "No, I don't. It's your turn."

She stares at her a moment longer, trying to decide if she should push harder or leave it be.

But by the look on Emma's face, it's obvious that this is the last thing she wants to talk about.

"Alright uh…," she looks down at her list and sees her second question is about how many women Emma's slept with. She wrote it down out of genuine curiosity, but asking it now would feel like a cruel reminder that Emma has no right to be angry. So instead, she skips to question three and decides to think up a random third before it's her turn again.

"Uh, alright, I've always wondered why you never stay the night at my place? Even when you fall asleep, you always wake up in the night and leave. Why?"

It's still a pretty sensitive question because it was how things unraveled between them in the first place but she is curious and she figures, there's no better time.

Her curiosity, and frustration, only heightens when she sees Emma reach for her glass and finish it off, swallowing all of it in less than 10 seconds.

Emma pulls the glass from her lips and looks back down at her paper, not even willing to look her in the eye, which only makes her more interested in the reasoning behind her late night escapes.

"Seriously?!"

"Alright, my turn. What was your ex-boyfriend like? The fuck face? What's the story with him?"

As a matter of principle, partly because she knows it will frustrate the hell out of Emma and partly out of spite, she reaches for her own glass and downs it, possibly making better time than Emma.

She's the lightest of light weights, so she'll surely regret this in less than an hour or so but to see Emma roll her eyes in anger is so satisfying that she can't bring herself to care about the God-awful wine hangover she'll probably have if they keep this up.

"Fine, be that way. But-"

Whatever unimpressive threat is on Emma's lips dies at the sound of the kitchen timer going off, alerting them that their pizzas are done.

"I'll get it," Emma says, hopping up to go get the food.

She's tempted to take a look at her questions as inspiration for her own third question but she manages to refrain.

"Alright, gross veggie pizza for you and a delicious, everything pizza for me!"

Emma says returning with two plates and what's left of the bottle of red wine. She hands her her plate, with six uneven slices already cut for her and plops back down on the couch.

"Alright, since you cheated last round, it's your turn. Last question though so make it count."

She takes a bite of pizza, chewing slowly while in thought.
What does she want to know about Emma Swan? She needs a question that is deep enough to give her insight into her life but not too much that she passes.

"Okay, question three. And I'm going to preface this by saying that nothing you share with me will leave this room. If you want it to be between us, I can absolutely respect that. But, I was curious as to how you ended up with your…," she gestures with her slice of pizza towards Emma's crotch and Emma nearly spits out her food in laughter.

"Why did you have to make that so awkward?"

She laughs along, realizing that after saying the dirtiest things to Emma during sex, this is a weird time to become sensitive about her genitalia.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to, I just don't know how sensitive you are about it, outside of the bedroom."

Emma rolls her eyes and smirks. "Well, don't you worry, I'm not at all embarrassed about it. I mean, don't get me wrong, I used to be. It's what kept me from being adopted for so long and I was really bitter about it. But Ingrid was a huge part in helping me realize that it's the way I was born and I can't help that."

"So, you were born with it?" She leans over to pour more wine in her glass, but still listening with rapt attention.

"Yeah, I was. Doctors originally thought I was a baby boy. It was what my parents had been told. The only thing I know about them is that I guess they didn't want a girl. At all. Because after the first few post-natal check-ups, I guess they realized something was off. My testosterone was below average and my estrogen levels were through the roof for a boy. Doctors ran a couple DNA tests, thinking it was Klinefelter's, which is like two x chromosomes and one y. They told my parents that they wanted to keep me a little longer, run a few more tests. They said that was fine, made it seem like they were all for figuring it out. Left the hospital that day and never came back. So, child welfare came to get me and at that point, there was no figuring it out. The system wasn't going to pay for it so I lived a good chunk of my life thinking I was some kind of freak. I've learned to live with it and it's obviously been fine, but still…I always felt like if I had been born normally, they would've kept me. Or…even if they hadn't, someone would've wanted me."

The sadness and sympathy she feels is unparalleled.

She scoots closer, moving both of their plates to the table before placing her hands on Emma's face so that they can look each other in the eyes.

"Hey, listen to me, someone does want you. Ingrid wanted you and now I want you. Okay?"

Emma stares back at her and it feels like her soul is being penetrated.

"I don't care what anyone says, what you've done in the past. I want you Emma Swan. Do you hear me?"

"Yeah, I hear you," Emma whispers, her voice a mixture of confusion and wonder.

She holds the eye contact, desperate to show Emma how serious she is about her. About them.

Looking at Emma now she knows she's doomed. Staring into her gorgeous green eyes, that always look like they're working hard to memorize every inch of her, she can see something that no one else can.
She sees such hope and promise.

And she knows she's not far from falling in love. She started to develop strong feelings even when they were just having sex, but watching Emma open up right before her eyes has only made things worse. And the urge to say it out loud, to express these feelings verbally becomes overwhelming. So to prevent herself from saying something she's sure that Emma isn't ready to hear, she molds their mouths together.

Their kiss is tender at first, but it escalates quickly and becomes hard and desperate for more.

Before either of them can consider the fact that their dinner is sitting, half eaten, she crawls closer to straddle Emma's waist.

Hands grip at her thighs, their firm grip claiming possession, pulling her closer.

Emma's mouth opens wider and she wastes no time slipping her tongue into her mouth, their mouths melding together perfectly.

She has always been described as put together. She has always been referred to as the one in control at all times. Of herself, of the situations around her. But she can't control this and she certainly can't control herself.

"Fuuuuck," she groans loudly as Emma's lips part from hers and find the most sensitive spot on her neck, licking and sucking any inch of skin she can reach.

"Is it awful that I want you? Like, fuck, I know we're trying to take it slow but…"

Emma whispers it into her ear while squeezing her ass and all she can do is grind her hips hard into Emma's growing and obvious erection.

"Ughhh," she lets out a moan mixed with a groan. "No, I want you too."

"Yeah?" Emma pulls back a bit and she instinctively moves closer, unwilling to let their bodies separate for even a moment.

"Do you want to?"

Emma nods quickly and without any warning, she reaffirms her grip on her legs and stands, lifting both of them off the couch.

The sheer show of strength soaks her panties and she wraps her arms around Emma's neck, leaning in to nibble on her ear.

"Fuck, you gotta stop. Let me at least…," but Emma's sentence is interrupted by her own moan as she licks the shell of her ear.

She has to give Emma some credit though, she manages to carry her all the way to the bed despite Regina's mouth and hands kissing and clutching her desperately.

Instead of dropping her on the bed and immediately attacking her like Emma has in the past, she's laid down gently on Emma's California king bed and Emma crawls on top of her, parting her legs so that she can lay between them with her hands resting on either side of her head.

She instinctively wraps one leg around her waist and Emma's hand comes up to hold it there while she leans down to connect their lips again.
But instead of the heated, fast-paced kiss she's expecting, Emma seems to be in no rush. Their lips brush languidly, Emma letting out what feels like a sigh of relief as she does. Emma's lips are so impossibly soft that she can never get enough of kissing her but after going this long without feeling Emma naked against her, the last thing she wants to do is go slow.

"Take off your shirt baby."

Emma, as if under a spell, is quick to comply. She scoots away and sits up on her knees pulling her shirt over her head and shaking out her curls.

She was already wet but the sight of Emma before her in a black sports bra and sweats, with the waistband of her Calvin Klein boxers visible makes her even more ready.

"No bra either."

Emma smirks as she takes off the bra without comment.

She leans up on her elbows, one hand reaching out and tugging the waistband of Emma's pants before releasing it. It snaps and Emma's bites her lip. She can tell that she's eager to remove them but she awaits instruction.

"I could do without these on."

Emma doesn't hesitate to climb off the bed momentarily to pull them off and when all she's left in is her tight underwear, barely restraining her erection, she beckons her back onto the bed with the crook of her finger.

"If I didn't know any better, I'd think you had a control kink."

She rolls her eyes as Emma finds her way back between her legs and even through her jeans she can feel how much Emma wants her. She looks up at her, seeing the pure, unadulterated adoration in her eyes and it makes her feel like the luckiest girl. And for a moment, she forgets to think about how many girls may have seen that same look. How many girls have laid in this same bed and watched Emma undress just like that.

"You're finally mine."

Emma smiles down at her timidly. "All yours. I feel like as much as I tried to fight it…," Emma pulls back and she prays she'll finish that thought but she has no such luck.

"May I take this off?" Emma asks politely, gesturing at her whole body. The quick transition surprises her but she nods regardless, more than ready to get than to feel their warm skin together.

Of all the things she's missed, this was one of the worst parts about being apart: being close and feeling their naked bodies together.

Emma is quick and effortless in her undressing, taking care to kiss every inch of skin as she reveals it and all she can do is throw her head back in pleasure as Emma kisses her through her panties.

"Take them off, Emma, please. Rip them off. I don't care. Just…off!"

She thrusts her hips up towards Emma's mouth, needing so much more right now.
Emma again complies easily, tucking her fingers into the waistband and pulling them down gently, unveiling her most private place.

Though she really didn't plan to have sex tonight, she's glad she at least showered and trimmed a little, so that there's just a light, well-maintained patch of hair covering her.

Emma stares again, hunger in her eyes, before laying down on top of her again.

"Ahhhh," she moans out at the sensation of Emma's hard dick pressed against her naked sex. "Emma please, I'm so ready."

"Actually, I want to try something new. Well…I don't know if it's new for you but it'd….it'd be new for us," Emma says nervously playing with her dark hair that contrasts perfectly with the white of the sheets beneath her.

She's never once seen Emma get nervous during sex and she can't help but get nervous thinking about what new thing she could possibly want to do.

"Okay," she says but her voice is painfully hesitant, not sure what Emma has in mind.

She leans down to kiss her chin. "You can say no. But…I want to please you, pleasure you. And since we both know you have an interest in control," she rolls her eyes but doesn't even try to deny it. The thought of Emma hanging on her every word and following her every instruction turns her on more than she'll admit out loud. "I thought you might like to ride me."

Her eyebrows crinkle. "I've already-"

"No, I mean I want you to ride my face."

Her eyes widen as she realizes what Emma's saying. "Isn't that-that seems dangerous?"

Emma laughs and gives up on holding herself. She gently flips over so that she's lying next to her instead.

"It's not, I promise. I mean, it's a little hard to breath but it's no worse than when I go down on you and you wrap your legs around me and squeeze when you cum," Emma runs her fingers through her hair soothingly. "Plus, it'll allow you to control the pace. You move as fast or as slow as you want. And if you don't like it, you don't have to do anything but stop."

She does like the thought of controlling the pace. She looks up at the ceiling and mulls it over.

"You've done this before?" She doesn't turn to see Emma's face, she's not asking to embarrass her.

"I have."

"And did you enjoy it?"

"Not…particularly. But it's not about me enjoying it, that's the whole point."

She sits up to climb back on top of Emma, legs on either side of her, "But it's not fun for me if you don't enjoy it."

"Baby, don't worry about me. I wouldn't have offered if I didn't want you to."

She looks down at her skeptically. "Look, I think me not enjoying it had more to do with who I was with because despite less than positive experiences, I want to do this with you. Not to brag or…upset
you but I have so many experiences. There aren't too many things sexually that I haven't explored in some way. But...I want to rewrite all of that. I want to re-do it all with you."

She wants that too. She wants every sexual memory Emma's ever had to be replaced with nothing but Regina and though she's not at all confident about shoving her vagina in Emma's face, she's willing to try anything once.

"Let's do it," she whispers, shaking her head at herself all the while.

But she immediately decides that Emma's wide grin is worth it as she watches her scoot upwards towards the plush pillows and headboard.

"Alexa, play my hot jams playlist," Emma says into the air and a female voice replies.

"Playing your hot jams playlist."

As usual, a song she's never heard begins and Emma grins again as she scoots back onto her pillow, apparently getting comfortable.

"Did you just turn on your sex playlist?"

"Nooo, I turned on our sex playlist."

She's skeptical about that, but she's too horny to fight.

She sees Emma get comfortable on the pillows and she grows eager to ride her but what surprises her more is how much she's missed Emma's body. Sure, she's eager to feel Emma's lips on her but even more than that right now, she just can't wait to have her pulsing dick in her mouth.

She blushes at her own thought but runs her hands over Emma's smooth, boxer-clad thighs.

"Ugh, you're so hot."

Emma says nothing, but reaches her hand into her own underwear, pulling herself out.

"We missed you," the sight of Emma stroking her dick while saying that she's been missed is more than enough. She leans down and kisses the head with an open mouth.

"Shit."

She's more than ready and wastes no time, lowering her mouth onto Emma's rock hard member.

"Ahhh," Emma thrusts her hips upward and, though it's been about over a month since she's done this, she remembers to relax her throat as she feels the first three inches intrude her mouth.

Her head bobs up and down, pace matching the beat of the song, slow and steady at some points and speeding up in others.

"Use your hand for me?" Emma asks breathlessly.

Just like Emma wasted no time in undressing, she wastes no time in wrapping her hand around the large dick, stroking it anywhere her mouth is not enveloping.

The wet, noisy sounds of her giving Emma what she hopes is the best blowjob she's ever had aren't lost on either of them and seems to only turn them each on a little more.
Emma thrusts harder as Regina gags a little but never pulls away, confident that she can take all of her.

"Ah, fuck. Yes baby. Shit, that mouth is perfect."

The words motivate her and she sucks and slurps even harder, determined to bring Emma to climax. But Emma seems to have her own ideas as she pushes her away gently. "Come here."

She runs her tongue over Emma's cock a few more times, swirling her tongue around the tip, mostly just to see her face of pure pleasure as she does, then kisses her way up her body.

She kisses every part of Emma's defined yet feminine six pack and sucks on each nipple, giving them their due attention.

"I can't wait to taste you. I bet you're dripping."

She grinds her naked lips against Emma's torso and they both let out a moan.

"Babe, don't tease."

Emma reaches out for her thighs and urges her closer.

Trying to keep her nervousness at bay, she puts one knee on either side of Emma's head but doesn't lower herself quite yet.

"Let me know if I hurt you okay. Just…push me away if you want."

Emma shakes her head and she feels her breath hitting her outer lips as she speaks.

"Fuck no, I want you as close as possible," and without warning, Emma licks a long strip up her slit.

She immediately buckles and relaxes into Emma's perfect mouth that licks and sucks, eating her out like it's a last meal.

"Fuu-," she can't even finish that thought because Emma is squeezing her ass and pulling her even closer.

The feeling of Emma's tongue, hot and wet, licking her is unbelievable and despite the intimacy of the position, her nervousness vanishes in lieu of absolute pleasure.

"So fucking wet," Emma mumbles around her.

It's true, she's dripping and as she looks down to find Emma's eyes closed but sucking her clit hungrily, she nearly cums. She can't help it anymore, she wants more. Needs it.

She grinds her hips down a little more, pressing herself into Emma's hot, perfect mouth.

She moans loader than she ever has and when Emma does the same and even inserts her tongue into her, she has to grip the headboard.

She's shaking, so so close to orgasming but she tries so hard to avoid it. Instead, she focuses on the endless cycle of pleasure.

She grinds faster. Emma squeezes her ass harder. She flutters around Emma's mouth. Emma licks and sucks and blows on her pussy until she can't contain the tension coiling at the base of her spine.
Her stomach tightens, her knuckles become white from how hard she grips the headboard. Emma pulls back a little, teasing her. She chases after her mouth and grinds faster, making Emma squeeze her ass harder and the cycle continues on for as long as Regina can stand it.

"Ah ah, yes. Baby yes, that's so good."

"You like that Gina? You like fucking my face."

Her voice is muffled because, ever the diligent lover, she never ceases her ministrations.

"Yessssss, right there." Emma finally finds a spot that drives her insane and to keep her there, she reaches down and tangles fingers through curly blonde hair, holding her in place.

"Ugh, fuck yes. Pull my hair."

Her eyebrows raise, not realizing Emma also liked having her hair pulled.

She yanks a little harder, pulling her head up a little while almost bouncing her soaked pussy onto Emma's lips.

"I'm going to cum. I can't-"

Emma, never one to disappoint, wraps her lips around her clit and applies a slow suction and that's all it takes.

But this impending orgasm feels so unlike the others. As she continues to grind, head thrown back unable to believe how good this feels, she can feel it all gushing out of her.

Her knees quiver and her body shakes uncontrollably. Strong hands find their way to her back and scrap their nails down her skin, hard.

"Ahhhhh, FUCK. YESSSSS! keep going. Oh my god. SHIT. Em, yes."

Emma continues to suck and lick her slowly until she can't take any more. She finally has to push her head away and pull up a bit. She's never cum so hard in her life and as she looks down at Emma's soaked chin, she can say she's never cum so much either.

Emma's hard breathing reminds her that she's still hovering and, with some difficulty, she swings her leg over to fall back onto what she plans to establish as her side of the bed.

Now that she's lying next to her, she can see that Emma's hair is in absolute disarray, her pupils are wide and concentrated on nothing but her.

Cum is still visible on her lips, shining in the light and the urge to kiss her is too overwhelming.

She leans in to capture her lips and tastes herself, a flavor she's become much more comfortable with since meeting Emma.

"So?" Emma asks when they breathlessly pull away from each other.

She can't help but grin, still not having recovered from the incredible pleasure.

"Oh. My. God. Too good."

"I told you," Emma smirks and leans up on one elbow, using her free hand to push some hair from her eyes.
"You're so fucking beautiful when you cum."

Her eyes close, delighting in the compliment and the feeling of fingers in her hair.

They lay in silence for a minute or two before she feels lips on her chin.

"So. So. Beautiful." Each word is punctuated with a kiss, each one becoming more forward than the last.

Emma moves from her chin to her neck to her chest.

Lips and teeth eagerly kiss and nip at her skin, displaying extra attention to her breasts. Her tongue flicks over them quickly and even though she feels so tired after the best orgasm she's ever had, her body is begging for more.

She watches as Emma drops little butterfly kisses from the valley of her breasts all the way down to her bellybutton, swirling her tongue around for a moment before continuing her quest downward.

When she reaches the area where hips meet thighs, she hears Emma sigh. "God, this body. You don't even know."

"Know what?" She whispers, staring down at her. She feels much less self-conscious about baring herself now and she allows Emma her time to just stare at her most intimate parts, seemingly in awe.

"You don't even know how sexy you are. How fucking bad I want you."

"Then show me," she issues the challenge and spreads her legs a little to accentuate her point.

Emma licks her slit once, then twice, preparing her for something she's been ready for all day.

She grabs her own breasts, squeezing and pulling in an effort to distract herself from the pleasure.

"Ahhh, Emma please. I need you."

"Where?"

"Inside." Her response is immediate and Emma wastes no time.

She lifts herself and scoots forward on the bed, reaching into the drawer.

She watches as Emma pulls out the strip of condoms from an unnecessarily large box.

Where does one even find 100 pack Trojan condoms?

"That's an awfully large box," she can't help but muse aloud.

"Yeahhh," she can tell by Emma's tone that she's afraid of what that statement means so she conspicuously avoids it.

She watches Emma tear the condom with her teeth and then makes a rash decision.

"You know, now that we're dating...as long as we're just seeing each other, I don't see a reason for those."

Emma freezes and she bites her lip, "Uh, well-"

"It's just that I'm on birth control already and...," she props herself up a bit and reaches for Emma's
rock hard dick. She boldly rubs it up and down her lips, moistening the head, reminding both of them how good it felt to exist without any barriers between them.

Emma immediately leans forward, unable to fight the feeling of warmth and wetness.

"Ahh, fucking hell."

She lets out a sigh of relief when Emma simply tosses the packet to the floor and requires no other explanation. She doesn't want to get into her own securities right now. She doesn't want to talk about how uncomfortable it makes her to see that Emma keeps never-ending boxes of condoms close by. She doesn't want to discuss how it makes her feel like every other girl in the world when there's latex between them.

She is unintentionally close to letting her own worries ruin the mood but Emma leans down, laying her body over hers perfectly. She doesn't rest her weight, but instead she fits into the crevices of Regina's body and it isn't lost on her how well they mesh together.

Emma leans down to kiss her, slow and surely before pulling away and readjusting their bodies so that her head is rubbing against her clit in the most delicious way.

Her back arches involuntarily and it only brings her body closer to Emma's.

"Mmm, put it in. Please."

"Beg me. Tell me how badly you want it."

She pouts, but opens her eyes to look at her. "I want it so badly baby. I've needed it for so long."

And it's true, she's been desperate for Emma since she asked her not to call again that early Thursday morning that now feels like forever ago.

She bucks her hip as Emma guides just the tip in, seemingly testing the waters.

"Ahhh," she shakes, still more sensitive from her previous orgasm than she realized.

Emma takes it back out and rubs her dick purposefully against her soaking wet pussy lips before slipping back in.

"Jesus fucking Christ," Emma exclaims as she slips half of her length in with no trouble. It's been awhile so she appreciates Emma taking it slow to start. After a full minute, she pushes herself in to the hilt and stills.

"Oh my god, I could cum right now."

The thought of Emma not only feeling so good from just being inside that she could cum, but her also releasing that load inside of her makes her flutter and her walls involuntarily flinch.

"Ugh, yeah."

They lay for another full minute, just enjoying the feeling of being full and fully surrounded by each other.

But then the song changes and it seems to spur something in Emma. It's a relatively slow song which doesn't seem like it will work well with Emma's normally furious pace but instead she steadies herself on her hands and slowly grinds upward, pushing in as far as she can.
"Mmm, fuck." She's been deep before, but never has Emma gone slow enough for her to feel it all, every single pulsing inch. All she can do is reach out for the sheets around her, balling them up in her hands just to have a way to expel the pain.

She groans as Emma pulls back out, nearly slipping out of her probably because of the juices flowing freely from both of them.

She feels Emma enter her slowly again, and she can feel herself stretching again, but the pain is so good.

She spreads her legs wider, desperate for more of what Emma is offering.

"Fuck yes baby. More, more." She pants out but when Emma keeps up her slow pace, she becomes desperate. She pulls on her hips, urging her closer, forcing her deeper.

"Ugh, Em, yes. Right there. So deep."

"That's right baby," Emma has fallen to her elbows now so that their slick, sweaty bodies are touching and grazing with her push and pull.

"I'm going so deep. Stretching you so good."

"Feels sooo good baby. Keep going," she's never been the begging type, or the type to say much at all during sex, but she can't help but vocalize just how incredible this all feels.

"Gina," it sounds almost like a helpless whimper as Emma attempts to push herself inside even further as if close is not close enough.

She has never felt anything this good, not even when she and Emma had sex before.

But as Emma turns into the crook of her neck to place open mouth kisses and whispered compliments on her neck, she realizes this isn't like any sex she's ever had before because all of those other times, it was just sex.

This is making love, she thinks to herself as her nails scratch at the blonde's bare back.

Even the pain she feels is perfect, from the way Emma penetrates her deep to the way she sucks and bites down on her bottom lip. There's so much to feel that the pleasure quickly becomes too much and her stomach tightens.

"Ughh, fuck. You feel so good around me. You have no idea how good."

She arches up, so desperate for more. "Harder baby. Fuck me harder."

Emma complies, moving at the same slow pace but pounding harder and even circling her hips so that every single part of her can feel Emma's thick shaft.

"Is that good? What you wanted?"

Emma's lips are right near her ear, panting harshly as she speaks.

And because she's so close, because their bodies are molded together in a way that makes it impossible to tell where one ends and the other begins, she can tell that Emma's tone isn't dirty at all.

It's curious. It's unsure. It's a question about Regina's satisfaction not a rhetorical question built to boost Emma's ego.
"Yes, baby you fuck me so well."

"Did he fuck you like this?"

The question is soft and she opens her eyes to find Emma staring down at her, still thrusting deeply but less aggressively for a moment. She looks insecure as ever and she wraps her hands around her neck to pull them as close as possible while able to maintain eye contact so that Emma knows that she's being 100% honest.

"No, no one ever has," she says simply and that seems to sate Emma as she leans down for a hot, open-mouthed kiss.

They don't speak any more of it and instead let their tongues do the talking, dueling for a moment. Their soft moans the only sounds filling the air.

Emma's forcing herself so deep that each inward thrust, she can feel her soft balls slapping against her skin. The air is hot and thick and smells of sex and she knows she cannot last much longer.

Her walls flex involuntarily and she watches as Emma screws her eyes shut.

"Too fucking tight. I've gotta cum."

She brings her hands up into Emma's hair, weaving her fingers between blond strands and pulling her down for a bruising kiss.

"I want to cum with you."

"Should I…ugh fuck, should I pull out?"

Emma breathes out while nipping at her jaw.

She shakes her head, knowing that's the last thing she wants. "No, cum inside me. You always cum so much, I want to feel all of it."

Emma lets out a sigh of pleasure and renews her thrusts, grinding and circling to hit every angle. And when she reaches down to pull Regina's thigh up a little, giving her even deeper access, they both fall over the edge and within moments they're both coming undone.

She feels her whole body shake, especially her thighs as she soaks the sheets and Emma cock with her cum.

"Ahhhh, fucking hell yes! So so good!"

"Jesus Christ, you're so tight like this. I'm cumming, I'm cumm—"

That thought is cut short by Emma's own orgasm that shoots into her like a rocket. She can feel her cock thrusting as deep as she can go and Regina grabs her ass and arches her back so that she can feel it all. The cum spurts into her, painting her tight walls white and her climax only continues to wrack her body as she feels Emma's sperm pooling inside of her.

They stay pressed together as Emma's cock continues to shoot out rope after rope of milky white cum and for the first time since she suggested they forgo the condom, she considers the consequences.

But not the negatives of unprotected sex because for a fleeting moment she has an awful thought that maybe this is how it happens. Maybe this is how they end up with their sweet little boy on the beach.
And she can't bring herself to regret a damn thing.

The thought of Emma impregnating her right now makes her even hotter, her pussy clenching around Emma's still rock hard dick.

Emma finally shoots the last of her cum and kisses a trail from her neck to her breasts, sucking on them gently as they both come down from their high.

"Holy shit," Emma says, hot breath hitting her burning skin. "That was…"

She can only nod, knowing that there are no words to describe just how intense that was.

She brings her hands up to wipe the slick hair from her sweaty forehead, suddenly feeling so heavy and tired. She feels more than sees Emma gently pull out of her and she's pleasantly surprised to find that she doesn't feel dirty or sticky the way she thought she would after Emma released inside of her. But she also instantly misses the contact and desires nothing more than to have Emma that close again.

"Come here baby."

Eyes still closed, she reaches out for her lover.

Emma kisses her way all the way back up her body before leaning down to kiss her on the corner on her mouth.

"You're so fucking beautiful, especially when you cum for me. Around me."

She smiles lazily, "You've said that twice already tonight. Is there anything else you like about me?"

"Too many things to list," Emma responds reverently.

"Good answer," she lifts her head a few inches to peck Emma's lips softly before falling back on to the pillow.

"So sleepy," she mumbles and she opens her arms, inviting Emma to cuddle against her.

She expects a no. She expects a scoff or smart ass remark but she's speechless when Emma grabs at the crumpled sheets around them and eases herself into Regina's arm, with the sheet now covering both of their hips.

"Only because that was the world's greatest orgasm," Emma justifies as she lays her head on her shoulder and throws one leg over hers.

Regina nods and kisses her forehead whispering, "Of course baby."

"Just for a minute. Not all night though."

She nods again, giving her one more kiss. "Whatever you say, sweetheart."

She smiles as watches Emma's eyelids close and her breathing slows.

And the smile never leaves her face as she too succumbs to sleep.

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Thanks for all the comments and kudos!
Until next time!
She rolls over and collides into the smell of Emma. It surrounds her so heavily that it wakes her. She opens her eyes while reaching out for the blonde and realizes immediately that Emma is no longer in bed with her. There’s no clock or way to tell the time, but she knows that it must be the middle of the night. Her body by no means feels well-rested so she couldn’t have been asleep for very long.

She sits up and turns on the bed-side lamp, filling the room with a small bit of light. Her clothes are scattered all over so she opts instead to rip the sheet from the bed to cover herself. After last night, she knows there's no reason for modesty but it still seems weird to walk around someone's house naked. Even if that someone is Emma.

She heads out to the living room, the crumbled white sheets dragging behind her like a wedding train.

It seems like every single light is on in the house but she sees no sign of Emma.

She heads back towards the hallway and tentatively begins opening doors. The first to the left of Emma's room seems to be a guest bathroom but the door furthest down the hall to the right is cracked just slightly and if she listens carefully, she can hear a small noise every few seconds.

She approaches and says her name, just so it doesn't appear as though she's snooping. "Emma?"

She is met with more grunts and for a moment, she wonders if Emma is doing something more private than she thought.

"Em?" She pushes the door open a little and is surprised to see Emma pulling herself up on a piece of gym equipment she's completely unfamiliar with.

Her mouth goes dry and starts to water all at once. Emma's mentioned several times that she likes to work out or go to the gym, but seeing Emma now in a pair of track shorts and a sports bra muscles flexing easily is turning her on like crazy.

She has her headphones in and so Regina steps inside and speaks a little louder.

"Emma?"

Emma's head turns immediately and she slowly lowers her body and drops down from the bar.

She pulls out her headphones and approaches quickly, "Hey. You okay babe?"
She smiles at the care in her voice, "I'm fine. Just woke up and you were gone."

Emma nods solemnly, "Couldn't sleep."

"How is that possible? We just had—well, I don't want to speak for you, but I just had the best sex of my life and all I want to do is sleep." She chuckles to take some of the edge off of her question but by the look on Emma's face, she knows exactly what Regina is asking.

It's the same question she always asks. Why can't you stay? Why can't you sleep through the night lying next to me?

Emma wipes her hand over her sweaty forehead and stares up at the ceiling.

"Yeah, I'm gonna go shower okay?"

Her heart drops at that. After last night, she felt like they had made some real progress, especially after their intense love making and Emma allowing herself to be held.

But given their perfect evening just a few hours ago, she doesn't want to push. Emma has already opened up to her more than she could've imagined in one night and so she has the right to decline her questions now.

"Yeah, okay."

Emma leans down and gives her a quick kiss on the cheek before leaving the room. She looks around one more time, taking in the mirror on the wall and the equipment lying around before exiting.

It's nearly an hour before Emma emerges again. After last night she realizes a shower is exactly what she needed. She needed the weight of their love making off of her skin. She needed those memories to be washed away. And for a moment, she forgets about the intensity of their night together.

But when she sees Regina out on the balcony, in a sweater that she's sure belongs to her, the memories come flooding back in.

She craves to be inside of her again. Not to fuck, but just to be close. She yearns to be held in her slender but safe arms.

She sighs. This woman is going to be the death of me.

She knows that she's hurt her. Unintentionally as always but still. Regina is trying, trying so hard to meet Emma half way. She tries not to push too hard or do too much and Emma appreciates it more than she can express. And yet she meets Regina's effort with a brick wall.

She's only going to allow herself to keep running into those same walls for so long, she tells herself.

She knows that as patient as Regina is being, it won't last forever.

She lets out another deep sigh before sliding the door open, stepping outside.

She fears her avoidance of Regina's question hurt her more than she originally thought because Regina doesn't even turn to acknowledge her.

Emma leans against the railing staring out at the ever-bustling city, standing beside her in silence as long as she can take it before she looks over at her, determined to fix what she broke.
"When I was 9, I stayed with the Harrisons. Looking back, it was like an abusive relationship. When it was good, it was great. But when it was bad, it was unbearable."

Regina looks over at her and Emma doesn't want to see any pity in her eyes, so she turns back to the cityscape.

"They had 4 foster kids. Two of which were older than me. But one kid…," she breathes out deeply, having only shared this with one other person on the planet, her mother.

"One kid, Silas, was 5. He looked up to me and I always tried so hard to shield him from their punishment. Every time he spilled something, broke something, wet the bed, anything…I always took the blame. Anything so he could be spared from them."

"What...what did they do?"

She swallows. "They had a basement. It was cold and wet and I was 9. It was the most terrifying thing in their house to me and they fucking knew it. They used...used to lock me down there and turn the lights out."

She feels Regina stiffen next to her. "I was fucking 9 and terrified of floor boards and pipes creaking, everything. And every single sound was magnified because I couldn't see."

She runs her hands through her hair, feeling a panic attack creeping up on her.

She takes deep breathes, focuses on breathing, focuses on being in this moment, not that one.

She's safe, reminds herself. When she finally feels it, she keeps going, grateful for Regina's silence as she tries to keep her shit together.

"They'd keep me down there all night and sometimes longer...if it was a weekend."

She turns to Regina so that she can understand her seriousness and sincerity. "That's why I leave. That's why I wake up in the night. It's not you. It's me. Or...rather them."

"I haven't slept in complete darkness since then. I just can't. My mom used to stay with me until I fell asleep but I'd always wake up a few hours later screaming and crying."

Emma can tell that her eyes are watering and it looks as though Regina might cry but she manages to hold back the tears. She wants to cry herself but she figures if Regina can be strong, so can she.

She inhales through her nose and exhales through her mouth before pressing on.

"It was like, even though I was somewhere new, the darkness took me back to that same fucking basement. I always feel like I can't escape it, no matter how far I run. I thought I could...", a lone tear falls from her cheek. "I thought I could escape it but I feel like the darkness lives inside of me now. And no matter where I go or what I do, I can't..."

She's not ugly crying but the tears are steadily pouring down her cheeks now. She wonders what portion of the tears are from reliving the memories and which ones are from embarrassment for looking so damn weak.

She never finishes her thought. Not that she knows what she wants to say anyway.

The reality is that she doesn't want to call this love. She doesn't want to label this. And she definitely doesn't want to say that she sees a more promising future with Regina than she sees for just herself.
But despite wanting to keep this thing between them simple, she has to admit that there's a connection between them. She may not admit to that possibility of a future for them aloud, but that doesn't mean she doesn't daydream about it.

She desperately wants to hold onto Regina and she doesn't want to scare her away with all this emotional baggage.

They stand in silence for a few minutes, both having turned back to look at the city lights contrasting against the dark night sky.

She wants to know what's on Regina's mind and she's just about to ask but Regina manages to speak first.

"I don't believe that there's darkness in you."

She says it softly but with so much conviction that Emma has to swallow the lump in her throat before responding.

"You don't know me very well."

"I want to."

A part of her is just relieved to hear that. She is relieved to get this out. It feels like a weight lifted and a burden shifted from her shoulders but she also feels the fear that surrounded her when she moved in with Ingrid. She fears that those who said they could handle her demons actually can't.

She shakes her head. "And what happens when you realize that I'm right? That I've got shadows from my past that follow me everywhere I go?"

They still don't make eye contact but Regina's hand comes to softly rest on top of hers and she takes the liberty of lacing them together loosely.

"I don't mind your shadows Emma," she whispers, "Because believe it or not…they look a lot like mine."

She scoffs involuntarily, "I doubt that."

"Emma, I realize our situations seem vastly different but…my mother was emotionally abusive to me. Always berating me in public and private for never living up to her unreasonably high expectations. My father, the only real family I had, died a few years ago and I haven't spoken to my mother since. Shortly after he died, I needed someone, anyone. So I latched onto the first guy that came along and called it love. I hugged him and kissed him like I loved him all in the hopes that maybe I'd finally be worth something to someone. That maybe he'd buy it and love me back. But he didn't. And…and sometimes, when I'm alone-in the dark- I remember his passive aggressive comments towards me. Why can't you go out like other girls? Why can't you put on something a little sexier? So and so's girlfriend does such and such every night for him. Anything he could think of to complain about, he did. Sometimes late at night, I remember him calling around 9 or 10 to tell me he was working late. But I could hear the women in the background. I could smell the smoke and liquor on his skin when he got home. And still I stayed. Because I had my own issues that refused to let me leave him. And it took losing him…and finding you, to realize that while I still bear the scars from that relationship, I'm healing them day by day. With you."

She whispers the end but the air around them is silent and Emma hears it.

She hears it and simultaneously realizes that that's what she wants it for herself. She wants Regina to
heal her scars and chase away her demons.

She doesn't know how to verbalize it as well as Regina but she remembers a conversation she had with her therapist, Dr. Hopper, years ago when Ingrid first brought her home.

*How are you feeling today Emma?*

*She shrugs, still in the defiant 'I don't need therapy' phase.*

*Alright, how about this, if you had one word to describe where you are right now, what would it be?*

*That intrigues her.*

*Where I'm at right now? Like in your office?*

*No, I mean, where you are in general. In life? What do you feel like today?*

*She shakes her head, refusing to make eye contact. Already feeling like she's failed him.*

*I don't know the one word for how I feel today.*

*You know, sometimes emotions have a way of attaching to one another. Sad and happy latch onto each other. Scared and safe become one entity.*

*She nods subconsciously, feeling just that. So happy to be safe with Ingrid but so afraid to be in yet another home that she doesn't know.*

*Tell you what Emma, when you find yourself feeling many things all at once, name them all. Separate each emotion and name it. And ask yourself why that emotion exists among all the others and then determine if it really belongs.*

*It sounded so silly at the time but it's how she's managed to get through tough days and nightmarish nights.*

*So do the same thing now, Emma. Separate all your feelings and tell her about each one.*

*"I want that too." She rolls her eyes at herself immediately, realizing the silence has probably stretched on too long for Regina to connect their thoughts.*

*"I mean…I want to heal my scars too. With you."*

*It takes so much out of her to say it but she chances a glance over at Regina to gauge her reaction. She's still looking forward, but smiling slightly. Emma takes that smile as a sign to continue.*

*"I'm scared that you'll get to know me and you won't like what you see."*

*"Me too."*

*"I'm scared that you'll realize you don't want to deal with my issues."*

*"So am I."*

*The interruptions would be annoying if she didn't desperately need the reassurance that she's not the only one drowning over here.*

*"And more than anything, I'm so fucking scared of being with you because…I'm afraid of finding
out that this could work. That we might be just right for each other. Because that's one step closer to something I'm not ready for."

Regina finally turns towards her again and she reciprocates, standing awkwardly for a moment before Regina steps forward and wraps her arms around Emma's waist. Laying her head on her chest, just about her breasts. She's not sure if Regina's silence stems from shock at her last admissions or because she can't relate to that particular feeling.

"Don't worry Emma. We can take a million baby steps to the wedding altar. I don't mind."

She freezes and Regina instantly shakes against her in laughter. "I'm kidding dear."

She hardly finds the joke funny but she smiles at Regina's ability to lighten the mood and wraps her arms around Regina's shoulders regardless.

"A huge part of me is scared," she continues, swaying them gently in the night, "But also I'm excited because…I've never felt anything like this. You make it easy. At first I was scared that it was too easy, but now it feels natural. I like it. But liking it, liking you, makes me nervous. Because I don't want to mess it up."

Regina squeezes tighter. "Then don't."

"Easier said than done."

"No, if you're about to do something you feel in your heart might mess it up…don't do it."

"And if my heart isn't sure what to do?"

"I think it'll know."

Emma nods. She thinks she's probably right.

Her heart had told her time and time again after their…breakup(?)...that she shouldn't be sleeping with those other women. She had a feeling deep down that it wouldn't satisfy the need she had. Her heart had tried to tell her. But she had ignored the nagging feeling and done it anyway, feeling more and more like shit after each and every time until eventually her heart led her back to Regina's door that day.

"I'm going to try really hard for you."

"I know. And I'm going to do the same for you."

"You don't have to change a thing. You're perfect," falls from her lips effortlessly as she leans down to kiss the top of her head.

"No I'm not. I've got things I can work on."

"I can't think of a single thing I would change about you. Smart, sexy and pussy is on point."

She feels Regina pull back slightly so they can look at each other, "Sometimes I feel like I'm dating a frat boy," she says with a playful eye roll.

"Ohhh baby. Just you wait until my 4th of July party. Nothing but beer and barbeque." She pulls Regina back into her, desperate to have her as close as possible.

She knows she isn't the only one yearning for contact as she feels Regina cling tighter, running her
fingertips up her spine.

"Why do I get the feeling that you own several sleeveless American flag tees?"

"Because you probably saw them while you were digging around my closest for clothes to wear."

She pulls at her own sweater to emphasize her point and Regina blushes sheepishly.

"I hope it's okay. I wanted to check out the view but it was way too cold in just those sheets."

"Of course," she pulls away just slightly to lean down for a kiss. "What's mine is yours," she mumbles, their mouths still pressed together.

Regina repositions her hands so they play gently with the baby hairs at her neck, a sensitive spot for her and pulls her down closer for another kiss, more heated than the first.

She moans into her mouth and they both open their mouths simultaneously to allow the other entrance. Their tongues brush gently before Regina pulls back and shivers.

She's not sure if it's from the kiss or the cold but she decides to err on the side of caution. "It's getting chilly. We should head back in." She says as she runs her hands up and down Regina's arms in an attempt to warm her.

"Yeah, plus I have work in the morning."

Emma nods, agreeing but already thinking of ways to get her to stay in the morning.

"Will you be able to get some sleep?"

She has to think about that one. Usually she wakes up around 2 or 3 and just stays up, but she doubts it's even 2am yet. "Maybe? But it doesn't matter, I'll lay with you either way."

She runs a hand through Regina's hair and watches as her eyes flutter closed.

"Sleepy?"

"Very."

"Come on, let's get to bed."

"Emmmmmaaa," she's never heard Regina whine outside of sex and her heart flutters at just how adorable her sleepy pouting is.

"What babe?"

"Carry me?"

From any other girl, this would be a whiney and ridiculous request but, for Regina, she's all too happy to comply.

She places one more chaste kiss on her lips before gripping Regina's thighs, her arms coming up to wrap around Emma's neck again.

"Up we go," she mumbles as she hoists her up, Regina's legs wrapping around her waist.

She's slightly heavier now that she's resting all of her dead weight on Emma, but she doesn't mind at
all. She manages to slide the patio door open and closed with one hand and they head to the room in silence.

When she tries to set Regina down on her side of the bed, however, she's met with resistance.

"Let go Gina. Lay down."

Regina merely shakes her head, still latching on tightly and she realizes this is just a habit of sleepy Regina. She becomes clingy and she kinda secretly loves it.

"Ugh. Alright, you win my little koala."

She knows that if any of her friends were here, they'd probably gag at this scene. But when it's just the two of them, she feels no embarrassment. Only pure affection and adoration for the body sealed against hers.

With slight difficulty, she lays them both down on the bed and only then does Regina loosen her grip so that she can get comfortable under the sheets before making her way back to Emma.

They fall into an effortless position with Regina's leg draped across her leg and her arm across Emma waist. She wraps an arm around Regina's shoulders to keep her close in the night and their hands meet on her stomach to lace together.

"Do you need the lights out to fall asleep Gina?"

Regina shakes her head immediately, "No, leave on as many as you'd like. I'll be fine."

She nods, grateful for her understanding.

They lay in silence for a solid ten minutes and just when Emma's sure that she's fallen asleep, Regina's head moves just so, so that they can look at each other.

"You never did ask me your third question love."

The sleepy nickname catches her off guard and makes her heart skip a beat.

She remembers her original third question, it was about the best sex Regina had ever had. She had written it down mostly for an ego-boost, knowing she was likely the best partner the brunette had been with in her slightly longer life span.

But after everything outside and the mind-blowing sex that was so much more intense than anything she's ever experienced, she knows exactly what she wants to ask.

"Do you see us together in the future? Like in 5 years?"

It's risky. She knows it. She knows what she wants to hear but she's terrified of the actual answer.

She's holding her breath but she doesn't have to sweat it out long because Regina nods firmly against her chest.

"I don't want to scare you but…yeah, I do."

"Really?" She breathes out, able to exhale a sigh of relief.

"Really. I know things started out weird and rocky but I think we're building something beautiful
"Me too." She whispers, still in disbelief that Regina sees a future with her.

Because of her own upbringing, switching homes and families often, she's never thought about her own life more than a year ahead of time so to know that they're both looking so far ahead and seeing the same thing...it means everything to her now.

"Do you want kids one day?"

"I-," She takes a moment to consider that. Does she want kids?

*If they could all be as cool as August, then definitely.*

"I guess so? But it's not really in my five year plan. Maybe 7? Or 10? I just feel like I'm still a kid, you know?"

"I understand completely," Regina assures her but she can't help but pick up on some subtle disappointment in her tone and she feels the need to clarify.

"But yeah, I'm pretty sure I want them. I'm assuming you do too?"

"I do. Two. A boy and a girl. I was pretty lonely as a kid, being an only child so I'd want my son or daughter to have someone to play with and talk to. But I don't think I could handle more than two."

She closes her eyes and smiles at the thought of a little boy or girl with thick brown hair and big brown eyes running around barefoot.

"Two is good. Then you're not outnumbered."

"Exactly."

She can't stop herself from indulging now that they've opened up this fantasy land with children that look like Regina but act so like Emma. "House in the city?"

"I'd probably want to live in a suburb honestly. I love the city but I want the kids to have a backyard."

"Agreed. I've never seen myself as the suburban soccer mom and Stepford wife but still, I want the kids to have a safe place to play in like a quiet little neighborhood."

Regina shifts against her so that her chin is resting just above her breast and they're making eye-contact.

"Married?" She asks hesitantly probably because she knows how Emma feels about marriage.

*But you're the one who mentioned being a wife...*she shakes her own damn head at herself.

"Probably not. But...happy nonetheless. And super committed. Like joint bank account committed."

A light laughter pours from Regina's lips and she feels less shitty about herself in an instant.

"Oooh, you've got big plans for us I see."

"Huge plans," she laughs along. "Like Disney cruises with the kids and fancy dinners with all of our mutual friends."
"But they'll all be married. They'll ask us every month when we're going to finally make this thing official."

"Then we'll show them our bank statement so they can see how serious we are. Maybe even do a home remodel and add a pool to the backyard just to prove that we're in it to win it. And when one couple inevitably calls it quits, we'll still be us. Happy and in love because there's none of that pressure to get it 100% right."

Regina stares at her silently for a minute and she fears that this touchy topic may start an argument, but instead she lays her head back down.

"You're probably right. And everyone will be jealous, asking how we do it."

"We'll be the epitome of relationship goals."

"There will be a screenplay written about our epic love story."

"It'll be called The Princess & The Swan."

"Wait...what? Why would that be the title?"

"Well, obviously I'm the swan...and you're the pillow princess. Thus, the princess and the swan."

"I beg your pardon? I am no pillow princess!"

She laughs at the indignation rolling off of her. "Uh Gina...yeah, you kinda are."

She scoffs, "I am not. And if it was true, which I'm not saying it is, but if it was...I wouldn't be a lowly princess. I would be a goddamn pillow queen."

She smirks at the thought, finding Regina in a tight old-fashioned corset barking orders at her incredibly sexy.

"Alright, fair enough. So The Queen and the Swan then?"

They both grimace, silently acknowledging that it doesn't roll off the tongue like the other title.

"Or the Queen's Swan?"

"I feel like that's a very misleading title. It sounds like a children's movie. And there's going to be way too much sex for this to be considered appropriate for young audiences."

"What? Emma, your title was an exact replica of a children's movie, the Princess & the Frog."

Regina untangles their hands to flick her on the stomach. "No wonder it sounded so good. Damn."

They sit in silence for a few minutes, both obviously mulling it over.

"The Queen and her Swan?"

"The Queen's Swan?"

"We already said that."

"Right sorry."
"It's cool."

"Swans and Queens?"

"Sounds like cops and robbers."

"Or chutes and ladders."

"Or a weird game of chess."

"What about The Timeless Tale of the Swan & her queen?"

"Ha! What next, the Swan and Queen Chronicles?"

"Or…maybe just Swan Queen?"

"Oooooh, Swan Queen sounds so fancy. I love it. That's the one."

"You think?"

"Absolutely babe. Swan Queen. There's a real mystery behind it, like you have to see it to really understand it."

"Sure, sure. Just like us." Regina chuckles as she settles in deeper to her side. "Okay, now that we've established our movie title, I'm going back to sleep."

She turns to kiss her forehead and breathe in her apple shampoo before saying goodnight.

"Goodnight Em. Try to get some sleep baby."

Oddly enough, there's just something about the warmth of Regina's hand in hers and the peaceful feeling of her lover's heartbeat against her own chest that has her falling asleep before she can even reciprocate and wish her sweet dreams.

But behind closed eye lids she sees Regina and a two-story suburban home with 2 dogs and 2 kids and a fish that the entire family neglects and her dreams have never been sweeter.

####

**Until next time!**
Chapter 17

She wakes the next morning before Emma but still wrapped tight in her embrace. The lights in the room are off, which makes her wonder just how late Emma stayed up. She suspects that it must have been late enough for the sun to start to rise in order for her to feel comfortable turning them out.

She lays there for a few minutes, just enjoying the feeling of waking up with Emma. It thrills her, makes her heart beat twice as fast and she's worried that she might wake her with its frantic pace.

Eventually the need to use the restroom wins out and she shimmies out of her arms, quickly and quietly.

Emma doesn't move an inch.

After using the restroom, she heads for her purse out in the dining room.

6:23.

She's so grateful that her body is used to being up at 6 now because she had completely forgotten to set an alarm.

Emma actually lives a little closer to the school than she does so she thinks the can get away with leaving by 7:35.

*I think I'll shower and then treat her to breakfast in bed,* she smiles to herself as she heads into the guest bathroom not wanting to wake her peacefully sleeping girlfriend.

She beams even more at the thought.

Emma is her girlfriend. Though she hasn't said as much, it's pretty obvious that they're there.

Even still though, there's no way she's going to use the g-word before Emma does.

Emma's shower is spacious and as she runs her hands over body, she shivers, looking forward to the day that they have sex in this bathroom because knowing Emma they undoubtedly will.

She takes her time washing and when she steps out she realizes there's a small dilemma.

She has no clean clothes.

Tiptoeing into the room, she inspects the drawers looking for something to put on. She grabs a pair of Calvin Klein underwear and a band tee and tosses them on, figuring Emma likely won't mind.

She's awoken by…music? The emptiness of the bed? She's not 100% sure which it is but as she rolls over, she's disappointed that she doesn't get to wake up next to Regina. It was something she was, admittedly, looking forward to when she had fallen asleep just a few hours before.

"Alexa, what time is it?"

"Good morning. It's 7:03 am."

She nods and sits up. She hears it now. The light music, the pots and pans clanking gently.
She gets up and brushes her teeth before making her way to the kitchen, anxious to see Regina.

She's stopped dead in her tracks though when she sees Regina, back to her, swaying gently to the Spanish music playing quietly through her phone.

She watches her pour pancake batter and whisk eggs and can't help but feel a sort of… pride she's never felt before.

_She's all mine_, she thinks to herself as she approaches quietly.

She stands behind Regina for a full minute before she finally turns around and throws her spatula out of fear.

"EMMA!"

"Hi," she smirks for a moment before bending down to pick up the utensil.

"My god, you scared me."

"I can see that," she tosses the spatula in the sink and pulls another from the drawer before handing it back to her.

"You're up early."

"My body missed your body," she says it casually with a shrug but they both know that after last night, it holds a little more weight.

Regina comes closer so that they're standing almost chest to chest and reaches up to peck her on the lips.

"I wanted to surprise you."

"With what?"

"Breakfast in bed. You ruined it."

"I think you in my fucking underwear is more than enough surprises for one morning," she pulls at the waistband much like Regina did the night before.

She had already awoken with her usual morning semi, but Regina in tight baby blue boxers and a shirt that barely fits makes her want to fuck her right there on the kitchen counter.

"I had to shower but didn't have-"

She doesn't let her finish the thought before pulling her in for a kiss, the lips languidly sliding against one another, neither of them in any real rush.

Regina is the first to pull away and she follows like a whipped puppy, eager for more.

"No no," both hands come to push against her chest, "I have to finish breakfast."

Her first response is about to be, 'I don't eat breakfast.' Because it's true. She doesn't. _Mostly because I'm never up in time for breakfast food._

But Regina's worked hard it seems to do something nice for her so she says nothing, just throws up
two hands in surrender and backs away to grab some juice from the refrigerator.

"So what are your plans for the day?"

She gulps down her orange juice before responding.

"I'm assuming I'm taking you to work and then I'll probably hit the gym with a friend of mine, get some shit done around here and then like, if you want I can pick you and August up after school?"

Regina's back is to her so she can't see exactly how she feels about the plan, but she nods in agreeance.

"Sounds great," she says distractedly, putting pancakes and eggs on plates.

She brings them over to the table and Emma follows with forks.

"You want something to drink? Juice? Coffee?"

"No, I'm fine. I had a cup of coffee already."

She nods and takes a seat and for a minute they eat in awkward silence.

*This is what I mean…I just have no clue what to say to her,* she thinks as she pulls her pancake apart.

"You said you're going to the gym? Again?"

Emma nods emphatically, excited to have something to talk about.

"Yeah, I mean, earlier was more weightlifting to tire me out. I usually do that early but then go with a friend to run a couple miles and do weights where you need a spotter."

"Wow, no wonder you lift me with no problem."

She smirks at that while taking a sip of juice.

"Yeah, I took up running in high school to keep me out of trouble. Then I just kept running and then started doing weightlifting a couple of years ago."

"Well that's great dear. So…who's…who's your work out buddy?"

Her smile widens at Regina's poor attempt at nonchalance. "Why? You jealous?"

Regina rolls her eyes but the slight blush to her cheeks gives her away entirely. "Not at all. Merely curious about who your friends are."

"Oh I'm suuure," she draws out. "But honestly, no need to worry. Neal is an old friend and, unless he wants to take it up the ass, we're just friends."

"Oh, Emma, come on." She points to her plate and Emma would feel bad if the thought of her and Neal having sex weren't so damn funny.

*He'd probably just say "no homo" the entire time.*

She chuckles to herself as she finishes her eggs.

She waits for Regina to finish her food before standing up to take their plates.
"Thanks," Regina mumbles before standing as well.

"No thank you, breakfast was great."

Regina just nods it off, clearly finding it to be no trouble at all.

"I know you said what's mine is yours but we're about to test that theory."

She quirks an eyebrow as she adds the dishes to the dishwasher. "Why? What's up?"

"I wasn't expecting to be seduced last night, Miss Swan. Which means now I need clothes for work."

She smiles and approaches Regina, grasping for her as soon as she's within reach and pulling her close.

"Call me Miss Swan again and you'll find yourself late for work."

Regina throws her head back in laughter. "Don't tell me, you have a teacher/student fantasy that you see coming to life now."

"Oh, absolutely. I'm finding myself very happy that you teach kindergartners instead of college kids. Your students would've been so into you."

"Well, no need to worry. There's only one student I've got my eye on."

The deep eye contact and fuck me eyes aren't doing anything to relieve her boner right now.

"Yeah? Which one is that?"

"The worst one in the class of course. She's never on time for class. She never does the reading or turns in her assignments when they're due. I…I feel like I'm constantly riding her-"

"-about turning in work and being responsible."

The evil smirk on her face says Regina knows exactly what she's doing right now and Emma sees a perfect opportunity to get her to stay.

"Well, maybe you should teach her a lesson then."

She reaches down to grip Regina's ass and she yelps a little.

"Yeah, I guess I could do that."

Regina's hands travel down to her tented boxers and runs over her dick lightly with her fingertips.

"Ahh shit," she gasps, needing more friction as soon as possible.

"She's just so hard…to discipline. She doesn't respect authority at all."

Her lips turn up at the suggestive talk.

"Oh yeah? Maybe you should whip her. Maybe that would help."

She's given up on being stoic about this. Her head is buried in Regina's neck, and she periodically moans in between kissing softly all of her most sensitive spots.
"Ahhh, I don't know. You see Miss Swan has a d that I just can't raise any higher…"

"Fuuuuck. Yeah, I don't think that's true."

She says it, but she honestly doesn't think her erection could be any harder than it is right now.

That is, until Regina's hand slips into her shorts and grabs her firmly.

"Ohhh, fuuuuck."

"It is. And she really needs to get behind me…"

Before she comes in her own pants, she decides that two can play this game.

She clings to Regina's hips and turns her quickly so that her hard on is pressed up against Regina's backside.

"Yeah, and do what Ms. Mills?" She runs her hands up to her tits and squeezes them harshly, causing Regina to let out a moan that again almost makes her cream her underwear.

"She needs to get behind me and my efforts to help her pass so that she can graduate. That's all I was going to say."

"Well, maybe there's a way she can earn some extra credit?"

Her hand trails down to the underwear Regina had chosen from her collection and she slides them easily in to find Regina's pussy soaked.

"She's willing to go the extra mile. Just tell her what to do."

Regina's hand finds its way on top of hers and guides her between slick folds.

"Ahh, well….I just need her to push herself a little harder."

She presses into Regina's body until they're up against the island in the center of the kitchen, Regina clutching at the counter and Emma's one hand rubbing her clit while the other kneads an ample breast.

As instructed, sort of, she applies a little more pressure and watches as Regina comes apart before her very eyes, falling back into her with her head thrown back in absolute pleasure.

"And then what?"

"Then, I need her to insert herself…into class conversations."

She knows Regina is more than wet enough and so she enters her with two fingers, with no problem.

"Ugh, fuck Em."

"Have I earned my A yet Ms. Mills?"

"So close. God, so close."

She pumps her fingers harder, rubbing her own throbbing cock against Regina's ass for any kind of relief she can get.

After only a minute, she decides she needs to be inside of her so she works to finish her off quickly.
She flicks her clit with her thumb and pumps deeper and finally she curls her fingers just right and when Regina reaches around to grab at her neck, nails digging in deep, she knows she's been forced to succumb to her own demise.

Regina shakes and quivers and she holds her steady while doing her best not to cum.

"Ahhhh, yes. Yes, keep going."

She pumps long, thin fingers twice, three times more, helping Regina ride her wave before her hands are being held still by Regina's.

"Stop stop stop baby. Jesus, Miss Swan."

She quivers a few more times, clearly experiencing post-orgasmic aftershocks before turning in her arms.

She watches as Regina pulls Emma's hands from her shorts and slowly pulls them up to her own lips.

"You always look so excited to taste me. I admit, I'm a bit curious."

Holy fuck, don't do it. Don't do it. Don't you fucking lick my fi-.

But the opportunity to finish that thought never comes because within moments Regina is sucking harshly, but slowly, on her fingers, licking off every trace of her own essence.

And in that same moment, with her forehead pressed against Regina's...she cums. Hard.

It wracks her body like a seizure and she's sure she probably looks so fucking stupid, cumming in her own pants like she's 15 years old again.

But if Regina thinks less of her for it, it doesn't show by the look in her eyes.

They're pitch black and her pupils are wide with wonder as they make eye contact, riding the highs of their own orgasms together.

Regina is the first to attack, pulling her down for a sexually charged kiss. There's nothing gentle about it, tongues and teeth clashing in an effort to be infinitely closer.

"That was sooo fucking sexy," she mumbles against her lips as she wraps her hands around Regina's waist, resting on her ass.

"I swear, you barely touch me and I cum for you." Regina rests her head against her collarbone and she kisses her head softly.

"Um, same," she says with some embarrassment. She's never been a one-pump chump, even during her first time, so the fact that she came from just watching Regina orgasm and then lick the juices from her fingers is a sort of new low.

"Yeah, I can tell. Looks like you came a lot."

They both look down to see a huge wet stain through her tight underwear and she knows if she doesn't wash them immediately, they're going to stain like this.

"Ugh, I...I need a shower. Wanna join?"
Regina sighs and pulls away, shaking her head. "No, I can't or we'll never leave."

"Is that so bad?"

"Yes, Emma. We have to leave in...ugh, 18 minutes. Hurry, go shower."

"But you could always call in! We could stay here. Lay around. Just talk."

She throws in talking as a viable option knowing just how much Regina loves to do that, hoping it will be the selling point but she's disappointed by another head shake.

"No baby. I can't. Now seriously, go get dressed or I'm going to have to take your car."

Now that motivates her. She really cares about Regina and would do a lot to see her smile but no one, absolutely no one, drives her baby.

"Alright, fuck. Let me...," she points down at the mess that's starting to dry against her thigh. "Yeah, alright. I'll be ready in 15."

"You better be," Regina says firmly, slapping her ass before she walks away.

"Soo, I'll see you later then?"

"Definitely."

She leans over to give Emma what's supposed to be a quick peck but it, of course, turns into a quick make out session.

"Baby, I have to go."

"You don't."

"I do."

"But..."

She has a feeling that she knows what Emma wants to say but she's too shy. Despite hours of progress and the most romantic love making, she's reminded that Emma is still taking baby steps.

"I'm going to miss you too, Em."

Emma looks away and sighs. "Yeah, but I'm going to miss you more I think."

She squeezes Emma's thigh and gives her one more kiss on the cheek. "Just stay busy, have a good day and I'll see you in just 5 hours!"

Emma nods and kisses the top of her hand before unlocking the doors and letting her out.

She steps out of the car, lined up in the row of parents also dropping off their kids and she can already feel eyes on her.

This is not at all her usual outfit. She usually prefers knee-length dresses or skirt suits but given the limited business attire in Emma's closet, she was forced to make something of nothing.

She had borrowed a pair of blank skinny jeans Emma had deemed too big and a white button up. She had pulled the jeans up to make them high wasted, tucked in the shirt and borrowed a pair of
black booties from a separate closet, specifically for shoes.

And right now, as she strutted her way into the school, she had to admit she looked damn good.

Naturally, she had been cautious at first but Emma had assured her she looked sexy but professional and urged her to remember she had a girlfriend waiting for her after school.

"So don't let any middle aged dads sweet talk you, kay?"

She had laughed at the time, thinking there was no way she would garner that much attention but apparently she looked as good as Emma claimed because every father turned their heads to look.

She hurries into the building and heads straight for her class to prepare for the day. She doesn't have playground duty this morning but she still has a few items to put out on the kid's desks before they arrive.

She makes it to her class safely without any incidents and starts her day in a better mood than she has in months and she really can't tell if it's the orgasm or if waking up with Emma Swan really is just that good.

"Okay, Em, what the actual fuck?"

He had just requested a break and they had safely perched the 150 pound bar back on its stand.

Neal sits up wiping sweat from his brow.

"What?"

"You just smiled through 4 whole reps. What the fuck has got you so damn happy?"

She rolls her eyes at him. "Nothing."

"Bullshit."

She huffs and looks around for their next workout task.

She settles on a low row and heads that way, fully expecting Neal to follow and continue to nag.

"Seriously, what's with the face?"

"I just had a great night last night, that's all."

"Ah, well fuck, why didn't you just say so? That's totally fair. Good pussy would have me smiling too."

She cringes a little at the thought of Neal talking about Regina like that, but she knows she can't correct him. She'll only get more shit for that.

Neal, one of her three closest friends, has always been her confidant about girls and sex.

He originally had a crush on her when they met senior year of high school. He was the first boy that had ever paid attention to her and that thrilled her in a way, but after going on one date together, she realized she wasn't into him. And when he kissed her at the end of the night, she knew for a fact she wasn't into guys at all. Information that hadn't surprised her therapist one bit given her 'history with men in previous homes'.
When she tried to break things off with him, he had been so desperate for an explanation for his hurt ego. She had told him that she didn't think she was into guys and while he was in the middle of trying to convince her that she couldn't know that after one date, she blurted out they couldn't have sex anyway, knowing that's probably what he was after in the end.

He looked disgusted and asked if she was waiting for marriage or something and so she had come clean about her condition. Neal was a nice enough guy but she wasn't desperate for his friendship so if he judged her, she wouldn't have cared much. And if he told the whole school, well then so be it. It was 4 months until graduation and she was certain there was nothing some high school kids could throw at her that she hadn't heard before.

But he hadn't been grossed out at all. In fact, he looked downright relieved, just glad that he wasn't the problem.

"Oh, well fuck. That's cool then. I get it. You've got a dick, of course you like pussy. Makes sense."

She had been slightly offended by the notion that if you had a penis must like women, but she was so grateful for his understanding that she just let it go.

Since then, everything had been a friendly competition between the two of them. Who could fuck the most girls, who could get the waitress's number first, who could return the following morning with the craziest stories.

And more than anything, they had always been the two out of all of their friends to maintain their single status. They were the ones sure that they would never get married, never settle down and they scoffed regularly at Ruby for being so head over heels for Belle. As cute as it was, she and Neal had always mocked her.

So telling him about Regina now just wasn't an option. He would never let her live it down, and what's worse, he would probably try to convince her that it wouldn't work. Which was already such an insecurity for her that the last thing she needed was someone to help her give into those insecurities.

So she just nods, "Yeah, the sex is pretty good." She says it with a tone of finality but he just keeps pressing, oblivious.

"Blonde? Brunette? What were the tits like?"

She sighs, she doesn't like talking about Regina like an object or like just some fuck. But she reasons that guys do this all the time, even Ruby has mentioned how feisty Belle can be in bed. Guys brag about their girls and it's really a compliment to them more than anything, so what was the harm?

"Brunette."

Neal smirks, "I shoulda known. You go through brunettes like I went through tube socks in high school."

"Ugh, shut up." She punches him playfully while adding weights to the next machine.

"So, scale of 1 to Monica, how freaky was she?"

Emma shakes her head in laughter thinking of Monica who liked to have her hands tied and asshole fingered while getting fucked. That was one of the few women she and Neal had passed back and forth just because she was so up for anything.
"Ahh, I mean, she's not a total freak but honestly, when we started she'd never even blown anyone. Couldn't stand the thought."

"Now let me guess," he grunts between lifts, "you've got her swallowing?"

She smirks, "I've got her fucking begging for it, licking it off my body, all kinds of nasty shit."

"Niiice."

"Yeah, it's been fucking awesome."

"I bet. Well, speaking of fucking, Ruby has finally agreed to go out tomorrow. She's finally agreed to leave the ball and chain at home for a night. So that means a. we get fucked up and b. I issue a challenge."

She freezes while pulling up on the bar.

Fuuuuuck.

She knows what that means and there's no way in the world she can accept his challenge.

"Oh, dude, you know—"

"No no! I need to redeem myself from last time where you took both girls back to your place. Seriously."

"No, I probably can't go out tomorrow. I promised Regina we'd do something. It's Friday, you know?"

He makes a face. "What? Regina? I thought you were done with that bitch?"

She opens her mouth to tell him not to talk about her like that but she doesn't want to deal with that conversation about why all of a sudden she's demanding he show respect for a girl that she used to think of as just another fuck for months.

"Oh, you know, pussy's good right? So…"

"Good enough to overlook the crazy?"

She just shrugs. "She's not crazy, just…,"

"Em, what? No, the girl was crazy. You said so yourself. She was calling all the time, wanting you to meet her friends. In my book, that's fucking crazy."

She shakes her head, "No, she just wanted a little more that's all."

"Soooo….what, you dating her now?" He laughs it off, not even serious about it but when she doesn't respond he drops his weights and turns to her.

"Emma, what the fuck?? Are you dating this bitch?"

"Okay, dude, enough. She has a name."

"Well that's a fucking yes."

She rolls her eyes but still says nothing to deny the claim.
"Em, seriously, I don't get it. I thought you didn't want to date, thought you just wanted to play the field."

"Yeah I know what I said," she pushes out through gritted teeth, "but...the sex was too good to give up. So what's a few fucking dates then in exchange for some of the best sex I've ever had, right? Trust me, it's not that serious."

She cringes as the words slip past her lips, knowing that in just the last few days, things between them have gotten more serious than she's ever been with anyone.

Fortunately for her, Neal's kind of a tool and though he looks skeptical at first, he then thinks of the craziest things he's done for sex, including a tattoo of a woman's name on his bicep he only spent one night with. "Yeahh, I guess. You sound completely pussy whipped so she must be incredible."

Emma smiles involuntarily at that because Regina is so incredible and just thinking about her warms her heart.

"Yeah, it's cool," she says nonchalantly more than ready to change topics.

"So, like is it an exclusive thing or are you allowed to still have fun?"

"I told her that I wasn't the exclusive type. She wants more and I think I can handle that but she knows that the monogamy thing might be a struggle for me."

"Oh, perfect! Then we can definitely have fun tomorrow. Yes! Fuck, why didn't you say that from the beginning? I thought you were like, about to marry this chick. You guys are dating, with some fucking on the side. That's totally cool with me."

He laughs and heads to his bag to take a drink of water and she takes a moment to curse herself. What she had said was true. She had clearly and explicitly told Regina that she might struggle being with just one person, something she had honestly never tried, but couldn't see herself enjoying.

But now that she was doing it, even though it had admittedly only been a couple of weeks, she was so into Regina. In her head, she had no problem acknowledging that Regina was holding all of her attention. She had no desire to look elsewhere or seek sex from anyone else.

Regina was satisfying every need she had and even those she hadn't thought needed fulfilling.

But her pride would never let her tell Neal that. Her pride wouldn't let her admit to anyone but herself right now that she cared so deeply for her. And the only thing keeping her from calling it love is that she's never felt romantic love before so she's not quite sure how she's supposed to know when she's there.

"Okay, so I'm thinking we play tomorrow at 5 then head out around 11?"

She nods absently trying to figure out how to either get out of going or convince Regina to let her go out alone.

She realizes immediately how possessive that sounds and reasons that Regina likely wouldn't say no to her going out, but she'd certainly worry the whole time.

Hell, she's probably going to worry the whole time.

She's never been approached by a woman and had to say no because she 'couldn't'. But she knows
that she's going to have to turn them down tomorrow because she knows for sure taking any of them home would be the fastest way to ruin things with Regina and as she presses through her workout, she realizes that that five year plan of a house and some domesticity doesn't sound too bad at all.

So, we'll go. *We'll have a few drinks and then I'll head out around 1 or 2 and it'll be great,* she nods to herself, comfortable with the plan and hoping Regina will be too.

"Emmmmmy!"

In a sea of parents and kids, she hears him before she sees him and she glances quickly left and right trying to figure out what angle he's coming from so she can prepare herself for-

He collides into her legs and despite his small body, he nearly takes her down with his force.

"Emmy! You picking me up today?"

"I am!" She lifts him easily and kisses him on the cheek, "Is that okay?"

He nods emphatically and gives her a kiss on her own cheek.

"Yeah yeah!"

She laughs and puts him back down so he can shrug out of his backpack and hold it up to her.

"Can you hold dis? It's too full."

She nods and grabs it, flexing ready for the weight of the bag but as per usual, she realize he has conned her into holding his things because his backpack is lighter than ever and she's 99.9% sure there's nothing even in it.

She rolls her eyes but holds it anyway.

"Here, hold my hand."

He complies easily and she walks them into the crowd, headed for the school entrance again.

"What are we goin' back in for? School's over Emmy!"

She laughs, he sounds so upset about being dragged back in. "Well, Augs, I just wanted to say hi to Regina."

"Who's Regina?"

"Ms. Mills, your teacher."

"Oh, is Regina her last name?"

"No, it's her first name. Mills is her last name."

"Oh."

They walk down the hall and find Regina standing just outside of the room finishing talking to a parent.

By the time they approach, the conversation is over and Regina smiles broadly.
"Hi!"

"Hello dear. Hello again August. Long time, no see!"

He scrunches his face, "I just seen you!"

"I just saw you," they both correct him at the same time and laugh with a timid look at each other.

"Here, come on in for a minute while I just grab a few papers to bring home."

They both follow obediently and once in the room August heads straight for the toy bin.

"Wait wait, she probably doesn't want you taking out any toys buddy."

"Oh yes. August sweetheart, we're leaving momentarily so please don't take any toys out."

He pouts and stomps his foot and she worries for a moment that it's about to turn into a tantrum she has no clue what to do with, but Regina speaks up, not even bothering to look at him.

"Young man, is that how we behave in the classroom?"

"It's not school no more." He crosses his arms but doesn't dare stomp his feet again.

"August, stop. You're being rude."

She really doesn't know what else to say. She usually doesn't have problems with him. There's not too much he asks for that she has to say no to. Dessert before dinner is always a yes. His movie choices, board game choices, bedtime stories are always a yes so the hardest and most unfamiliar territory for her is saying (and sticking to) a no.

"I just wanna play with one toyyyyyy." He's whining now and she starts to think there's no harm in just pulling out one toy. just to get him to be quiet about it but it's obvious Regina isn't having it because she seems to stand even taller as she approaches him and immediately the tears that were trying to fill his eyes to fuel his tantrum dry up.

"Excuse me August, but what was my answer?"

It takes him a moment but he looks down at the ground and shuffles his feet while answering. "No."

"Look at her when she's talking to you, August." Her voice is stern and she's proud of herself for thinking of something adult and responsible to say.

He looks up with his big blue eyes and repeats his answer. "You said no."

"Yes, I did. But not because I don't want you to play and have fun. I said no because if you take out the toys, you'll miss your surprise."

Immediately his face brightens and he looks from Regina to Emma. "A surprise? What surprise? For me?"

"Yes, a surprise for you," Regina says with a smile and instantly he's forgotten about the toy and she's diverted a meltdown.

"Um, what surprise is this?" She asks with a scrunched face because she and Regina hadn't planned anything specific for the afternoon.
"If I were to tell you what the surprise is, it would no longer be a surprise," Regina winks at her and she swoons a little.

"Ooookay, well hurry then so you can take us to our surprise!"

"Yeah yeah, hurry hurry!" He jumps up and down, "please!" he adds as an afterthought not wanting to risk losing it.

"Okay, let me just throw a few things in the bag."

She takes a few stacks of papers and puts a clip on them before tossing them into the tote.

"All set. Let's go."

She leans down to grab August's backpack and reaches for his hand and they all exit quickly, 2 of them very eager to find out more about this surprise.

"Where's your car?"

"Just over there," she says fishing the keys from her pocket.

"Where?"

"Right there silly!" August points to a black BMW SUV and she nods.

"Yeah the black one."

"I'm sorry dear but how many cars do you own?"

She laughs and opens the door for August so he can climb in.

"This one really isn't mine, it's the family car. Lilly uses it when she works because it has the car seat in it and when my mom is home, it's what she drives."

"It's not a car seat! It's a booster!"

She rolls her eyes in Regina's direction and they share a smile.

"Yeah yeah kid, whatever you say."

She closes the door on him mid sentence and turns to Regina. "Finally, we're alone."

Regina throws her head back in laughter and steps closer to wrap her arms around her waist.

"Hi," she whispers returning the embrace.

"Hello."

"How much did you miss me today?"

"Less than you missed me, I'm assuming Miss Swan."

At the use of her last name, her cock stirs from the memory of this morning and their slight roleplay.

She pulls away a bit only to lean back in for a kiss. Her fingers find Regina's neck and pull her ever closer while the fingers splayed out over her hips dig their nails into her skin, just under her shirt.
They continue like that only for a moment before they hear a pounding on the windows.

"Get a rooooooom!"

They pull apart slowly, laughter floating in between them at August's words.

"Alright, alright! Let's get out of here!" Emma opens the door for Regina before entering the car on the driver's side.

"SO?! Where is we going?!"

"Two things: One it's 'where are we going'."

"Where are going?!" He screams bouncing on his booster seat.

"That's number two: Nowhere until you buckle up, mister."

She watches him through the rearview to make sure he does it correctly and once he gives her a thumbs up, she responds by pressing the start engine button.

"Soooooo?!!"

She chuckles and looks over at Regina expectantly, "Sooooo?!!"

"Well…I was thinking that maybe we could go tooooo….." the suspense nearly kills the both of them. "The Central Park Zoo!"

They both light up at the thought!

She's always loved zoos and August has only gone once when he was three. Not only that but on Fridays, Lilly usually does the standard park or occasional indoor play gym and then ice cream before headed home so he's never gone to the zoo as a Thursday after school treat.

His eyes sparkle as he talks about all of the animals he wants to see, naming lions and tigers and penguins and kangaroos.

She doesn't say anything about the likelihood of all those animals being at this particular zoo, letting him have his moment just happy to see him happy.

"Emmy, look! Ms. Mills look!"

"August, wait."

"It's alright, let him go."

"Regina, he's five. I feel like we shouldn't let him just run off like that."

"Emma, it's okay. Really. As long as one of us can still see him, he'll be fine."

She exhales and reminds herself to relax a little.

"Yeah, no. You're probably right. I just…I took my eyes off of him once at a grocery store. I was chatting up the check out girl and looked up a few minutes later and thought for sure…someone had taken him. Turns out he was just down the candy aisle but I literally had a panic attack right there. So…now I just feel like I constantly need to be holding his hand."
Regina nods, squeezing her hand lightly. "I understand that. And if we're giving full disclosure. The first week of school, when he was coming into my class they told me he was a runner. Day 2, I let him go to the bathroom by himself and after 10 minutes I realized what a horrible mistake that was."

She laughs, trying to find the funny in the story but that's difficult when she thinks about the fact that Regina accidentally lost her little brother once.

"You probably never made that mistake again."

"Oh goodness no! He's one of two boys that needs to always have a responsible buddy with him."

She throws her head back in laughter. Yeah, that sounds like August.

"But the point is, you probably won't make that mistake again either dear. Things like that happen so that we can learn from them. So we keep a close eye on him and if he gets too crazy, we give him less of a leash. But let him have a little freedom and see what he does with it."

"Mmm, I guess. Though a leash doesn't sound like a bad idea at all."

"After ice cream, I'm thinking it's going to become a necessity."

She nods, completely agreeing as they swing their hands casually trailing behind August.

He finally sees the Snow Leopards he's been fangirling about since they walked in and he presses his hands and face to the glass, talking them into coming over.

Seeming to understand him, two small cubs come closer and swat so swiftly and unexpectedly at the glass that he jumps back and falls flat on his bottom and hands.

It's the inevitable, but even still it takes her a minute to process his wailing and tears.

Regina reacts first, running over and picking him up instantly. He clings his arms around her neck and cries harder and finally she's jolted from her position 15 feet away.

As she approaches quickly, she hears Regina's soothing voice coaxing his tears and fears away as she rubs his back.

"It's alright sweetheart. I'm sure that was very scary but he couldn't hurt you. He's behind a very big, strong glass."

Regina obviously has it handled but she wipes the tears from his cheeks and kisses his forehead, reassuring him that he's fine and they wouldn't have let anything happen to him.

He nods, but opts to stay in Regina's arms for the rest of their time at the zoo. It's not a total waste because he still lights up every time he sees a new exhibit and he and Regina read each description together, sounding out letters and highfiving when he gets a particularly tough word all by himself.

She mostly just stands back and watches, smiling and hovering. They stop for ice cream and she offers to hold him because she knows he's a messy eater and doesn't want to ruin Regina's clothes but she reminds her that they're her clothes anyway.

By the end of their zoo excursion, there's dried chocolate ice cream on both his cheeks and her shirt and she couldn't be more in love.

*With August. Not…Definitely not…with…her.*
She nods definitively but still even she's not 100% convinced.

Because that's the thing. Regina always has her second guessing everything.

Especially when she watches her interact with August.

She loves her little brother. He's her favorite person on the planet. Prior to his arrival, Ingrid had been the one to save her from herself but ever since he came along, it had been him. She had been more reckless, more rebellious before him. But now, he's one of two of the most important people in her life.

Though the list is quickly growing to three as she watches Regina display such patience and gentleness with him.

It only excites her a little more for the idea of a family of her own with Regina Mills ten years down the road.

She rolls her eyes at herself but the smile never leaves her face as she trails next to them, with one hand holding Regina's purse and the other securely placed on her lower back.

And when they ask an older woman there with her grandchildren to take a photo of them in front of the lemurs, she snaps it quickly before telling them that they're such a beautiful family.

And much to Regina's surprise, she simply wraps an arm around her waist and says thank you.

######

**Neal finally makes an appearance, so let me know what you think! Thanks for all of those that commented and kudoed . Until next time!**
Chapter 18

"Emma…stop."

She circles her arms around her once more.

"Emma, seriously. You're going to get us killed."

She huffs and rolls her eyes but pulls away anyway. "It's an electric stove Regina. Magnetic no less. I don't think we could die even if we wanted to."

"Regardless, go away dear. You said you'd let me cook, so let me."

"Can I help?"

"No. Because I doubt your help is very helpful. But if you want to be useful, you can go help August start his homework. He has 5 spelling words to write twice and a book to read. Once he finishes it, sign his reading log please."

Her eyebrow darts up at that.

Yeah, no. That's all definitely Lilly's job.

But then she remembers that she gave Lilly the day, and subsequently the night, off.

So she huffs once more and goes to find August, who's playing a game on her phone on the couch.

"Hey bud. Time to do a little homework before dinner."

"Right noooooow?"

"Yeah, right now. Trust me kid, I don't want to do it either. But Regina's the boss and she says it's homework time."

"I thought you said you was the boss," he asks, looking up at her skeptically.

"Yeah I am…except when she's around. Then I'm pretty sure she becomes the boss."

She shakes her head at herself, wondering when someone besides her mother became the "boss" of her.

But much like when Regina says "jump" and she asks "how high?" August puts the phone down and obediently goes to get his backpack, knowing better than to question their combined authority.

When he returns she helps him remove his spelling words and an oversized book titled "Mr. Dog's Day."

She rolls her eyes, already dreading this.

"You read 'em, I spell 'em, Emmy."

She sighs once more and reads the first word. "Dog."

"Dog," he repeats. "D-d-d. Ah ah ah."
As she fears, she looks over to see him writing an 'a' after the letter 'd'.

"Um, actually kid…it's…," she's not sure if giving him the answer is how it's done so she channels Regina for a moment.

"Well, sound it out."

"I did," he deadpans, face serious.

"Yeah…you did, didn't you?"

They stare at each other awkwardly for a moment before she tells him to hold on and jets back to the kitchen.

"Hey, babe. What do I do if he's sounding out words wrong?"

Without even glancing up at her, she smiles. "Have him try again and pick a different letter that might help make a similar sound."

"Right. Okay Augs, maybe try a different letter that might help make that same sound."

Switching up the instructions slightly almost makes her feel like she thought of it herself which makes her inexplicably proud. And when he finally figures it out on the third try, she high fives him and promises two desserts if he can get the rest without any help from her.

When he finishes his work sheet all by himself, she pulls him in for a hug and tickles him until he cries uncle.

And for the first time, there's no hint of jealously for all he has that she never got at his age. There's no annoyance at how at 5 she was cooking food for herself in the microwave, while he has a nanny and toys and not one but two rooms of his own.

There's just so much fucking pride. Because he's so smart and so clever and for once, she's happy that he got more. More toys, more affection, more love. Just…more.

*He deserves it*, she thinks as she watches him show Regina his homework and gloat about having two desserts.

"Ahh, well you'll have no dessert until all of your dinner is finished. Understood?"

"Understood!"

"Okay, homework back in the folder please. It's time for dinner."

"No book tonight?"

"How about we read it as a bedtime story?"

He nods and heads off to the living room again, finally giving them a moment of peace.

She knows she should mention her night out with Neal and Ruby tomorrow but she doesn't want to ruin the mood. They've had a great day, spending all but 5 hours together, and she begrudgingly admits that she's loved playing house today.

"What?"
She's been caught staring and blushes, looking away to grab plates for all of them.

"Nothing."

"It doesn't look like nothing, dear."

"I just...I was just thinking that you're going to make a great mom someday."

Not 100% true in this moment, but she really does believe it.

Regina blushes and places a small square of lasagna on a plastic Batman plate and two healthy portions on each of their plates.

"Mmm, thank you."

"You're welcome. Have you always wanted kids?"

"Yes, ever since I was a young girl. I always thought...thought I'd have them by now."

"Well...," she doesn't know where she's going with that. She knows what Regina is too disappointed to say. She thought she was going to marry that last guy. Have stupid babies with the last guy.

"Well...don't you worry. Because in approximately 5 to 10 years, I'm going to make a MILF of you Regina Mills. You're going to have all the babies you want-"

"So two," she interjects with a light humor.

"and you're going to be the hottest mom on the block. All of the neighborhood dads are going to want to mow their lawns while you job each morning."

"Mnhmm, and all the soccer moms are going to want to put their hands all over you."

She comes closer and leans her back against the counter, watching as she adds asparagus to all of their plates.

"And I'll only have eyes for you."

Regina rolls her eyes, but smiles and responds in kind. "Same. Now...go find August. It's gotten suspiciously quiet out there. And help him wash his hands. And wash yours too!"

She shouts at Emma's retreating back.

She chuckles to herself and thinks that Regina is going to make the best mom.

After a messy Italian meal (of the best lasagna she's ever had), a much needed bath for August (though they were all soaked by the end), and two bedtime stories (because a "homework book isn't a real book), August has finally fallen asleep between the two of them. Though he has room of his own, he had insisted on laying in between them and now they lay on either side of him holding hands lightly over his tiny body.

"I had a great day today," she whispers, terrified of waking him.

"I did too. Thank you for letting me intrude."

"Oh, it's cool. I...I usually try not to be alone with him so we don't do a ton of stuff like that together.
"We mostly just hang out at the house."

"Your mother's house?"

She nods and they find themselves in silence once more. She thinks Regina might have had a reason for asking about her mother's house but when it never comes, she figures it's now or never.

"I had…something to talk to you about earlier."

"Oh….about what?"

She smiles at the tone. It's so obvious that Regina is thinking the worst but doesn't want to assume or jump to conclusions.

"Well….tomorrow Neal…my gym friend…well, actually he's like my best friend…well besides Ruby I guess. Anyway…he just wanted to go out. I haven't hung out with him in a while so he wants me and Ruby to meet him at a bar. If that's okay with you?"

She holds her breath and bites her lip, not really sure what answer she wants.

On the one hand, she wants to know that she's free to go out and do her own thing. She wants there to be trust between them and she wants to feel like a free woman.

But on the other hand…she barely trusts herself. She has good intentions for tomorrow's night out but with a few drinks, she just doesn't know how the night will play out. She thinks that maybe what she actually needs is for someone to tell her no.

"Emma, did you hear me?"

She blinks and looks up at Regina. "What? I'm sorry."

"I said that sounds fine. It sounds like fun."

She hears the yes hidden in her statement but there's also nervousness. There's apprehension. There's everything they're both thinking but too afraid to say.

*Is this going to ruin this bubble we've been living in?*

"Cool. I'll probably be home around 1 or 2. Not too late, I promise."

She watches as Regina's facemorphs into one of concern. "1 or 2…that's later than I thought."

"Well, yeah, we probably won't go out until 10 or 11 though so it's not like I'll be gone forever. They're just night owls."

"Well, that's fine but you can stay out as late as you'd like. I'll be at home in my own bed."

The tone isn't exactly sharp but she feels chastised anyway. She sits up a little and turns to the side with her head on her hand so that she can look at Regina.

"If you don't want me to go, I-"

"No!" She says a little too loudly and they both freeze as August stirs and readjusts. They finally breathe a sigh of relief when he lets out an adorable snort but seems to still be in a deep sleep.

Regina cocks her head towards the door and Emma quickly gets up to follow.
"Look," she says in a normal voice once they've escaped to the kitchen. "I'm serious Regina. If you don't want me to go, I won't."

"Yes, I realize that. But...Emma if we are even considering long term, you have to be able to go out when you please and...I have to be okay with that."

"So you're okay with it now?"

"No, of course not. I mean...I want you to go spend time with your friends, I'm sure they're lovely dear but...I just want you to remember," she gestures around them, "this, I suppose. I want you to remember waking up to me and me in your shirt and trips to the zoo and all of it. Because it's what I think of when I'm away from you. I think about waking up beside you and making you breakfast and you kissing me goodbye before work. And...I just want to make sure you don't forget."

She's almost certain she feels her heart grow at the thought of Regina thinking about her when she's gone. It'd never really crossed her mind. Obviously she thought of Regina like every second of the day but it had never even occurred to her that Regina might be doing the same, smiling like an idiot while typing emails or getting caught daydreaming about their 5 year plan while at lunch with her coworkers.

"I don't mean to scare you Emma-"

"You didn't," she shuts that line of thinking down quickly.

Oddly enough, she's far from scared.

"I'm so into you Regina that all of this is like all I can think of."

She watches as Regina's shoulders relax. "You're sure? It's not all too much?"

"Not even close," she says immediately and means it more than she ever has before.

She wraps her arms around her shoulder, pulling her in close and Regina lays her head on her chest. They're new favorite position.

"Not to sound dumb but last night...the sex was just..."

"I swear if you ruin this by telling me how tight I am I'm going to kill you."

She chuckles and quickly attempts to find different words to use.

"I wasn't going to say that." Regina snorts and she knows she's been caught in a lie. "Well, I probably was but I was also just going to say that you're always the best I've ever had. But that...was like the best of the best. You're just...so easy to be with."

"Same for you. You're so rough while still being really gentle. I like that. I need that."

She pulls away slightly so that they can look at each other fully.

"I like that you make me want to be gentle. You make me want to just take my time. I needed that. It makes me feel like we're like connecting when we're having sex, you know?"

"Yeah," she leans up to place a kiss on her lips, "I know exactly what you mean."

"I love it."
"Good, add that to your list of things to remember while girls are grinding all over you tomorrow."

She says it lightly and it finally feels like the atmosphere around them is lighter.

"Yeah, I will. I'll think about how tight you are and that should keep me on my best behavior."

She watches as Regina rolls her eyes and tries to pull away despite her smile.

"You just love to mention that."

"Well, I'm sorry but it's seriously the sexiest thing ever. I can't get over how tight you are. Like…,"

She makes a fists and picks up Regina's hand. She grabs just one finger and attempts to jam it in between her curled up pointer finger and thumb.

"Like, this is how tight you are."

Regina throws her head back in laughter. "I'm really glad my vagina is impenetrable!"

"Well, no one ever said that! I've penetrated that shit on numerous occasions."

"Hmm, you must not be very big then."

She narrows her eyes as Regina smirks.

"Well, how about we take it out and see?"

"Mmm, no thanks. It's getting late."

She can tell by her tone that Regina is nowhere near tired.

"No, come on. Let me introduce that ass to my kitchen counter."

Without warning, she lifts her onto the counter and the last coherent thing Regina mumbles for the night is a hurried, "Fine, but I'm not cooking another meal on here until it's been sanitized."

"I'm serious Kat, it's like she's a completely different person."

"Let me get this straight, you had the best sex ever with her Wednesday night and now she's just this completely changed person?"

She nods emphatically. "Yes. I think something clicked for her the other day. She told me last night that she loves taking her time the way we did the other night because it feels like we're connecting. God, you should've heard her."

"Oh, no no. No thanks. I'm not interested in having to hire someone to pull a Mike Tyson on me and severe my ears."

She rolls her eyes and smiles down at her ice cream. Despite Katherine's best efforts, her mood just cannot be ruined today. She had been on cloud 9 with the kids and just as they started to drive her nuts, she had received a call from Emma during her free specials period.

They had briefly confirmed plans for the night, Regina going out to dinner with her coworkers and Emma at the gym playing basketball with friends before going to a bar. They had agreed to see each other tomorrow and she'd been counting down the minutes ever since.
"Ew, stop smiling like that."
She chuckles but doesn't at all try to remove the smile from her lips.

"I can't help it, Kat. I...Before, I feel like I was holding myself back from developing too many feelings for her but now that we're trying to make it work, I'm content to just let it happen."

Now it's Kat's turn to roll her eyes. "I take it you're in love?"

Her grin widens and she just shrugs.

"Well, just be careful. I'm glad she's trying but I'm not necessarily hopeful."

"I know, I know. But the other night, we had a conversation about a house and kids one day and she didn't freak out. She's not interested in—"

"I'm sorry, what?"

She looks up from her ice cream, startled. "What?"

"You've talked about kids?"

"We've technically been together—"

"For all of two seconds, Regina! Please don't jump into anything with this adult sized child."

"Kat, stop. She's great with August. And besides, it's not like we're trying today, though we did agree to take condoms out of the mix. But still, it's likely to be awhile."

"What? Regina, you can't be serious. I can only imagine how many diseases that thing of hers has touched."

"I am, Kat. It's not a big-wait...how did you know about her...," she leans in, "condition?"

"Oh please. Everyone knows about it...except you of course."

"Why didn't you tell me you knew? I had been so apprehensive about telling you!"

Kat rolls her eyes again, the only thing she seems to be capable of tonight.

"I assumed you knew I knew! Literally, she's got some nudes online that got leaked from her phone or something so now all you have to do is type in Emma Swan nude and it's all very...obvious that she's not completely normal down there."

The small hairs on her neck immediately bristle at that language. "She's...it's actually completely...well not completely but...there's nothing wrong with her Kat."

Her friend at least has the decency to look chastised "That's not at all what I meant. Look, Regina, I'm sure that she's better today than she was 3 or 6 months ago but I just don't want to see you get hurt, okay?"

Her hand slides gently over her own and she squeezes it in assurance.

But she's certain that she's far past the point of return and if Emma messes up now, she knows there's no way to avoid getting hurt. She checks her watch again and fights the urge to text her.
"She should be finishing up with her basketball game by now."

"Ugh, such a guy."

"She really is. She dropped me off this morning in sweats, a tank top and a ball cap that said Swag."

"Nooooo," her friend laughs and it's a pleasant change from their previous conversation.

"Yes, she did."

"I hope you've burned that hat."

"As soon as she lets it out of her sight, it's my first target. I also saw an American flag tank top in her closet so that will be the second thing to go."

"How's her place?"

"Gorgeous. It's got an incredible view of the city."

Kat nods and in their silence, she flips over her phone quickly. Her heart skips a beat when she sees a text from Emma.

"Give me just a moment." She slides the text open and her smile only grows.

8:39pm: I miss you.

She's aware that Kat hasn't asked but she tells her anyway, "She said she misses me."

"It's only been what…12 hours since you two last saw each other?"

"You and Jefferson were the exact same way when you first started dating so you have no right to criticize me!"

Kat has no response for that and so she fires off a quick text to Emma before flipping her phone back over, smile firmly back in place.

"How adorable. Should we get out of here so that you can get home to your sweetheart?"

She reaches for her purse but is clearly in no rush.

"No, she's headed to her place to shower and change but then she's hanging out with some friends tonight so we've agreed to just see each other tomorrow."

That stops Kat in her tracks. "She's going out tonight? Without you?"

"Why yes, she is. Because she's not on a leash and can do what she pleases, without me."

Kat scoffs. "Oh and I'm sure she will do whatever she pleases."

She puts her hand up, effectively stopping whatever Kat's going to say next. She doesn't need this. She doesn't need any more reason to worry.

"It's fine Katherine, we've discussed it at length and I'm confident that she'll be fine."

"Don't use my full name just because your girlfriend is a cheating nymphomaniac."

"And with that, I'm more than ready to head home."
She and Kat shake their heads simultaneously, knowing that if they continue this conversation, it's bound to turn into an argument.

"I'm just looking out for you," she finally says when they reach her home, the entire car ride filled with silence.

"I realize that. I just…I wish you'd give her a chance. With every worry I already have, it'd be nice to not have you whispering in my ear about how I can't trust her."

"I know…I shouldn't have said those things. But Regina, I just don't want to see your heart get broken."

"It's my broken heart, Kat, not yours. There's no great reward without a great risk, remember?"

Kat immediately turns her head away and she knows it was a low blow.

Of course she remembers. It was what she said nearly three years ago when she had been mulling over calling him back. They had met at an art gallery and he had been charming and bold and forward and had given her his number. She'd gone back and forth for two weeks about whether or not to call, admitting there was chemistry between them but worried that she wasn't his type.

He spoke of backpacking in Thailand and had compared one of the pieces in the gallery to the Papua New Guinea sunset and she knew that he was the adventurous type. And she…wasn't. She was content at home. Content to lay in bed with a good book.

She hadn't travelled much in her lifetime, only to Italy with her family. Her mother had never even entertained the idea of visiting her father's hometown in South America.

But when describing him to Kat, she had said he was just what she needed. Someone to get her out of her comfort zone. Someone to show her the world. When she agreed that she would like to see a few more places during her time on earth, it was Kat that had said there was no great reward without great risk.

So, at her urging, she took the risk. And found that there were no rewards. Not great ones or even good ones.

There was loneliness as he embarked on backpacking journeys without her. There was worry as he stood at the tops of inactive volcanoes. And then, when he left, there was emptiness.

But that was the only feeling that didn't last long. Because Emma had come into her life at just the right time and since then, she had been happier than she could remember.

And during their time apart, she had missed the tall blonde more than she ever missed him while he was gone for days or occasionally weeks at a time.

"Look…I don't blame you for that. Maybe the first date but the rest was on me. I stayed with him longer than I should've because it was safe and I didn't…I didn't think I'd find anything as good. But…"

"You did."

"No," she looks over at her longtime friend, "I found something better."

Kat sighs and she knows her well enough to know that she's won this round. "Alright, I'll give her a chance. And..if I'm being honest, she really seems to be trying."
"She is. She told me…she's going to try really hard for me. For us. And I believe her. I have faith in her."

"Alright," Kat nods resolutely. "Then I can have a little faith too."

She leans over to hug her before getting out of the car, all the while hoping that their faith in Emma Swan is not misplaced.

After so many quiet nights in with Regina, the bar feels extra loud.

It's a popular spot downtown that recently reopened with a dj booth and dance floor and while Ruby dances and Neal flirts, she plans her escape.

*What the fuck is wrong with me? This used to be fun. I used to live for Fridays.*

Used to. But then Regina had claimed Fridays. They'd spent it at the movies or dinner with her friends or even just in bed the whole time.

And as she compares the two, she knows she'd rather be in bed with her girlfriend.

She scratches her neck and attempts to hide her blush from all of no one.

But really…what's the point of this anyway? She can't go dance with anyone because if she pops a boner, she's terrified she'll let her dick make all the decisions. If she just sits at the table and gets too drunk, she might fuck up and say yes to a dance so she's stuck to one beer thus far.

She's just not sure how long she can keep this up. If Neal comes back and she's not wasted with a girl around her arm, he'll know something's up.

"Okay Emma, think," she mumbles to herself looking around. She almost immediately locks eyes with a brunette that stares at her hungrily. Reflexively, she smirks but tears her eyes away when the girl grins and waves.

She looks down at her beer and rolls her eyes, already feeling her approach.

*Goddammit!*

"Hello there, Emma."

She looks up into gorgeous green eyes and instantly remembers that she knows this girl.

*Sally maybe? Noo, no one under 40 is named Sally.*

She tries to think of how they know each other and remembers that she'd gotten a blowjob from her and they'd fucked around in her car once but they'd never exchanged numbers. Sandy had never even mentioned seeing her again which meant she wasn't trying to catch feelings either.

*Perfect,* she thinks as she comes up with a quick plan.

"Hey…"

"Sadie," she assists with a cocked eyebrow.

"Sadie, of course."
"Couldn't stop screaming it when I sucked you off. Is it coming back to you now?"

She swallows and wills her body to be cool as she involuntarily does remember her fingers laced through soft hair guiding her up and down h—

"Yeah, yeah. How have you been?"

She laughs and she realizes that it's such a stupid question.

The laughter must set Sadie at ease because she steps a little closer and cocks an eyebrow in a dangerous fashion.

"I'm not here for small pleasantries. I think we both know that."

"We also know there's nothing small about my pleasantries."

**Oh my god, why did I say that?**

She curses herself as Sadie's smile only grows wider.

"So true. May I sit?"

"I'd…rather you didn't."

The shock is evident on her face. "Oh..kaaay. Did I do something wrong?"

"No," she shrugs, "it's just that I'm seeing someone now." It feels a little forced but she hopes it's convincing because it's true.

Sadie jerks her head back in surprise and lets out a strange chuckle. "Ha…you're serious?"

She scratches her neck again just for something to do. "Yeah, seriously."

"Wow…well, then we should celebrate that."

"Should we?"

"Yeah, why not? I distinctly remember you telling me like a month ago you weren't interested in a relationship but here you are. A change of heart is always worth celebrating."

She shrugs and flags the hostess over and orders another beer for herself and let's Sadie order for herself.

"So…since you're taken, am I forced to stay standing?"

She thinks that this might be a trap. It has to be right? Women don't just celebrate missing out on good sex, do they?

"Can I sit if I promise to keep my hands to myself?"

They both share a laugh and she nods. "Yeah, sure."

"So, how long have you two been dating?"

"Uhh, well we'd been fucking around for a few months, nothing serious. But then she wanted more and I didn't so we called it quits and now…here we are. So I've known her for about 10 months but it feels like longer."
Sadie nods. "How cute. And she let you out all by yourself?"

She lets out a short laugh because she's been thinking the same thing. "Yeah, she did."

"Well, she's either very trusting or very stupid."

She nods again, trying to figure out which is it while she watches Ruby dance with a few girls at a safe distance. It always amazes her that even after more than a few drinks, she never gets into trouble. Ever since she started things with Belle, she's been a saint when they all go out. If they go out at all, as Ruby usually opts to stay in.

The waitress brings back their drinks and they sip on them for a few minutes in a surprisingly comfortable silence until Neal returns with a blonde and a redhead on either arm.

"Hey, this is Tiffany and Megan."

Sadie smiles politely and she just nods.

"Anyway, we're here to do shots bitches. Who's in?"

Sadie raises her hand, likely in it for the free alcohol and she shrugs half-heartedly.

"What's up with you, Em? No shots?"

_Say no. Say no._

"Nahhh, actually...um, Sadie and I were just talking about getting out of here. You ready to head out babe?"

The feeling of calling someone else 'babe' doesn't sit well on her lips but she maintains a charming smile for show.

But the smile on Neal's face drops instantly, thinking he's lost this round yet again.

She looks over at the brunette pleadingly, sending a message to her piercing green eyes to just go along with it.

"Uh, yeah. Definitely. I'm ready when you are."

She breathes an internal sigh of relief and stands, putting a hand on her back to guide her towards the exit when Neal stops her.

"Well, fuck. Wait, you win alright? But at least stay a little longer. It's only been like an hour Emma."

"Sorry dude," She shrugs and her apologetic frown isn't entirely fake. She really has missed him but she can't stay. She just doesn't have the strength or desire to keep up this charade. "But I can't wait. She's been all over me and I've barely lasted this long."

"Have her blow you and come back then. Isn't that the one that was down to fuck in your car once?"

She squints and wonders if he's always been this much of a dick.

She rolls her eyes internally and tries again, cringing internally as she stoops to his level. "Have you seen her ass? This is going to be an all-nighter."
"Fuck, yeah okay," he says peeking over at the tall woman who appears to be standing impatiently, waiting for Emma. "I'll talk to you later, cool?"

She nods and fist bumps him before heading out with her hand on Sadie's ass.

"This is just for show, sorry."

"It's fine, I've let you do it before."

"Right." Once they're back at the front door, she drops her hand like it's been burned and Sadie abruptly stops.

"I think I saw some photographers earlier. Not sure if you want it to look like we're leaving together."

She curses herself as she rethinks her plan.

"Alright, well yeah I should let you go first or something. Do you have a car here or are you taking a cab?"

"I'll probably head to a different club. I took an uber here so I'll get a quick cab to my next stop."

"Okay, great. And thanks so much for doing all this."

She runs a quick hand up Emma's arm, squeezing slightly. "My pleasure. I think it's really sweet that you're trying so hard for your girl. She's very lucky."

"Nah, I'm the lucky one. But...thanks again."

Sadie smiles once more before stepping out onto the street and Emma breathes a sigh of relief. She gives it 5 minutes before walking out and requesting her own car.

It takes her all of thirty minutes to get home and she immediately falls into bed. She wants to call Regina but it's nearly midnight so she fires off a quick text wishing her a good night, surprised to get a response not 20 seconds later.

Thank you. Have a fun night dear.

I'm home actually. I'm all funned out.

I hope you didn't call it an early night for my sake.

No, I just wasn't feeling it. But I did miss you.

Lately, she feels like that's all she's been saying: I miss you.

But it's true. She has. She misses Regina when she's in the other room so 15 hours is way too much.

I miss you too. I can't wait to see you tomorrow.

Same. She includes a heart to test the waters and she blushes herself when she gets one back.

Goodnight Emma Swan.

Goodnight Professor Mills.
She smirks to herself and gives it an embarrassing 20 minutes before accepting that that's the end of their conversation.

"Alexa, play my "Us" playlist."

"Playing your "Us" playlist."

She pulls the sheets over her waist and prepares to get some sleep when she gets another text. She grabs her phone from the pillow quickly, hoping that it's Regina.

Disappointment accompanies worry as she slides open a text from Ruby.

*Wehred you go?*

*Home. Too many girls and I wasn't feeling it.*

*Yhou where my ride?*

She rolls her eyes and sighs. She wasn't Ruby's ride. Originally, she planned to only have a drink or two and drive herself home. But apparently that ship sailed after her third drink.

She grabs her keys from the front table and opens her Uber app, already dreading dealing with a drunk, clingy Ruby.

She has no clue what she's doing here.

She feels in some ways like a creepy stalker, or worse an obsessive girlfriend, just showing up at Emma's house unannounced. But after their late night texts, she couldn't wait any longer to see her.

*And it's not like it's 5 in the morning. 11am is more than reasonable.*

She'd picked up a few groceries so that she could make her breakfast, her way of saying without words that she's proud of Emma for having a good night out without being too crazy.

She's grateful she has a strong memory because she's texted Emma twice for an actual address and received no reply.

*She's probably still asleep,* she thinks, more than happy to surprise her with actual breakfast in bed this time.

After handing over her keys and name to the parking attendant, she makes her way in, fully prepared to head to the elevator.

"Excuse me, ma'am?"

She turns hesitantly, not sure if he's talking to her. "Yes?"

"Good morning! All guests are required to check in here." She shifts the groceries to her less dominate hand and he at least at the decency to look sorry.

"Right, sorry."

"That's alright. Can I see your ID please?"

She rolls her eyes and removes her purse from her shoulder. After an awkward thirty seconds, she
gives up on pulling out the ID one handed and sits the bags down.  
"Here you go."

"Thank you." He stares at the computer for a moment before nodding.  
"You're not on the approved list of visitors so allow me to just give Ms. Swan a call."

She is torn between finding the staff here incredibly efficient and creepy. She supposes though in a place like this it's his job to know everyone and their guests by face and name.  
"Ms. Swan?"

Silence.

"Oh, hello. Well, I have here a Regina Mills, do I have permission to send her up?"

A pause and he types away on his computer.  
"Understood, thank you ma'am. Enjoy your morning."

"All taken care of, I hope?" She doesn't know why she's so snarky with him. Making sure crazy people aren't flooding through their halls is in no way offensive to her, she just hates to be made to feel like she doesn't naturally belong in Emma's home.  
"Yes, ma'am. I apologize for the delay. I've also been instructed to provide you with a day pass. This will be valid until midnight tonight, allowing you to come and go without checking in. That will take me a minute."

She smiles and after a few minutes, she's on her way with her own hotel like room key with her name and driver's license photo on one side.  

The man at the elevator offers to assist her with her bags but she shakes her head and continues on, her excitement to see Emma fully renewed.  

As the door closes, she sets the bags down, careful not to break the eggs and pulls out her phone.  

*If she's awake, why didn't she text me back?*

She gives up on solving the mystery when the elevator comes to a slow halt on the 14th floor. She picks up her belongs and walks down the hall trying to remember which number it is. She hits 1424 and realizes she no longer recognizes the art on the wall so she backtracks and tries 1422. When she's met with angry flashing red lights, she quickly retreats back one more. When she slides the key, it flashes green and she pushes the door open with a sigh of relief.  

"Okay, not to sound like a crazy girlfriend," the door slowly closes itself as she makes her way inside, "but I'd like to be added to the approved list of people! Having to call you in advance ruins the surprise of—"

But her words are cut short by an actual surprise that makes her heart stop beating altogether.  

Standing in the kitchen, in her girlfriend's kitchen, is anyone but Emma Swan.  

She's tall like Emma. Gorgeous like Emma. But certainly not Emma. And her thick, wet brown hair coupled with her large breasts falling out of a shirt she's seen Emma wear reinforces that obvious fact.
They stare at each other for a long moment, her mouth wide open while the woman appears to size her up.

It's pretty obvious by the too small shirt and lace panties and wet hair that this must be someone Emma brought home, but she tries not to jump to conclusions. Emma had texted her last night, she had said she was home, in bed, missing her.

*It's not that hard to lie over text, you fool.*

She shakes her head at the devil on her shoulder and decides to get down to the bottom of this before assuming anything. "Who...who the hell are you?"

Her voice is sharp and it must sound threatening enough because the woman arches her perfect eyebrows and smirks.

"Emma hasn't mentioned me?"

She swallows thickly, finding it almost impossible with the lump in her throat.

She refuses to be played like an idiot so she considers cutting her losses and getting out of here as quickly as possible but she's also torn.

She wants desperately to confront Emma.

She wants to see the look on Emma's face when she's forced to explain how and why she lied and cheated.

"Where is she?" Her voice is seething and leaves no room for noncompliance.

Her sinister smile grows and she takes a sip of her coffee before replying. "Shower."

She drops the bags, eggs be damned, and makes her way to Emma's room, finding it easily after spending two consecutive nights in her arms.

When she pushes the door open, she's greeted with the sound of the shower but also a bed with no sheets on it.

She almost appreciates Emma's consideration for at least washing the linen before fucking her on that bed again.

She blinks several times to clear away the impending tears. She refuses to cry for a woman who obviously never intended to be true to her.

She heads to the bathroom and nearly screams in anger when she's forced to step over a bra that could never belong to Emma.

When she finally reaches her destination, Emma has her back to her. She's rubbing soap onto her arms and chest and she wonders if she's scrubbing extra hard just to get the scent of another woman off of her.

Just the thought of her lying in bed, touching...kissing another woman brings her to release one lone tear.

And with precise timing, she goes to wipe it away just as Emma turns and they make immediate eye contact. Emma jumps out of fear and her first instinct is to apologize for scaring her but she refrains.
Because it's Emma's wide, already apologetic eyes that tell her everything she needs to know.

#####

Loving your comments and kudos so please continue to let me know what you think!

Until next time!
"Regina," she doesn't even bother turning off the water. She slides the door open and steps out quickly, grabbing a towel to wrap around her waist.

"How could you?" Regina has a voice of steel and it frightens her more than any foster parent ever has.

The fear of losing Regina gives her goosebumps and makes her blood run cold.

"No, I didn't. I swear I didn't."

She laughs and it sounds close to cruel. "You know, I applaud you for all the effort. The texts last night, the shower this morning and even the sheets you were thoughtful enough to clean. All very efficient of you…just one problem, dear. You forgot to see the whore in your kitchen out."

Her heart is pounding and she continues to shake her head to all of this.

"Baby, just list-"

"Are you serious right now, Emma?" The firm voice, that's borderline yelling, shuts her up.

"I caught you! I was staring right at her. She's wearing your shirt and prancing around your house in her underwear. Do you still want to call me baby?"

"Maybe I'm just a friend? A really really close friend."

An instigator is the last thing she needs right now. She rolls her eyes but doesn't tear her gaze away from Regina.

"I'm sorry little girl but was I speaking to you?"

"I'm sorry but you don't have to be such a bitch."

She's already in a ton of shit, and she knows it, she doesn't need this right now.

"Oh my god, get out." She pushes past Regina and pushes the taller woman out of her room.

"I'm just trying to help Em."

"You helping is you leaving."

"Alright, alright call me later." Emma nods and turns back around immediately, feeling like one fire has been put out.

But when she re-enters her bedroom, she realizes that the small fire has actually spread wildly in the ten seconds she's been gone because Regina looks ready to run and slap her all at once.

She keeps her distance and remains in front of the door, blocking it, just in case she tries to do either.

"Emma, I don't want to hear it." Her tone is final but she shakes her head. She refuses to lose Regina over something she didn't even do.

"Well that sucks but you're going to hear it. I'm not going to let you walk out of here, walk away
from me and us and this thinking that I fucked you over."

She's not really the most serious person, she knows that. But there must be something in her voice that tells Regina this isn't up for discussion because she says nothing and she takes that as her cue, rushing out the words so that she can explain without interruption.

"That was Ruby. My best friend. From downstairs. She just stayed over last night. She was so drunk last night and her girlfriend hates to see her like that so sometimes after a late night, she crashes at my place. No sex, no touching. I don't even think of Ruby that way. We're just friends. I swear to God, Regina, absolutely nothing happened last night."

She watches on quietly as Regina stares at just her bare mattress.

She's not sure if it's the right move but she approaches.

"They smelled like smoke and tequila so they're in the washer." She answers the unspoken question quietly, afraid that a normal voice will spook her.

"I want to believe you." Regina whispers looking up at her.

There are still obvious pools of tears in her eyes and the tone of her voice says she's not quite convinced. Her heart is telling her it's all a misunderstanding but her head is saying that a million small coincidences are never coincidences at all. And she gets it. If she'd walked into Regina's house and found another girl, or worse a guy, half naked she'd would've flipped out too. And no sheets on the bed would only make it harder to believe that this was all just a coincidence. But in this case, that's exactly what this is.

She takes a deep breath and tries again.

"Look, I know things started out terribly. I know that I was with a lot of different girls before but… I'm trying so fucking hard for you. Sat at the bar miserable last night because of you. Well, not because of you but just…because going out is no fun without you. And for full disclosure, because I don't want you to think I'm keeping secrets, I accidentally flirted with a girl and when she tried to sit, I freaked out and shouted I had a girlfriend. I pretended to take her home in front of Neal, then we went our separate ways and I came home and talked to you for a bit. Then Ruby texted and needed a DD so I took an Uber to get her. She convinced me to have one more beer, we sat and literally talked about our girlfriends for an hour and I drove us both back here. She crashed in my bed, like always. I even slept on your side just to…so no one else did." She blushes at how lame that sounds.

"This morning, she woke up early and showered and…I don't know, she must have answered when the downstairs guy called. He knows everyone and he knows we're friends so she probably just gave you permission to come up. And I…I don't know what she said to you, but I promise she was probably just intentionally being an asshole. We didn't have sex or anything close to it. She's actually terrified of dick so…"

Her crude and blunt language brings a small smile to Regina's face and it allows her to relax for a second.

She takes a deep breath and reaches out to put a hand on her hip.

"I'm sorry for not telling you she was here. I should've texted you last night or something."

Regina's hand comes up to wrap around the arm attached to her waist and she runs her fingers all the way up her smooth skin to her neck.
She stands statue still allowing Regina to touch and take her time.

"No…I should've trusted you. I should've let you explain first before jumping to conclusions."

She pulls Emma down and presses their foreheads together.

"I just…I was already worried, Kat didn't exactly help ease that and it just all caught me off guard this morning."

She nods, desperately wanting to pull her closer and hug her. "I get it. And I just…Tell me what I need to do to make this work. I-I'll do anything you want Regina."

It surprises her how much she means it.

Regina slips both arms around her neck and brings their bodies closer until their pressed tightly against each other. Just the way she likes it.

"Promise me you won't let me go? Even when I'm being crazy?"

"Promise," she seals it with a kiss and the moment their lips touch she feels like it's been forever.

"Promise me that even when shit looks really bad you'll let me explain?"

"Promise." Another kiss solidifies Regina's promise and this one grows more passionate in an instant.

Fingers find their way into her semi wet hair and she grips Regina's ass, pulling her closer to her hardening cock.

"That felt like a fight," she breathes out into Regina's neck as she nips and licks.

"It did." she sighs, already catching on.

"Well congrats to us for surviving it."

"The first of many bumps in the road, I'm sure."

She laughs and slips her hands under the satin button up shirt.

"So much make up sex. I can't wait."

"You wanna go finish that shower?"

"Do I have to go alone or can I bring a friend?"

"Well, no, you cannot bring a friend. Especially if she looks anything like Ruby. Whom I'll inevitably have to see again. Oh god."

Regina groans, likely from embarrassment and she can't help but cackle.

"Luckily for you, Rubes has a good sense of humor. She won't hold this against you, buuuuut she'll never let you forget it either."

Regina's head falls to her shoulder and they share a quiet laugh.

"Sorry again..about that."

"Don't be. I'm over it."
She kisses her head once for good measure.

"So…shall we go christen my shower?"

The smile on Regina's face grows against her skin as she untucks the towel and lets it drop to the floor.

"Oops."

She smirks at the obviously intentional move and leans down to pick her up bridal style, carrying her back to the still running shower. She sets her down gently and immediately her soaked clothes cling to her body.

"Ugh, should've taken these off before," she mumbles against Regina's lips.

She struggles to get her shirt off, fingers wet and slippery.

"Fuck, hurry. Take it off."

She tries to remove it as quickly as possible but that proves difficult as Regina simultaneously tries to remove her jeans.

Finally, once she's completely naked, she gives her another deep kiss before walking Regina back into a wall.

"Turn around," she whispers against her lips.

Regina immediately complies and sticks out her ass for good measure.

"All yours Miss Swan."

If her dick wasn't already rock solid, that does the trick.

She wastes no time running the head through soaking wet folds and entering her in one smooth thrust.

"Ahhh," she hears her pant against the marble tile and leans forward to kiss her neck as she pulls out and pushes back in, as deep as she can.

"Fuuuuuck."

"Tight enough for you?"

She laughs to herself but doesn't respond verbally, choosing instead to slap her ass once.

She can't decide which is better, the sound Regina makes or the way her pussy clenches around her. She decides that both are perfect and she gives her ass another firm smack, thrusting a little harder.

"Yes, again."

She switches to the other cheek and hits her a little harder and is rewarded with another tight clench around her cock.

"Shit baby…I'm not gonna last."

"Tell me when you're going to cum."
She nods and grips onto Regina's hips, continues to pound into her hard and deep.

The sight of Regina's hands clenching at the tile on the wall, the feeling of being raw inside of her and the hot water pouring over both of them proves to be too much because less than a minute later she issues her warning.

"I've gotta cum babe."

She expects Regina to double her efforts like she always does but instead Regina pulls away abruptly and turns around, leaving her dick hard and on the verge of cumming.

"What the fuck, Gina?"

Her furiousness dies down a bit when Regina reaches out to grip her dick in a firm hold, hard enough to feel good but not too hard to hurt.

"Who do you belong to Emma?"

"Wh-what?"

"Who do you belong to?" Confusion must still be written all over her face because Regina steps closer and grips her jaw, forcing her to look down at her directly into her eyes.

"Are you all mine, Emma?"

She finally understands the question and nods immediately.

"Yeah, of course."

"Say it," she whispers.

"I'm all yours," falls from her lips effortlessly. "I belong to you. All of me...belongs to you."

The smile on Regina's face makes her want to say it a thousand more times and she opens her mouth to reinforce it again but Regina leans forward and bites her lip harshly before pulling back just slightly.

"Good because I'm all yours. All of this," she says rubbing her cock against her swollen pussy lips, making her gasp, "belongs to you. So fuck it...like you own it."

How she survives that statement without blowing her load, she has no clue. But she lifts Regina's legs quickly and effortlessly while slipping inside all at once.

And immediately, they set a brutal pace.

Regina's legs are wrapped tight around her waist.

Her fingers scratch and claw at her back.

Her teeth nip at whatever skin they can reach.

And all the while, her own hands are pressed against the wet walls.

She leaves no space between them so that her body and the wall are the only thing holding Regina up.
Her face is buried into her lover's neck and the feeling of closeness, tinged with possessiveness, makes her want to cry.

Never has anything felt this good or this real to her.

She wants to do this forever, she decides in this moment.

Regina breathes against her cheek that she's close and she's determined to cum together.

She doesn't have enough strength to rub her clit and hold them up so she settles for a bruising kiss. Their lips and tongues clash together and their moans fuel what is probably the most incredible orgasm she's ever had.

"I'm cumming."

She nods in agreement and gives one more thrust before pushing in balls deep and releasing her load, feeling Regina shudder around her.

"Ah, I feel it baby. So good."

She continues to pour everything she has into this woman and wishes for the first time in her life, that she could get Regina pregnant.

She knows they're not ready.

And by "they", she knows that really she's not ready.

But god, just the thought of Regina carrying her child makes her give one more harsh thrust that makes them both gasp.

Once their climaxes pass, all that's left is the sound of them catching their breath and water hitting the ground.

"Oh my god. Don't put me down," Regina says, throwing her head back against the wall, "I can't feel my legs."

"Don't worry baby, I got you." She kisses her chin and carefully lets go of the wall to grasp each of Regina's legs.

She's tired and the power of her orgasm has her weak in the knees but there's no way she's letting Regina go.

Once her breathing is back to normal, Regina lifts her head again and grins when they make eye contact.

"God, sex with you is never going to get old."

She chuckles and nods in total agreement.

She leans over carefully to turn off the water and finally Regina drops down to the ground, allowing them both the ability to breathe normally.

Instead of stepping out of the shower though, they stand there for a moment, content to enjoy a few slow kisses.

"We're going to be okay, yeah?"
She knows they have a lot to learn about each other. Like Regina said, they've probably got lots more bumps in the road but she needs the reassurance that they can do this.

Because if Regina can believe in them, she figures that she can too.

She moves the hair from Regina's face, covered in likely a mix of water and sweat and waits patiently for a response.

Her sigh of relief is audible when she hears Regina whisper, "More than okay, Miss Swan."

"Alright, don't peek. Okay?"

"Okay, I won't."

"Swear?"

"Swear," she can hear Regina rolling her eyes but doesn't take her eyes off the parking lot as she tries to find a spot.

"So, I suppose I'm just a little confused. What is this again? What are we doing?"

"Babe, telling you what we're doing completely ruins the point of 'mystery date night'."

She sighs and sits back in her seat, feeling the car move at a snail's pace and trying to determine where they could be.

Finally they lurch to a stop and Emma puts the car in park before leaning over to kiss her on the cheek.

"Ready?"

She nods impatiently, "Can I remove this?"

"No no, one sec."

She hears Emma get out and a moment later her door opens and smooth, cool fingers help her out of the car.

"Alright, ready?"

"I was ready to take this blindfold off an hour ago when you put it on. Come on, Emma!"

She hears a light laugh and finally the obstruction is removed. After taking a moment to get used to the light, she looks up at the large blue and yellow letters on the building.

"Uh…mystery date is at…IKEA?"

She doesn't want to sound picky because realistically, anything would be fine by her. But she'd be lying if she said she wasn't expecting something a little more…tasteful.

"Yeah! See, I thought since you accused my place of looking very unlike me, you might like to help me decorate a bit?"

She turns to look over at Emma who has her lower lip between her teeth, clearly nervous.

"Are you serious?"
"Lame idea?"

"No…just…much more thoughtful than I thought it would be."

"Well every once in a while, I know how to be cute and…domestic."

"You don't have to tell me that, dear. I'm well aware."

After their rough morning filled with a little fighting and a lot of making up, she experienced first-hand just how domestic Emma could be. She had watched her do laundry, cook breakfast, and then they had laid in bed for most of the afternoon watching t.v. and just talking.

It was probably the most they'd talked to date and if she wasn't in love before, she was now.

Especially as they perused each department hand in hand. Emma would pick up an item, pretend to use it and ask each time, "Does this feel more like me?"

"It's a spatula," she said the first time, unsure as to how to respond.

"I know, but is it me?"

She laughs at that and it becomes the go-to question for every item they come across that they like.

Until they reach the kitchens and Regina can't help but stop and inspect each one, falling more and more in love as they go.

"Emma, this is so nice. We should get one of these."

"I already have a kitchen, babe. We're not shopping for a new kitchen."

"I don't mean today. I meant as in, one day, we should get one of these."

She says it casually, or at least she tries to, just to test out the waters.

Emma has yet to freak out during talks of a future together, so little by little, she attempts to slip in little mentions of their informal 5 year plan. If only to remind Emma that she's committed to this. To her. It's become obvious to her that Emma seems to need that.

"Hmm," she feels a kiss on her temple and a hand slips back into hers. "Yeah, okay."

They walk in silence for a few minutes and she thinks maybe she's struck a nerve or frightened her in some way.

"Too much?" She asks softly, almost not wanting to be heard, as she pretends to be reading the description of another kitchen item.

"Hmm?"

She rolls her eyes, knowing well that Emma probably heard her. "I said was that too much? Kids is fine and a house in the suburbs doesn't scare you but a kitchen in the house is the tipping point?"

The question is meant to be playful, but her tone obviously didn't get the memo because she sounds mad and she knows it. And Emma must hear it too because she drops her hand.

"No, it's… it's not a tipping point. You can have a kitchen?"
"Then why did you just shut down that conversation like I proposed or something?"

The smile that seems to involuntarily form on Emma's face eases her worry some but not much.

"I didn't shut it down, I said 'okay'. As in, sure we'll totally have the kitchen?"

"Yeah, but it was the way you said it."

Emma shrugs. "I just…," she stops and runs her fingers through her hair and for a moment, she looks truly stressed.

"You just what?"

She speaks softly and backs them into a corner giving Emma a little more privacy to speak her mind.

"That whole kitchen costs like $10,000. I don't-I don't have $10,000."

That gives her a pause, not at all the answer she was expecting.

Emma Swan lives in a high rise apartment, drives a shiny mustang and everything in her closet is a name brand. She doesn't appear to work and yet she has yet to pay for a single thing when they're out together. Nothing about her would suggest that she couldn't afford a $10,000 anything but she tries to ease her worry anyway.

"Well, I mean, we're not buying it today…"

"That's not even the point," Emma snaps back and so obviously regrets it right away because her eyes scream sorry.

"Fuck, I didn't mean to…," she sighs and grabs her hand again and she finds it hard to be mad.

"I just mean that…I'm 22. With no college degree, no job, no real plans for my future. I literally modeled once for Calvin Klein and I've been using that money for food and gas since. Everything else, my mom pays for. I still get a monthly allowance for fuck's sake. Like, how am I supposed to buy you, or anyone, a house? Or a new kitchen? Or take care of a fucking kid, let alone two?!"

Her eyes widen at these supposed issues being thrown her way. She had always wondered where Emma's money came from, since she didn't appear to have any source for her income. But she figured it must have been some sort of trust fund given to her. Though,

"That definitely explains all your Calvin Klein underwear….seriously, every pair."

Emma stares at her for a moment, curiously, before they both break into a full blown laugh.

After a full minute of gripping her side and the nearest shelf to maintain her balance, she stands upright to see Emma wiping tears from her eyes.

"Jesus, is that all you got from that?"

"Well, no…I also gathered that I'm going to be your sugar mama." She says with a smirk and a wink.

Emma lets out another loud laugh and laces their fingers back together. "Yeah, okay so you were catching my drift. I was worried."

"No no, don't worry dear. I understood perfectly."
They continue walking, silently acknowledging that, while this isn't the end of the conversation, it's also not going to keep them from moving forward.

With a squeeze of her hand, she tries to tell Emma that it's fine. They may never meet at the altar, but she's in this for richer or poorer.

"Oh my gosh, this is so fucking cool."

"That's for children, dear. Actual children, not adult sized children."

Emma rolls her eyes and lets go of her hand to inspect the rocket ship bunk bed.

She admits that it's very unique and she can definitely see it in their home but she moves along anyway.

"We should get this!"

Now it's her turn to roll her eyes. "We can't afford a kitchen but you've got rocket ship bed money for a kid that won't be here for at least another 10 years, if you get your way?"

She smirks over her shoulder, watching Emma climb the small ladder that she's certain she shouldn't be climbing.

"But a stainless steel kitchen is a stainless steel kitchen. Those are a dime a dozen. This is a one of a kind."

"Yes, dear, because I'm sure IKEA is the first and last person to ever think of something so ingenious."

She chuckles to herself and looks at a toy organizer, mentally reminding herself to stop back in here when they are ready for additions to their little family. There are so many useful items they could use in here.

She sighs happily just thinking about it and holds out her hand blindly, signaling for Emma to move on from the bed.

Not a moment later, she feels the spark that, even now, surprises her when Emma's skin touches hers and they continue on their way.

"You're going to be kicking yourself in 10 years when we can't find that bed, Regina Mills."

She brings their hands up and kisses Emma's, "Alright dear."

"Seriously."

"Okay, sweetheart."

Emma huffs and she smirks, more than ready to say 'I told you so' in 15 years after they've assembled the rocket ship bunk bed in their child's room.

After stopping for dinner half way through their shopping experience and adding a few more items to their list, they're out of the store in just under 4 hours with a new bookshelf, two lamps, several pieces of art for the walls and kitchen utensils that she's almost certain Emma already owns.
"Well? Did I do okay? Did you have fun?"

"Definitely. I'd never been into IKEA so that was a new experience by itself. And then, holding hands and just being a normal couple was just the icing on the Swedish furniture store cake."

"We are a couple, aren't we?"

"Mhmm."

She can feel Emma turn her way at the light, she feels her gaze on her face and it makes her blush. She's grateful for the dark that surrounds them.

"You okay?"

"Fine, dear. I was just thinking about what you said earlier."

"What did I say?" She asks hesitantly.

She doesn't want to ruin their mood but she has been curious all day. "When you were telling me about your night…you said that you pretended to take home another woman…for Neal's sake. Why? What does it matter if he sees you go home with someone or if you go home alone?"

Emma is silent for nearly a minute and she lays her head back thinking she's just never going to get a response. Until she does.

"Neal and I are bros. He's…he's the one I talk to about girls and stuff, you know? We compete for girls, or used to," she adds quickly, "and we share stories and we made fun of Ruby so hard when she started dating Belle because we didn't get it. And we didn't get it because we didn't have it. She fell in love and we didn't have that. All we had was each other. And I just feel terrible ditching him because then…he'll be alone."

With some difficulty, she ignores the part that sounded like Emma had also fallen in love.

"So, you plan to go out with him every Friday and pretend to take home some random woman just so that he doesn't feel lonely?"

Emma sighs, "No, that's…I couldn't do last night every week. All I wanted was to be at home with you. But…I just don't want him to hate me, you know? Getting a girlfriend is like his definition of selling out."

She nods and reaches across to put a hand on Emma's thigh, drawing small circles.

"Okay."

She wants to say more but she doesn't want to fight about it.

"Okay?"

Emma looks hesitant to believe that ultimately keeping their relationship from her best friend is 'okay' by her but she nods firmly.

"Okay. You'll tell him in your own time. I'm not going to push the issue."

It surprises her how much she means it. She doesn't necessarily like the idea of Emma pretending to be single, but it's not worth the energy of an argument, especially after the evening they've had.
The rest of the drive is shrouded in silence and it's not uncomfortable but it lacks their usual peace.

"So, am I ever going to meet your friends then?"

She asks as they're headed to the elevator of Emma's apartment.

"Uh, do you want to?"

"It seems only fair. You've met all of my friends."

She presses 14 since she's closest to the number panel and Emma waits until the door closes to speak.

"Ah, I don't know, my friends are kinda assholes. You know that, you met Ruby today."

"Yes but... they're still your friends. When you're not with me or August, you're likely with them."

"I can't just be by myself?" Emma asks stepping off the elevator and she rolls her eyes, following.

"Yes, dear. You can be alone but that wouldn't change the fact that you still have friends."

"I don't know why you want to meet them. Ruby, as you know, is an ass. Neal's a huge ass. Belle is ___"

Before she gets the chance to finish that thought, she opens her door and stops dead in her tracks, causing her to run right into Emma.

"Oh come on! What the hell are you guys doing here?"

The question isn't filled with anger, just annoyance. She peeks around Emma to get a glance at what she's looking at and smirks when she finds the woman who must be Ruby and probably her girlfriend cuddled up on the couch.

"Speak of the devil, Emma."

She can't say for sure but she imagines that Emma rolls her eyes as they finally walk all the way in and the door closes.

"Hi Emma," the brunette says as she untangles herself from Ruby. She has a beautiful, soft Australian accent and she's automatically surprised that this woman is dating the tall, wild brunette still stretched out on the couch.

"Hey B." Emma leans down to give her a hug and she grows unreasonably jealous. She shuts down the silly question floating around her head, who's hugs does Emma enjoy most? Her's or this gorgeous stranger's?

"Well, looks like you got your wish." Emma says it begrudgingly but there's a smile on her face anyway when she turns towards her.

"Regina this is Belle, the one that lives downstairs. Belle this is my girlfriend."

The way Emma says girlfriend looking right into her eyes gives her a chill. She reaches out her hand but that is immediately bypassed in favor of a tight hug that's not at all unpleasant, considering they're a pair of strangers.

"It is so lovely to finally meet you, Regina. We've heard so many great things."
"It's great to meet you too. She's a little more secretive about her friends, but I was just telling her I wanted to meet you both."

"We've been saying the same thing to her for a while. She's so difficult though so I'm glad we've run into one another. Who knows how long she would've put off us meeting?"

She sees out of the corner of her eye Emma huff and walk away but she couldn't care less. She's dying to get to know Belle a little more, already confident that they could be friends.

"Ruby, don't be rude."

Ruby, like a well-trained puppy, gets up immediately and comes over with her hand already outstretched. Her grip is firm, as if they're meeting for a job interview.

"Nice to, officially, meet you Regina."

The smirk on her face tells her she knows exactly how much she worried her this morning.

"Same," she keeps it short and sweet because she can already tell that she and Ruby are leery of one another. After her stunt this morning, she's not 100% sure that Ruby wants to see them together so she leaves the introduction there and turns back to Belle.

"How long have you two been together?"

Belle slips a hand around Ruby's waist and it's as if the taller woman becomes a completely different person. Not hard and cocky, but clearly comfortable and so in love.

"This one has been all mine for almost two years."

"Yup, and many many more."

Ruby gives her a quick peck on the cheek and then a set of pleading, puppy dog eyes.

"Can I go grab a beer with Em?"

"Just one."

"Okay, love you," Ruby kisses her nose quickly and then jets off to the kitchen and she almost wishes she was a fly on that wall instead of here with Belle. She's dying to know what Emma says about her when they're apart.

"Regina, come sit. Please."

She crosses her legs on the couch and settles in and Belle does the same thing just a few inches away.

"So, start at the beginning. Tell me everything. Wait wait," she holds up a finger, "Sweetheart?"

Not two seconds later, Ruby all but jogs from around the corner and she can't help but chuckle a little at that.

"Yeah? You okay?"

That question must concern Emma though because then she peeks her head around the corner too, looking a little worried as well.
"Fine, just wondering if you could get me a glass of wine, love?"

"Of course!"

"And me too?" she chimes in.

"Yeah, definitely!" Emma responds eagerly, already on her way back to the kitchen.

"Looks like you've got her right where you want her."

Belle laughs in good humor and nods. "Yes, well, took me long enough. I think the whole first year we dated, she was oblivious to everything. On our fifth date, not even our first Regina, she actually took me to a movie and went to the concession stand and didn't get me anything. Didn't even ask if I wanted anything and when she returned with a popcorn, she looked genuinely confused when I reached over to grab some. She looked at me like I was crazy."

She gives a full, genuine laugh because though she can't picture this Ruby doing that, she's experienced the same type thing with Emma.

"I hear you, the other day-" she's cut off by the girls returning with wine and what looks to be a cheese plate.

"For you, ladies."

They each receive a glass of wine and Belle gets a kiss on the cheek while she gets a shy smile from Emma. She takes the initiative and purses her lips, tapping them lightly and Emma gets the hint easily. She leans down and gives her a quick peck and she mumbles a 'thank you' against her lips before they part.

They both watch their respective significant other leaves the room before she continues.

"So, the other day, Emma took me on our first official date and she brought me here so we could make pizzas. So we're standing at the counter and I ask her how her day was. She responds with -"

"Oh no, don't tell me. Did she say 'Good', 'fine' or 'It was whatever'?"

"She said good!" She rolls her eyes. "So, of course, I tried to coax more out of her. Nothing. That's all she gave me. Then when it's my turn, I tell her about how stressful it was, give her details and all she says is 'Hmm'."

Belle's beautiful blue eyes sparkle as she listens attentively and she slouches a little more, getting more and more comfortable by the minute. "At one point, she actually said she didn't understand why we had to talk about our day at all. As if that was the silliest thing she'd ever heard of."

She shakes her head and takes another healthy sip of wine.

"That's got Ruby written all over it. It's like we've found the biggest messes and decided to date them. Both of them, no offense to you," she waves her off easily, "just have no clue how to be in a relationship. Or at least Ruby didn't. Our first date was to an all-you-can-eat Korean barbeque restaurant. I honestly wasn't even going to call her back after that."

"So why did you?"

"Because…at the end of the night, after we had said goodbye and I was already in bed. She texted me and told me not to answer the phone. And when she called, I watched it ring and I wanted so
badly to answer. But I held out and five minutes later, I had a voicemail from her. It was super long and she just…she apologized for everything. For taking me to a buffet, eating and talking at the same time, at one point, she flirted with our waitress so she apologized for that too.” She rolls her eyes and nods at that, very familiar with that issue with Emma.

"She told me she was new at this but she wanted to see me again. Because even though it was probably the worst date I’d ever been on, she said it was the best night she’d had in forever. And I thought…yes, she’s an absolute mess but who says that love is supposed to be neat and orderly? You know?"

She nods but says nothing, needing a moment to regain her composure. That hits closer to home than she thought it would. But god, she gets it.

Emma's a train wreck. She's long since acknowledged that. But she's her mess. Her sad, beautiful, tragic mess. She sighs and takes another sip, thinking about how nice it is to share Emma's disasters without fearing judgement, like she does when talking to Kat.

"Isn't that crazy?"

Belle quirks an eyebrow as she sips her wine and grabs a square of cheese.

"This isn't at all what I envisioned for myself. She's not what I envisioned…but now that she's in my life, she fits perfectly."

She blushes when she accidentally thinks about how that also applies sexually.

"I'm sure," Belle smirks and it's obvious that she's been caught but she just smirks back and after a long moment they both laugh, Belle balancing herself with a hand on her knee.

"Should we check on them?"

"They're not kids, Emma."

"I know…I just…," she huffs. "I just don't like leaving her alone for this long."

"Aw, how cute," she says flatly, taking another gulp of her beer.

"No, not like I can't, it's just like…what could they possibly be talking about? They just met!"

Ruby shrugs from her spot on the counter. "Who the fuck knows, man?"

She watches Ruby take another sip, which reminds her. "Was she pissed this morning when you got in?"

Ruby groans and throws her head back. "You have no idea. She went off about it. Yelled at me for a solid thirty about what I could've been out doing that was too important to call or text."

She winces and regrets not texting Belle as soon as they returned home safely last night. But she'd honestly been so tired, she passed out first thing.

"Fuck, sorry dude."

"My own fault, I really didn't mean to drink that much. We just haven't gone out in forever. But it's cool, we made up. Several times. Aaand I think she said something about going shopping tomorrow, which is like my formal punishment."
She nods and takes a gulp of her own beer. "Sucks but I'm glad you're cool. Speaking of which, I lied to Neal last night. Told him I took home some random girl, Sadie."

Ruby looks weary when asking, "...did you?"

Her eyes widen, "No! Of course not! And I told Regina all that this morning. But he texted me earlier when we were at IKEA. He asked."

"Woah woah, slow the fuck down! You took her furniture shopping as a date? This is more serious than I thought."

"No, it wasn't really like that. She just thinks my place lacks character, her words not mine. So we got a few shelves and a lamp and shit. No big deal. I just...want her to feel comfortable when she's here, you know? So she wants to be here."

"All the time."

"Yeah," she replies naturally and then regrets it when she sees Ruby's ever growing smile.

"Shut up. Don't say it."

"You're in love with this chick."

"I'm not."

"But you really are Em."

She sighs and lifts herself to sit on the island. She gives up fighting her, and consequently, she gives up fighting the truth.

She runs her fingers through her hair, anxiously. "I...I didn't know I could ever feel this way about someone."

"You didn't know you could love?"

"I-No. I don't know if this is love. All I know is I feel good when I'm with her. I know I want to hold her hand all the time and hugging her is the single greatest thing on this planet. But...sometimes, do you ever...do you ever want to mess it up, Ruby?"

That seems to get Ruby's attention and she stares deep into her eyes. "What?"

"Do you ever...like last night, I was out and a couple times I thought, 'What's the point?' Why am I trying so hard for her?"

"Because that girl out there loves you Emma!" She says fiercely.

"That girl out there is too good for me, Ruby!" She snaps back. "You know it, I know it and once the newness of all of this wears off, she's going to know it."

Ruby shakes her head and sets her beer down angrily. "And you think I deserve Belle? Of course not! But isn't that the whole point? Emma, it works because I work at it."

"I am working at it!" She yells and then remembers that they're not far and can likely hear them if they get much louder.

"Then work harder!" She grits out and she's not sure why Ruby is so upset about a relationship that's
"Put every ounce of energy and focus you have into this relationship and I promise it'll keep your mind off of everything else. Honestly, for the first few months Em, I'm not going to lie. I thought about how easy it would be to cheat. Belle was so trusting that had I been careful, I could've gotten away with it. I could've had my cake and eaten it too."

"Did you?" She almost doesn't want to know the answer. She knows that Ruby is her best friend but she can't imagine having to look Belle in the eye and keep a secret like that.

"I almost did." She whispers. "I'd met a girl at a bar and we'd been texting a little. Nothing bad but I definitely hadn't told her I had a girlfriend. But one day, Belle confronted me about it. Kinda. She said she felt like I was being distant and that if I didn't want to be with her, I didn't have to be. That no one was making me stay with her. She looked upset but she was giving me an out. But it's not until you get ready to lose something that you realize what you have, I guess."

She definitely gets that. "I felt that this morning."

Ruby winces, "Shit, was she super pissed?"

"I don't know, honestly. Her words were angry but, like, she looked hurt."

"I'm really sorry about that. I realize that in retrospect it wasn't cool and definitely not funny."

She shrugs, "It's fine. We talked about it, made up, fucked in the shower. It's all good now. I just don't ever want her to look at me like that again."

"Then don't fuck up."

"I don't know how not to, Rubes. Everything in me wants to wreck and ruin this…before it ruins me."

"Look…I get it. 100%. Like I said, they're way too good for us. But you know what we have to do then? We have to try every day to prove we're the kind of women they could spend their lives with, take home to their parents, and have a family with. And is it perfect every day? No fucking way. We stay out too late and drink too much sometimes and I've forgotten both of our year anniversaries. But that woman out there? That girl gave me a second chance when I didn't even deserve the first. That kind of girl - that cries because I cry and plays Call of Duty because she knows I thrive on being better than her at something – she loves me, man. I don't know why and I don't know for how long, but I'm not going to be the one to mess it up."

"And if she leaves you?" She asks in a small voice, wondering how Ruby would ever survive that.

She gulps and Emma can tell that it's her greatest fear.

"Then…I don't know. I don't know how to function without her anymore so…I don't know. Kill myself maybe?"

She laughs to avoid the seriousness of that statement, but she knows it's probably true. For both of them maybe. Because she honestly doesn't want a life that Regina isn't a part of. She sighs.

"I think I love her."

"I know you do."
Their smiles are goofy and spread like wildfire and it feels nice to connect with Ruby again. Since she'd gotten serious with Belle, it felt like they had nothing to talk about. She was in love before and Emma wasn't and for so long, she couldn't see the benefits of being tied down like that.

But as Regina and Belle reappear in the kitchens with empty glasses laughing, she thinks that being tied to Regina is the greatest honor ever.

"Hi," she says making her way over to grab the glass, "Want another?"

Regina shakes her head, "I'm fine dear. More than, actually."

"Yeah, we're going to get going and leave these two alone," Belle says sitting her glass on the counter.

"Okay, but I'll see you tomorrow?"

"Absolutely! I'm so excited."

She opens her mouth to ask, "what's tomorrow" at the same time that Ruby reminds her that they're supposed to spend the day together tomorrow.

"Shopping remember?" And it's obvious that, while Ruby wasn't exactly looking forward to shopping, she loves to spend time with her.

"Well, you're off the hook. Regina and I agreed to get brunch and go shopping together actually."

Belle kisses the frown on her lips and grabs her hand, "We'll see ourselves out. Em, love you babe. Regina, this was great. See you in the morning."

She leans up to place a kiss on her cheek and kisses each of Regina's before pulling Ruby along, as she complains about their day being ruined.

When the door finally clicks closed, Regina turns to her and smiles lazily.

"I made a friend with your friend. I'm officially in."

She grins and leans against the counter. "I feel like I'm never going to see you now."

"You won't. I'm going to spend all of my time with your best friend's girlfriend."

"Then Ruby and I may actually have to start sleeping together."

She worries for a second that it's too soon to make that joke, but Regina chuckles and goes to rinse out both glasses.

"What time is brunch tomorrow?"

She wraps her arms around Regina's waist and kisses her neck, just to be close.

"10:30."

"Okay, cool. That's not too bad. Where are we eating?"

"If Ruby's not allowed to go baby, I don't think you are either. Sorry."

She loosens her grip allowing Regina to turn and look at her. "Why can't I go?"
"Because I think it's just the girls? She's inviting one of her friends and I was going to invite Kat."

"But…I'm a girl."

Regina smirks and she rolls her eyes. "I am."

"I know, I'm just joking. But on a serious note, you can't come. No significant others allowed."

"Are you kidding me right now?"

She knows she's pouting but the weekend to her meant non-stop time together. No need to be up early or go anywhere and now there's a wrench in that whole plan.

"Don't be mad." She leans up to give her a quick kiss. "Call Ruby, even Neal, and hang out with them for a few hours. I'll be back before you know it."

"Ugh."

Regina grins wider. "Oh stop it, you're such a baby."

"Fine, but we're going to a strip club."

She doesn't know why she's being a child, but fortunately, Regina doesn't take her seriously at all.

"Okay, Emma."

"And I'm going to let someone give me a lap dance. The hottest girl in there."

"That's your prerogative, dear."

"I don't know what that means, but I'll even let her buy me dinner, if she's cute."

Regina lifts one eyebrow and comes closer, until their lips are just barely touching.

"Do whatever you want tomorrow, Emma Swan. But always remember, this," she pushes the palm of her hand into her crotch and squeezes gently, "this belongs to me. Okay?"

She nods quickly and presses their lips together in a fierce kiss that deepens when Regina's fingers tangle in her hair.

When they finally come up for air, Regina rests her head on her chest as they fight to get air into their lungs.

She feels her place a kiss on her neck. Then her collarbone.

One. Then another.

"Oh and this belongs to me too. Okay?"

She's confused until she feels another soft kiss. This one right on her rapidly beating heart. She closes her eyes and almost cries at the overwhelming desire to say those three little words. Instead, she swallows thickly and just nods.

"Yeah, okay."

#####
Let me know what you thought!

Until next time!
"So, you know, there is one thing Rora and I have been curious about," Ashley smiles coyly, "how's the sex?"

She whispers it but everyone at the table hears and Regina's ears turn bright red.

They all laugh except her, even Kat chuckles uncomfortably.

They've been getting brunch every Sunday for the last month, leaving their respective significant other's at home, or sometimes with each other, and it's quickly become one of the best parts about her week.

She's found she can confide in them without judgment or fear that Belle will go back and tell Ruby or Emma what's been said but even still, "Sorry, but I don't kiss and tell."

"Oh come on Regina! We're all friends here."

She scoffs, "How about if I asked about sex with Ruby? What would you say?"

Belle blushes, "I would say that it's wonderful. She makes every time feel like the first time."

She had hoped to prove a point but Belle had been bolder than expected. And her answer spurs Aurora to offer her own details without any prompting.

Aurora smirks, "Oh, Phillip's a stud and he knows it. He can go at least 30 minutes. Which, compared to where we started, is like a lifetime."

The girls all laugh and she thinks maybe there's no harm in opening up a little.

"Alright, well, if you must know, the sex is spectacular. Like, every time becomes the best I've ever had."

Ashley grins devilishly and leans in, "Did it take some getting used to?"

She smiles, knowing exactly what she's referring to. "Not at all, I'd actually never been with a woman before so when she told me about...it, I was quite relieved. Though," she pauses not sure if the next thing ready to fall from her lips is going too far.

"Oooh, what?" Aurora smirks and everyone else does too. Perhaps maybe not Kat, but she chooses not to glance her way at all. She's quickly finding that this sort of conversation makes Kat uncomfortable but as she gossips around the table with 3 other newfound friends, she realizes she's missed this. And she needs this. She needs people to talk to about their relationship and if Kat's not going to be supportive, then that leaves her with the remaining women around the table, who have become quite the Sunday staple in her life.

"Well, I was a little overwhelmed at how...big she was."

Belle throws her hands over her face, blushing furiously. Aurora's eyes widen as her cheeks flush and Ashley looks more curious than anything, leaning closer with her chin in her hand.

"Really?! Like...how big?"

She shrugs, "I haven't measured or asked exactly but as a teacher who uses rulers often..."
smirks and all the girls laugh, "I think it's at least 7 inches. At least."

Aurora gasps, "Oh my! I cannot imagine that. I mean, I know Emma's tall but I never would've thought…"

She takes a sip of water and just nods. "I know."

"Wow." Ashley smirks and leans back. "Well, good for your girlie."

She smiles wide, "Speaking of Emma, I should get the check. She literally doesn't know what to do with herself when I'm not around."

"She and Ruby are just two peas in a pod. Rubes laid in bed complaining the entire time I was getting dressed."

"Emma put on all her best moves to try and get me to stay." She adds, swallowing the rest of her mimosa.

"Well, now I feel like I should be dating a woman. Phil was knocked out the entire time I was getting ready. He's probably still asleep."

Kat nods, "Jefferson is the same way. He's probably glad I haven't been around in the morning to wake him up early."

"We should trade significant others for a while, then you'll see it's not all that. It was cute the first week, now it's just background noise while I dress."

Belle huffs out digging in the wallet for her card.

She smiles to herself, while looking through her own purse, suddenly reminded of how she and Emma first met at the bar as she perused through her bag for her card.

"I don't know. I still find it cute."

"Ugh, you two are so in love it's disgusting," Ashley says, with pure delight in her voice.

She says nothing, only smiling wider as she pulls out her card and slides it into the bill holder.

"Have you told her yet? That you…love her?" Belle asks wearily.

"Oh no no no. I think she already knows how I feel, but I'm not saying it first."

"That's understandable."

"What?! Why not?"

Belle and Ashley speak at the same time and then proceed to make eye contact for a moment, communicating something privately before the waiter returns to collect the check.

As he walks away, she contemplates asking what that was all about but she decides maybe it's not for her to know.

And when Aurora changes the subject to everyone else's Thanksgiving plans, she goes along with it especially when a question is directed at her.

"So, you nervous about Thursday?"
She sets her mimosa down and smiles easily. "More excited than nervous. I have heard her mother over the phone once or twice and she seems very nice. So I'm really looking forward to finally meeting her."

"She's very lovely and I'm sure she'll adore you, Regina."

Everyone around the table, even Kat, they all nod in agreement.

"I hope so. I'm sure Emma would end things if her mother didn't like me." She bites her lip and looks down at her plate to avoid making worried eye contact with the girls.

"Well, I'm sure she'll like you, sweetie. What's not to like? And she's the easiest woman to get along with, I promise you that. She hardly knows me and invites me and Phillip over every year for Christmas."

"And Emma's birthday! She threw her a surprise party this year and invited everyone!"

She smiles involuntarily at that, but it falls rather quickly. "Wait, when was this? When is her birthday?"

"April 12th," Belle says distractedly as she calls the waiter over for a final refill.

They've known each other for almost a whole year. And they were definitely sleeping with each other in April but that was only a month into their sexcapades. Knowing how private Emma is, she's not surprised that she didn't mention her birthday but she is curious to know if she and Emma spent that night together.

She commits the date to memory, surprised it never occurred to her before to ask and after a few minutes, they all stand to leave.

She hugs Kat, Aurora and Ashley goodbye before walking towards Belle's car, which is really just Ruby's black Maserati.

"I still can't believe she lets you drive her car." She slides in and closes the door.

"Well, she doesn't let me. She just doesn't argue with me when I tell her I'm taking it."

"See, I'd love to drive Emma's car but she'd argue with me until she's blue in the face."

"Well, there's your problem," she smirks over at her before pulling out into traffic, "You make her think it's a discussion rather than a decision that's already made. I don't ask Ruby if I can use her car. I grab the keys, throw myself in her lap, kiss her in all her favorite spots to soften her up and as I'm pulling away, I tell her I'm going to borrow her car for a little bit to run errands or something of the sort. She nods and stares at my lips while I talk, I thank her with one more kiss and that's it."

To say she's beyond impressed would be an understatement. "I never would have imagined you being so...manipulative!"

Belle laughs as she slows for a red light. "That's the thing Regina, I don't have to manipulate. Not really. Ru loves me. And she has two favorite things. She loves to see me happy and she loves to be rewarded for doing things that make me happy. And, since they're so alike, I guarantee Emma is the same."

She scoffs, "Oh, I don't know about that. You've got Ruby eating out of the palm of your hand. She loves you and you've been together for a while. We're still pretty new...and I'm not sure Emma's
Belle nods and takes off again, "Trust me, she may not have said those three little words yet, but I know she loves you. And she's not the type to say it, but she's probably dying to show you. You could ask her for the moon and she'd probably find a way to make it happen."

"I just…I don't want it to seem like I'm using her. I really don't need anything from her. Just…her."

"I understand, it took me some getting used to as well. But one thing I've learned about Ruby is that she's not that romantic. To this day, she still plans the worst dates. So, she likes instruction. She likes to sit back and let me take the lead. If I ask her to take me somewhere, like last summer we went to Italy for our one year, she offered to pay for everything and every time I tried to contribute she said no. She doesn't think of it as me using her, this is her way of saying "I love you". Plus, if Emma thought for a minute you were after her money, she wouldn't be with you."

She bites her lip and looks out of her window. She doesn't need anything from Emma, really. So she doesn't know when an opportunity would arise for her to ask for something but she vows the next time it does, she'll turn on her charm and do it.

###

The opportunity presents itself sooner than she thought it would. The students have the entire week off during Thanksgiving break and she and Emma have been lazing about all day. She knows she needs to get out of bed because there are a million things she needs to do but Emma makes such a wonderful big spoon.

She cuddles deeper into her arms and hears Emma groan. "Stop moving."

"I'm sorry dear, just trying to find a good spot."

"Well, stop it. I am so worn out. I can't go another round but I swear if I get hard, we're doing it."

She chuckles and pushes her bottom up against Emma once more to find that she is a little hard. She pauses immediately, not wanting to make things worse because she really doesn't have it in her to go again.

They'd been up all night, in what felt like every position and now she really just wants to lay here for days. But she knows she has a million errands that need to be done. Not only has she been busy at work, but even after work, she's been neglecting simple things like dishes and laundry at her own house in lieu of spending time with Emma and even August.

And while she regrets nothing, she does need to swing by her own house, she needs to go shopping for a new dress for Thanksgiving dinner with Emma's mother and a few other miscellaneous tasks that have fallen by the wayside.

She groans and sits up, leaning back on both her arms.

"Alexa, what time is it?"

"Good afternoon. It's 12:48pm."

She sighs and falls back onto her pillow, turning to face Emma whose eyes are closed but she has a lazy smile on her face.

"Lilly and August should be done at the museum soon. Wanna order lunch?" Emma asks cracking
one eye open.

"Mm, that sounds nice but lunch is going to lead to a movie on the couch which will lead to a competitive game of Hungry, Hungry Hippos which leads to dinner, dessert, more bedtime stories than necessary and before I know it, the day is gone. I need to get out of bed and run errands today, Em."

"Ughhh, whyyy? We have all week to do that shit."

She rolls her eyes and places her feet on the floor. "No, I don't. I want to get a new dress for dinner Thursday. I need to do laundry at my place and my check engine light came on yesterday on the way to your place so I can't lay with you all day today."

She must sound stressed because Emma sits up a little and kisses her back, moving her hair to the side. It's longer than it's been in years and she knows she'd normally have cut it by now but she may have developed an obsession with Emma pulling her hair during sex so she lets it grow.

"Okay, no worries. We can do stuff today. We just have to wait until August gets here."

"Actually…," It's now or never, she tells herself. "I was thinking, to save time, maybe we could divide and conquer?"

"What do you mean?" Emma swings her legs off the bed and grabs her underwear from the floor.

"Well, since I have some things to take care of at home, it might be faster if while I do that, you can take my car to a shop."

She chances a look over at her girlfriend to find her standing, clearly contemplating that.

"But…I thought we were running errands together."

She sounds downright sad and confused and not for the first time in the last few weeks, she maintains the urge to tell Emma how much she loves her pouting. And her in general.

She sighs and tries a different approach. "Well, we could do it together, but then it'll just take us longer. If we separate the tasks between us, we'll be able to get them done quickly and then cuddle."

She knows how much Emma loves to cuddle and watches her think hard on this offer.

"Alright, I guess we can do that? I'll drop you at your place and then get your oil fixed."

The chance presents itself so easily that it almost doesn't even feel like conning Emma into stealing her precious Mustang.

"Orrr," she walks around the bed and wraps her arms around Emma's waist. "I can drive myself. In your car, if you don't mind?"

She sees the furrow on her brow, but before Emma can say a word, she reaches up and pulls Emma into a fierce kiss. She makes it hard but slow. Her lips are laced with passion and persuasion and when Emma clutches onto her for dear life, she can literally feel the hesitation slip away. She imagines that Emma isn't even aware at this point of what they were discussing but just for good measure, she drags her nails down Emma's chest, just under her collarbone. She knows it drives Emma crazy and when she Emma lifts her leg, she can feel her completely hard penis.

She figures she probably should put an end to this, she really doesn't have time for another round.
Or 12 knowing her. She chuckles to herself internally and pulls away slowly, lowering her leg and leaving one more kiss on Emma's jaw before laying her forehead there.

"Thank you baby. I promise I won't be gone too long okay?"

And just as she expected, Emma only nods. "Of course."

She smiles extra wide, gives her one more kiss and leaves swiftly before Emma can even think to change her mind. She'll brush her teeth at her own place.

###

"How come we're in this car?"

"Because Regina has my car so I'm using hers."

"Why?"

"Because she had errands to run."

"What's an aaron?"

"It's like little things you have to do. Things…that need to be done."

"Like homework?"

"No…like, things that have to be done out and about. You have to leave the house to do them. I think…"

"But how come we couldn't take mommy's car?"

"Because Regina's car needs an oil change."

"What's an oil change?"

She sighs. This is why she doesn't like to be left alone with him. Too many questions. Not enough answers.

"It's what you need to do to make your car run okay. If you don't get an oil change, your car might break down."

"Well how come Regina couldn't come too?"

"I told you buddy, she's busy."

"Busy without us?" His question is how she's been feeling since she and Regina parted ways a little over an hour ago.

She hates this whole "let's do separate things today". It's bad enough that her Sundays with her girlfriend have been interrupted the last few weeks in lieu of a "girls only" brunch.

Now this? An hour apart already feels like a lifetime and as she hears August sigh from the backseat, she knows she has to do something to keep them both distracted until their other half returns.

"Hey, how about after we get the oil changed we have a little fun?"

"Like what?" He's all at once enthusiastic and bouncing in his booster seat.
"Liiiike," think Emma, think! "Like wash Regina's car by hand?"

"Yeah yeah yeah!" He throws his hands up and she smiles involuntarily.

Yeahhh…she hopes she and Regina have a kid just like him someday.

###

"Wait wait, so she just handed over her keys?"

"I mean, she didn't hand them over…more like I pried them from her hands…while kissing all her favorite spots."

Kat throws her head back and nudges her in the arm. "Wow, I didn't know you had it in you and I didn't know she was that into you."

She sighs and accelerates from the now green light. The car lurches forward eagerly and she flushes and apologizes, still not quite used to so much horsepower.

"Yeah well…I think…I think she loves me."

She whispers it into the car, as if speaking it too loudly in the universe will reverse Emma's feelings for her.

"I think she does too," Kat whispers back and she has to consciously convince her heart not to beat out of her chest.

"I want to tell her but that will scare the crap out of her. I know it."

"Haven't you both discussed being together long-term?"

"Yes, but…I think thinking it and saying it are two different things. When she talks about us in the future, she doesn't see us getting married. She sees a house in the suburb and kids and joint bank accounts but she doesn't want to get married. That's too permanent I think. And I have a feeling that she feels the same way about I love you's."

"Sooo…you're just going to be together forever and never tell each other you love each other? That makes no sense."

"Yeah, I know but…," she pulls into a parking spot. "I don't know what else to do. If I tell her I love her and scare her off, then what?"

She takes the key from the ignition and sits back in her seat.

"Can I ask something without sounding like an insensitive jerk?"

She turns her head towards Kat and smiles gently. "Sure. I mean, you'll probably sound like an insensitive jerk but I won't judge you for it."

"Oh gee, thanks. Anyway, I was going to ask…how do you know you love her? I mean, it's been what a solid month or so of dating after a rocky couple of months of sex with no strings attached. Do you even know enough about her to love her?"

She sighs.

She's been asking herself that same question for the last week or so.
"I don't know how I know Kat. I really don't. But I know this…I was with him for almost two years and never once did I just feel it. Like down in my bones. Never once did my heart…beat for him. Emma keeps it racing. Constantly. I don't know all of her yet but I already know I love every single inch of who she is."

Kat sighs and just as she worries her answer is insufficient, she smiles and pats her thigh.

"Well, can't argue with that. I'm…I really am happy for you, Regina."

She knows it's silly but she wants to cry right now. Kat is one of her oldest and dearest friends and her opinion and her approval means so much.

"Thank you," she whispers and she knows she sounds choked up.

"You're welcome. Now…let's go get a dress for your girl."

###

She receives a text from Emma a few hours into her shopping spree.

*Hi! I just wanted you to know that I'm at my mom's place on the upper east side. You can come here when you're done.*

She smiles despite the simplicity of the message. It's informative more than anything, certainly not romantic but she swoons anyway because she wasn't kidding when she told Kat that everything Emma does makes her heart pound and race.

*Hello! Okay, that sounds good. Will you send me the address? I hope to be done soon.*

*Oh good, because August really misses you.*

She knows Emma well enough to know that August is a cover up for her own feelings and so she plays along.

*Please tell him that I miss him too and I'll be back soon.*

*Hurry home.*

Her heart soars and flutters at the thought of home being just wherever Emma is.

"We should hurry. She's going through withdrawals," she says as she walks out of the dressing room in a knee-length dress. The lace top is bright red and shows just a glimpse of her cleavage before hitting the black that hugs the rest of her body all the way down.

"Well, I think this is the one. Damn."

She pats down on her stomach, feeling as though it's a little tight.

"Are you sure? I feel like you can see all my fat." She turns to look at herself in the mirror.

"What fat?! You're in great shape."

"No, Emma is in great shape," she mumbles to herself.

She hadn't really thought much about it since their first few times together but as she stares at herself in the mirror, she starts to feel like she doesn't measure up. She grips at her sides and frowns when
she turns around to look at her backside in the dress.

"No no, don't do that. Don't second guess it. This dress is gorgeous. You are gorgeous and Emma's going to love this and her mom's going to love you. Now, no more overthinking. This is the one so go take it off so we can buy it and get you home to your girl."

She sighs but says nothing, more than ready to get back to Emma now.

###

After dropping Kat off, she drives another 45 minutes through stop and go traffic to finally arrive at the only house she's ever seen that was larger than hers growing up.

But the size quickly loses her interest as she pulls further into the circular driveway and sees Emma and August in bathing suits washing her car. They're soaked and covered in large soap suds and water but the smiles on their faces when they see her makes her forget all of that. Especially when they both lean in for a hug and wet her clothes too.

After almost three hours apart, all she wants is to be near them again and so she lets it slide.

"Hi," Emma says into her neck, giving her a quick peck before pulling back and meshing their lips together.

"Ewwwww."

They pull apart, her laughing and Emma rolling her eyes.

"One day, I'm going to tell him how he was created and he's going to vomit everywhere. I can't wait."

She sighs and leans up for another kiss.

*It's amazing how much I've missed her.*

"How was your day?"

"It was three hours, sweetheart."

"Felt like a whole fucking day."

"Well, I can see you managed to stay busy." She squeezes Emma's hips once more before walking around to check out her car.

"Thank you both for washing my car!" She looks over at August who smiles wide enough to show all of his tiny teeth.

"You're welcome! We're almost done but," August says coming off the porch with another sponge and lifting it up to her.

"Wanna help?"

She's not at all dressed for this but she's quickly finding that she can't say no to either of them.

"I would love to! Let me just," she turns to Emma, "can I borrow some clothes?"

"Yeah, of course. I'll show you to my room. Augs, stay here. Don't go anywhere, I'll be right back."
"Kaaaay!"

Emma grabs her hand and walks her up the steps when she feels something cold and wet hit her back.

"Ah!" She shrieks and they both turn around to find a cheeky looking August, holding a hose.

"August!"

She knows she should be upset, even Emma sounds upset but really she's just trying her hardest not to laugh. She's got to give him credit for being bold enough to spray her.

"August, you need to apologize."

The smile on his face falls immediately and she feels like she should jump in. She waits for his timid apology before 'tsking'.

"Oh no, an apology isn't good enough. You see," she steps a little closer to him, eyeing a bucket right near her back tire. "the only way to make us even, is if I do the same thing to you."

And with a quickness she didn't know she possessed, she grabs the bucket and dumps the water all over him.

He shrieks for a solid 10 seconds afterwards and she thinks that maybe she hurt him or scared him but then he reaches back down for the hose and, out of buckets, she knows her only good option is to run.

So she tries to run towards the door, thinking that August wouldn't dare get the inside of the house wet. But then she runs right into Emma who grips her waist easily and hoists her up and over her shoulder.

"Oh no you don't. Sorry babe, but you started this war with him."

"Emma no!" She says beating on her back, but still laughing all the while.

"August, get the hose. It's time to teach Ms. Mills a lesson."

August reaches down again screaming playfully and just as she feels water soak her butt, Emma looks back at her, "Get it? Teach you a lesson….because you're a teacher?"

She momentarily forgets about her now soaking wet jeans because she's laughing so hard.

"Yes, baby. I got it."

She rolls her eyes and gives up fighting for Emma to put her down. There's no place she'd rather be anyway.

#####

I know this wasn't the most fulfilling chapter but it was the filler of what's to come. Let me know what you thought!

Until next time! :(
"Wow. You…you're gorgeous."

"You said that."

"Because I meant it."

"Well, thank you dear. You don't…" she smooths out the wrinkles of the dress, "You don't think it's too much? Too tight for meeting the parents?"

Emma shakes her head immediately. "Not at all. You're…just…," Emma lets out a deep breath and turns back to the mirror, continuing to tie her tie.

"Just wow?" She smirks and approaches her from behind, grabbing her slender hips and watching her loop her thin red tie with expertise.

"Yeah, like so many wow's." Emma smiles at her widely as she finishes off with a tip clip to keep it snugly in place.

"Well, you don't look so bad yourself."

Emma is sporting a suit similar to the one she was wearing when they first met except this time, instead of heels she's wearing oxfords with her tight black pants cuffed at the bottom. As she stands in the mirror next to her, Emma's tie complementing her dress nicely, she admits that they make quite a beautiful, stylish couple.

Emma's arm wraps around her shoulder easily and she stares in nothing short of adoration as she kisses her hair and closes her eyes.

"Why are you actually the most beautiful thing ever and how did I get so lucky to call you mine?"

She sighs, thinking the same thing about Emma as she wraps her arms around her waist.

"I don't know," she says honestly. Because she has no clue how someone like Emma could want her.

And she could almost understand why Emma would feel the same. Because they're both so battered and bruised and the reality that someone wants them not just in spite of their flaws but because of them is a heavy thought to bear.

"I don't know either."

They stand in silence for a few more minutes until August comes in with one shoe on and his sweater on completely backwards.

He had insisted on dressing himself in the clothes that she had laid out for him so they left him to it for a few minutes.

They both share a laugh at the finished product.

"Hey bud, let's get your shoes on and fix you up a bit."

Emma lifts him easily so that he's standing on their bed and she watches with intensity in the hopes
of overlooking the fact that she referred to it as "their bed" at all.

Emma pulls off his sweater to reveal a poorly buttoned red dress shirt and they both barely manage to stifle another laugh.

"Here let's sit, huh? Gina will work on the shoes while I work on the buttons."

"I buttoned by myself!" He says proudly as he carefully sits himself on the edge of the bed, feet dangling off the edge.

She sits herself just as carefully, crossing her legs and then lifting his little foot to tie his black converse.

As Emma works the buttons and Regina compliments him on how handsome he looks, it hits her how good this feels.

For a moment, she forgets that August is not her child. She forgets that she and Emma aren't happily married and that they're at a high rise in the city as opposed to a 2-story house in the suburbs.

This false reality only further excites her for the real thing down the road, especially as they finish and August throws his arms around her neck. He's a little too heavy for her to carry but she manages anyway because, much like Emma, she can't refuse him anything.

"Alright, fam bam. We all set?"

August nods enthusiastically and almost knocks her out and with that, they head to the door.

All the while, August screams 'fam bam' several times right in her ear.

Even still, she can't imagine trading this for anything.

The nerves that had settled during their long car ride reappeared the moment they pulled up to the restaurant.

"Are mommy and daddy in there?!"

"Yeah, bud. Uh, but..." she can tell that Emma is sensing her terror and is trying to give her a moment but after months of his parents being gone, she can't bring herself to keep them separated for even a moment longer.

She takes a deep breath and turns in her seat, hoping that August's excitement will turn her butterflies to stone.

"Are you excited to see your parents?"

"Yeah yeah yeah!" He bounces on his booster seat and she nods resolutely.

"Then let's do it."

Before Emma can question her, she smiles at her and opens her door.

Emma waits patiently as August climbs out of the car and then they each take a hand before heading to the large doors that are opened for them.

"Thank you." August repeats after them excitedly already looking around for his mother and father.
"Hi," Emma says to the short, pimply boy standing at the front, "we're with Nolan, it's like a party of 20."

He nods courteously and leads them back to their private dining room.

"Here you are, ma'am. Enjoy your meal and Happy Thanksgiving."

Before Emma can even say 'thanks' or return the sentiment, a soft, soothing voice floats towards them.

"Is that my sweet boy?"

She can't tell who's more excited to see the tall blonde woman, August or Emma. But they each find her immediately and August drops her hand in an instant to make his way to her.

She bends down as well as she can in her dress and opens her arms for him, which he wastes no time jumping into.

They hug each other tightly as she strokes his soft brown hair and whispers into his cheek.

She used to think that the Nolan's weren't the best parents. She had tried on several occasions to get in touch with them and each time she was met with Lilly, who took all of the information she provided and "passed it along".

But now, it's abundantly clear to her that Ingrid loves her son as she spins him around.

Of course, all the attention showered on him reminds her that Emma is standing next to her still, smiling widely but…still at her side.

She feels bad immediately that Ingrid's first thought, first concern, was for the 5 year old. And so she takes Emma's hand and kisses it.

Emma looks her way and smiles widely and she wonders if it even bothers her.

"Ready to meet my mom? Officially?"

She only nods, bile rising in her throat a little.

Don't mess this up, Regina.

They walk towards her and immediately catch Ingrid's eye. She puts August down easily and kisses him once more before pointing at a man standing in the corner talking with another gentleman and August instantly bolts.

As they come to a stop right in front of Ingrid who seems to stand taller than ever, she takes a deep breath.

"Hey mom."

Ingrid's face lights up and her smile grows wider, if that's at all possible. She faces Regina to intentionally roll her eyes.

"Hey mom," she mocks easily, deepening her voice to imitate Emma's and she does a pretty good job.

"8 ½ months and all I get is 'hey mom'? Come here." Her arms open invitingly and Emma doesn't
hesitate to fall into them.

"Oh my girl. I've missed you so much."

"I know, me too," Emma mutters almost sounding uncomfortable.

Ingrid sighs and pulls back. "Right…well…this must be Regina."

She sticks her arms out ready to shake hands and introduce herself formally but Ingrid bypasses it and pulls her in for a hug that's just as tight as Emma's seemed to be.

"My goodness, it's so nice finally getting to meet you. Officially I suppose because I know we've met at the school once. I have just heard so many good things and I know we've even chatted a few times but…you are so much prettier than I could've imagined."

She swallows and works up the nerve to just say 'thank you' without her voice shaking too much.

"Of course. I really am looking forward to getting to know you better, Regina. But for now, the food is going to start pouring in so we should probably take our seats in a few minutes. I also know there are a few of Emma's friends you probably haven't met yet, so I'll let you two do that."

She pulls Emma in for one more tight hug before heading back to the other side of the room where August and a man who is most likely his father are having what appears to be a tickle fight.

She wants to comment about how awkward that felt but when Emma smiles back at her, looking happier than she has all day, she can't bring herself to say it. Obviously, Emma didn't sense any awkwardness at all despite seeming less than thrilled to see Ingrid in person.

"So? She's great right?"

There's no need to fake the smile that lights up her face. "She seems wonderful."

Emma lets out a delighted sigh and takes her hand again.

"Ruby should be here by now, let me text her."

"Sure…," she glances around the room and spots a man she's never seen before now talking to David. "Do you know that gentlemen?"

"Hmm?" Emma looks up and immediately locks eyes with him, as he was already looking their way.

"Oh yeah….that's-that's Neal."

Her heart skips a beat at that. She has a hard time believing that for a moment. The Neal she had created in her head was smarmy and unattractive. This man was far from either, at least from 15 feet away. He wore a nice button up and tie with black slacks and he honestly looked like the kind of guy she'd have found attractive a year or two ago.

"We should probably go say hi. Especially to David."

She nods mutely and lets Emma lead her over there, both walking rather reluctantly.

As they approach, David turns their way and grins at her.

"Em, hey!"
To his credit, he looks excited to see her and his hands twitch almost imperceptibly as if he wants to reach out and hug her but he thinks better of it.

Emma smiles briefly but genuinely at him and puts a hand at the bottom of her back.

"Hey David…this is Regina." The lack of title isn't lost on her but she smiles warmly anyway and reaches for his hand. He, like Ingrid, seems like a hugger but given Emma's disposition towards him, he probably doesn't want to push it because he shakes her hand and nothing else.

"It's so nice to finally meet you Regina. Ingrid has been talking about you non-stop."

She blusses and out of her peripheral, she sees Emma looking anywhere but at them.

"It's great to meet you too. Emma has spoken so highly of you, of both of you," she adds on so it doesn't feel like a complete lie.

The glint in David's eye tells her he knows that's not true, that Emma is hardly fond of him at all and would never speak *too* highly of him but he just says the same to her.

After another moment of awkward silence, Neal speaks up and smugness in his voice almost makes her roll her eyes.

"I'm sorry, what was your name again? Was it Sadie?"

She signs internally and grinds her teeth for a minute. She has no clue who 'Sadie' is but she's two seconds from losing her cool. "It's Regina."

"Hmm, never heard of you. I remember a Sadie, a Brittany, and an Alex…but Regina doesn't ring any bells?"

David chuckles awkwardly and steps in, "No no, Regina and Emma have been dating for a few months, right?"

"Y-yeah," is all Emma manages to say and, though she had told her she'd give her time to tell Neal, she's growing rather agitated with Emma's reluctance to call this what it is: a relationship.

"I'm the girlfriend," she says proudly, and maybe even with a hint of smugness, as she wraps her arm around Emma's waist.

Emma's tense posture is not at all lost on her.

"Which one?"

Emma must feel her tense in that moment because she says his name firmly, and perhaps it's meant to be some sort of a warning or deterrent but all she can focus on is that Emma didn't say 'the only one'.

Dinner is beyond awkward.

Ruby and Belle arrive and that seems to settle things down with Regina a bit.

Still, she knows she fucked up earlier. She can feel it every time she reaches out and places a hand on Regina's thigh because she flinches and lets it rest there for a moment before crossing her legs or turning more fully to Belle, who's seated next to her.

She can feel the brunette's frustration with her every time her mother asks her a question about them
and she answers it nonchalantly before Regina answers it more completely.

She hears Belle comment about how Ruby does the same thing, but Ruby overhears and snorts.

They all know that Ruby does no such thing. Ruby takes every opportunity to gloat about how incredible Belle is. Meanwhile, she's tried her hardest to shift every question or hint of interest to a different topic entirely.

'How did you meet' is shut down quickly with 'It's not a very interesting story'.

'How long has it been for you two' is met with 'Not long enough to really count days.'

And God, she doesn't mean to be so short with her parents. She doesn't mean to discredit everything she has with Regina…it's just that Neal is sitting right next to her.

And she just wishes she had known he was going to be here because at least then she could've mentally prepared herself for this.

And more than that, she could've prepared Regina.

But nothing prepares her, or Regina, for the moment when she puts the last nail in her coffin.

"So, Regina sweetheart, Emma tells me that you helped her re-decorate her apartment?"

She groans in her head, adding that to the list of things Neal is going to give her shit about later.

"We did, she called it a mystery date night. It was a lot of fun!"

Her mother opens her mouth to say something and without thinking, she mutters, "It really wasn't a date. Or at least it wasn't to me."

But even if it was only meant for Neal's ears, she knows that Regina hears it. She knows that her mother hears it too and based on the simultaneous glares she can feel on her face, she knows that it was a fucked up thing to say.

Because it's the furthest thing from the truth. If she had to pinpoint their first date, it would've been that evening. Their whole relationship had reached a turning point that day and she just flat out lied about it. Lied about how much it meant to her.

She sighs and tries to fix it and fast. "But yeah it was a lot of fun!" She fakes enthusiasm as she reaches for Regina's hand on the table and she supposes that that's a step in the right direction, until Regina subtly moves it to pick up her fork again, saying nothing.

Emma looks up pleadingly at her mother and though she's clearly not happy, she obliges and changes the subject.

"So baby," she says turning to August next to her who's eating without a care in the world. "What kind of fun things did you and Emmy do while mommy and daddy were gone?"

And that starts him on a rant about everything their mother has missed. It always amazes her that he can't remember what he ate for breakfast but he can always tell a story from a month ago at the zoo exactly as it happens. He replays the moment when the snow leopards swatted at him and he fell. He conveniently leaves out the part where he cried but he is sure to tell her about all the other animals he saw and the ice cream he had and the big boy words he sounded out.

Everyone around the table indulges him, even Neal, and fortunately, he manages to dominate the
David has already established that August will go home with them.

Her mother has already requested to get lunch tomorrow and do some Black Friday shopping alone with Regina, which she happily agreed to. It thrills her to no end that they've seemed to hit it off.

Now as they prepare to head off of to their car, she takes her time hugging Belle goodbye. She avoids Ruby's eyes because she knows there's nothing there but disappointment. It's the same reason why she's been avoiding looking at her girlfriend.

She pulls her keys out and they say their final goodbyes, with Regina holding onto Belle for longer than necessary.

They've become close over just a few weeks and that genuinely makes her happy.

Finally, the doors to her mustang are shut and she feels like she can finally breathe.

"Baby, I am –,"

"Just stop, Emma. Please."

Regina sounds equally irritated and tired and she wonders if she really should drop it. Maybe they'll have a more productive conversation in the morning, after everything has settled down.

The drive back to her place is over an hour with the crazy traffic and it gives her plenty of time to think and rethink her apology through. She decided in the car to save it until morning, but as they walk through the doors of her house and Regina still says nothing to her, she thinks maybe she should try again.

She's not going to be able to sleep at all like this.

"Gina, I'm sorry," she says quickly so that there's no chance of being cut off.

Nothing. She receives nothing.

She just keeps walking to the room, with Emma hot on her heels.

"Look, I know I made things so awkward tonight but can we at least talk? Can you at least accept my apology?"

Silence. She receives silence.

And that silence manages to turn her sorry into something cattier. Because Regina is the one always trying to get her to open up, talk more, expose herself more. Yet here she is, doing just that, and Regina is dead silent.

"Okay, what the fuck? You seriously want to be mad and just ignore this? That's not going to fix anything, Regina."

She says it mockingly and regrets it immediately but it seems to spark something in Regina and as she turns to her, eyes ablaze, she realizes she's about to get the fight she wasn't (or maybe was) looking for.

"Are you fucking kidding me right now? You sat there tonight and lied about everything we have
together and then you accuse me of not being willing to fix it?! Emma, I didn't break it! You did."

"Okay fine-"

"Shut up. You have talked all night. You've told a whole table of your friends and family that what we have literally means nothing to you."

"I never said that!"

"Yes you did! Every time you said something stupid like 'it wasn't even a date' or 'the story of how we met isn't really that important'...how can you sit there and lie like that Emma? I just don't understand at all. You lay in bed with me one minute thinking about our life together and then proceed to tell everyone you love that meeting me just wasn't even that significant to you."

She sighs, knowing that she was digging her own grave even as it was happening.

"Gina, I'm sorry. I am. I don't...I fucked up and I'm sorry."

"Stop apologizing," She puts her hand up and Emma stops, if only to avoid being in more trouble. "Sorry is another way of saying 'I regret what I did and if I could go back in time, I'd do things differently'. Sorry, to me, says that if this situation ever comes up again, I'll do things differently. And...I don't believe you're sorry. I don't think that you'd do things differently. Not as long as Neal is there."

She rolls her eyes, "Riiight. I get it now. You said you were cool with me telling Neal in my own time, lie detector tests confirmed that was a fucking lie."

"You've got to be kidding! Are you seriously trying to make me seem like the bad guy?"

"I'm just saying that it's not like you didn't know. You said you weren't going to fight me about it."

"No Emma, I said I wasn't going to pressure you into telling him but tonight? Tonight he was pushing every button in the hopes that you would do exactly what you did. Discredit everything we have and hurt me in the process."

"What?! You're fucking insane. He's an asshole but he wasn't out to hurt you."

"He didn't hurt me Emma. Neal can say whatever he wants about me and about us. He can think whatever he wants but you're my girlfriend. You're supposed to be on my side."

The momentary skip of her heartbeat at hearing Regina call her the 'g' word is replaced by the assumption that Emma isn't 100% on her side.

"I am on your side!" She yells it louder than she means to.

"Then act like it! I mean, how many girlfriends do you have Emma?"

"Oh my god. Please, you know the answer to that." She rolls her eyes.

"Then why not just say that when he asked?! The answer is one, me! But you're too much of a coward to say that, aren't you?"

The word coward hits her square in the chest. "I'm not a coward. It's just not any of his business."

Her voice is loud but somehow timid, which is such a contrast from their constant angry yelling of the past few minutes.
Regina must have some sympathy for her and she comes closer, placing hands on her hips.

She shakes her head, "Yes, you are dear. You're too afraid to tell your best friend that you found something good." Regina leans forward to place a kiss on her heart and sighs. "You're too afraid to just admit that…to admit that you're in love because you don't want to look weak. But sweetheart, it's not weak to – "

She scoots back immediately and shakes her head. "What? No…no, I'm not in love with you."

The words slip off her tongue so easily that she almost believes them. Lord knows she's said it to so many girls before.

To Regina's credit, she looks hurt for only a moment before she swallows and continues.

"Emma, you...you don't plan a future with someone that you don't love. You don't make love the way we do and then turn around and say that there's no love between us. I don't believe you."

"Gina stop," she sighs much like she did that night that Regina asked her to come back to bed. Just before she walked out of her life for weeks. The longest weeks of her life. The worst ones too. And Regina must sense her shutting down because she steps forward again to reach for her.

"No, Emma, you're not going to do this again. You're not going to tell me this means nothing and then walk out again. You don't have to say it back if you don't want to, but I love you. And I know you love me."

And it's that right there that kills her. She had suspected, of course, but to hear Regina say those three little words, it frightens more than comforts. It's the last thing she needs to hear right now.

She takes another step back. "You don't know anything. Look, I'm sorry that shit got crazy tonight, I'm sorry that Neal brought up those other girls and I'm sorry that I didn't stand up for you or whatever. But that doesn't mean I love you."

By the way Regina's eye shine with unshed tears, she can see that she's ruining it. Ruining them.

"And please don't think you're special because I fuck you slowly."

She's adding oil to the fire and she just can't stop. She doesn't want them to burn to the ground but at the same time, there's instant relief. If it falls apart now, before there are joint bank accounts to separate and kids to split time with, then that's better. For everyone. Because one way or another, she's going to hurt her. She can't even do dinner with family without disappointing Regina. How is she supposed to handle a whole life of always getting it wrong?

"I do the same thing for Alex and Brittany and Sadie."

Regina swallows thickly. "I know that you want to push me away, Emma. But I told you, your past doesn't scare me. We're building something here and it's good. Good for both of us."

Regina may love her now, but she'll get tired of this soon enough. Tired of all the fighting, of all the demons and shadows. And the thing that drew them nearer at first, their difficult pasts, will come back to haunt them in the worst way.

Things may be good now but nothing good ever stays. No love ever lasts. She just knows it.

So why not save Regina from all that if she can? Because that's what love is, isn't it? Sparing your
partner when you can? Giving them the best of everything…even when that means having to give them up?

In the back of her mind, she wishes there was someone to talk her off this ledge. She wishes that Regina hadn't cornered her like this with all these feelings in the air. But she's found over the years that some wishes don't come true.

And so with no one to talk her out of it, she takes an ax to the last standing pillar of their relationship. Regina's trust.

"They're not in the past. I lied when I said it was just you."

Regina shakes her head. "I refuse to believe that. I know you Emma, whether you like it or not, and I know you wouldn't do that to me."

She laughs coldly and pulls out her phone. "You don't know shit Regina. And you definitely don't know me."

Without another word, she unlocks it and opens her messages, specifically the ones to and from Neal before handing over her phone.

Regina stares at her for a long minute, as if giving her enough time to take it all back and she has to remind herself that she's doing this for Regina. That now is no time to have a selfish heart.

And eventually, Regina looks down at the screen.

Emma already knows what's there. It's a woman on her knees sucking her off.

Regina doesn't move or attempt to take the phone from her so she scrolls for her and narrates coldly as she does.

"You see that Regina? That's what I do when you're not around. I fuck girls slowly and intimately and in my bed, just like I. fuck. You."

The words are barely out before Regina's hand connects firmly with her face.

When she regains her composure and lifts her head again, she knows they're done. And she has no reason to be upset.

She's done this to herself. But of course, that does nothing to stop her heart from breaking into a million pieces as a single tear slips down Regina's cheek.

"I'm not going to beg you to be with me Emma. If there's one thing that being with you has taught me, it's that I deserve good things. And tonight, you humiliated me in the worst way possible. I'd rather be left alone in a restaurant than treated like that. I deserved better than him and now I realize…I deserve better than you."

The comparison to him cuts deeper than anything else ever has and she's literally been cut before during her time on the streets.

But still…she doesn't apologize. She doesn't beg for another chance or for forgiveness that she doesn't deserve. She lets her go. Because even if it kills her, it's what's best.

Because this is what you do when you love someone.

#######
Very anxious to hear your thoughts! Until next time!
Chapter 22

Italics are flashbacks to moments immediately following Thanksgiving dinner.

There were stages to missing Regina.

Regret.

That was stage one and it lasted longest.

She regretted losing her the moment she walked out, but even more the morning after. After the initial need to blame anyone but herself passed…she realized she had no one to blame but herself.

And Ruby had been quick to remind her of that.

*She can't breathe. There isn't enough air in her lungs. Or the whole atmosphere really.*

*She cried herself to sleep last night and had dreamt of her.*

*To wake up without her now feels like death. It's harder now to see why she thought this was a good idea.*

As she replays it all in her head, she has no idea who she was last night. The things she said were beyond cruel. The last thing she ever wants to do is hurt Regina. And yet…

*She sighs and sits up from the couch.*

*There was no way she was going to sleep in that bed. She'll probably have to burn it honestly.*

*She briefly considers lighting it on fire while lying in it because really...what's the point anymore?*

*Her phone lighting up pulls her from her dangerous mind and she looks over to see that it's 12:03pm and Ruby has called at least 10 times.*

*Fuuuuuck, that means she probably knows.*

*She can't face Ruby right now. She can barely fucking face herself.*

*But like any good friend, Ruby is persistent and knocks loudly immediately after the ringing stops.*

"*Emma, don't even try to pretend you're not in there.*"

*If she had a heart, it would sink.*

*The fury in the fiery brunette's voice is evident even through the thick door.*

*She sighs again. This isn't going away anytime soon. She's fucked up and the least she can do is face that head on. Maybe if she wears a brave face, acts like she doesn't care, everyone will move on from this quickly.*

*She stands as the knocking continues and pulls it open just as Ruby's hand was poised to knock again.*

*Ruby's anger reignites as she takes in her red eyes and wrinkled suit that she slept in.*

She turns away, unable to face her, but Ruby roughly grasps her chin and forces them to make eye contact.

"No, answer me Emma!"

"I don't know," she lets out sadly.

"Not good enough, Emma." Her tone bites, cuts and claws at her. She's never seen her so upset.

After a moment of silence, she's pushed through the doorway as Ruby walks in and shuts the door.

"Emma! What were you thinking? How could you do this?! You were happy with her. I just saw you last night and things were fine. What happened?!

She shakes her head, thinking about how awful she was at the table.

"I-I really...," she pauses, "I just...got scared, Ruby."

She looks up at her best friend and sees no sympathy.

"Scared of what exactly?! Things were going fine. You were happy, that much was obvious. How did you—" Ruby takes a breath and runs her hands over her face.

"Emma, walk me through this because I am not understanding at all. I saw you two last night and things were good. How did I wake up this morning to your girlfriend crying on my couch with my girlfriend?"

Her chest pounds at the thought of Regina still being here. She doesn't have the right to ask how she is. She doesn't have the guts to ask to see her because she wouldn't be able to face her.

She tries once more to answer honestly. "Ruby. I'm telling you...I got scared. It was like...one second we were having a normal fight, I knew what she was mad about so I was trying to fix it, I was trying to apologize but she wouldn't listen. She wouldn't accept my apology."

"What was she upset about to begin with?"

She cringes at having to replay this.

"Emma." Her tone leaves no room for argument and so she lets out a deep sigh.

"Neal. She was upset about Neal. He...he was a huge dick to her all night and I...I didn't say anything."

Ruby's face scrunches up, "What, when? I didn't think they even talked."

"It all started before you got there...he just...I went over to introduce Gina to David and he was standing there. He kept saying dumb shit like 'what's your name again? Sadie? Alex?' and when she told him she was my girlfriend, he actually asked which one."

Ruby winces before taking a step back. "Wait...he said all of that and you didn't say anything?"

She's been saying that to herself all night. After all is said and done, she knows without a doubt that Regina means more to her than Neal. Despite everything they've been together, she could live without Neal. Regina...not so much.
She can't believe she didn't say something. If prior to the evening beginning, someone told her that Neal was going to say those things, she probably would've committed to punching him in the face. But...

"In the moment, I just...I didn't want to get into it there." Ruby looks so unbelievably disappointed so she continues, "And...I was gonna say something to him later, you know? Tell him that shit wasn't cool. I was going to talk to him I just...never got the chance. She blew up at me."

"Of course she blew up at you!" Ruby retorts immediately, "I'm surprised she even stayed for dinner after that. Emma...that's your girl."

She doesn't bother correcting her that it's past tense now.

"You're supposed to stand up for her. At all costs, against anyone. If Neal ever said that shit to Belle, there would've been a whole fucking fight. And his ass certainly wouldn't be welcome to sit at my family's table for dinner."

She grinds her teeth at that. She doesn't need a side by side comparison.

"Okay, I get it. You're better at this than I am, Ruby!"

"Oh my God, don't get pissy with me because you fucked up!"

"I get that I fucked up, I don't need the lecture." She turns away and heads towards the hall.

But Ruby doesn't give up easily at all and follows her.

She blocks out how familiar this all feels.

"You obviously do so whether you want it or not, you're getting one."

She rolls her eyes. "What's the point anyway? It's over. It's done. She's not coming back and I don't —"

She can't finish that thought. She's lied enough. She not about to pretend that she wouldn't go back in time and do everything differently, starting with dinner.

"Why isn't she coming back?! Emma, stop being such a fucking coward and walking away from all of your problems. Just answer me! Why did she leave?!!"

The word 'coward' triggers her.

She turns around and pushes Ruby harder than she ever has. "Get the fuck out of my house."

The initial shock is written all over her face until it turns to outrage.

"Is that why she left you?" She asks standing. "Did you fucking put your hands on her?"

The accusation from her best friend that she would ever lay her hands on Regina fuels her anger even more. The urge to strangle her becomes overwhelming and she walks away before it becomes reality. She can't lose two of the most important people in her life.

Ruby's cold laughter hits her back as she again continues to follow her all the way to her makeshift gym.

"You can push me as hard as you want Emma but nothing's going to change the fact that you
pushed her away. But you will give me a fucking explanation. Because the Emma I know, she wouldn't do that. The Emma I know loves that girl. So, again, I ask what the fuck?"

Emma unbuttons her shirt and begins wrapping her fingers, needing to punch the shit out of something. Anything to keep her from taking her anger out on a truly undeserving Ruby.

She shakes her head, clearly Ruby isn’t leaving without the full story.

She pulls off her pants until she’s in nothing but a bra and boxers before she takes the first hit of her punching bag.

The first hit lands squarely in the center and it feels so good.

"I told you, Ruby. I freaked."

"About what?"

Another quick jab with the left.

"About her. One second, things were heated and we were yelling and the next she…she was pulling me close and being so…goddamn understanding."

She lands two more quick punches as she thinks about how patient Regina was trying to be with her last night.

"One minute, she was telling me how I shouldn’t be afraid to tell Neil I'm in love with her and the next I…I was trying to convince her that I didn't love her at all."

Ruby sighs and she doesn't even bother looking over at her. It's bad enough that she can't stop replaying last night in her head. She doesn't need another person looking at her like she just murdered their puppy with her bare hands.

She lands a couple more blows before revealing the absolute worst part.

"I told her I've been cheating on her."

Ruby's gasp is audible and the silence that follows is deafening.

"Is that true?" Ruby's disgust surprises her and she whips her head around.

"Of course not! You know I…"

Couldn't. Wouldn't. Hadn't even thought about it.

"I wouldn't do that to her. But…in the moment, all I could think was that I needed her as far away from me as possible. Needed to let her go before I hurt her even more. Because I was Ruby…"

She looks over and sees that Ruby's eyes hold only a hint of sympathy.

Not that I deserve any at all, she muses.

"I was hurting her and I just didn't-and I still don't- know how not to."

Ruby swallows and they stand there for a long minute before she speaks.

"Emma," her voice is strained and it's apparent that she's barely controlling her anger. "All I can
say is that I hope you're happy with yourself."

Ruby shakes her head and stares up at the ceiling. "You got exactly what you wanted. She's long
gone and according to Belle, forgiving you is the last thing on her mind. So enjoy being alone and
going nowhere in your life with Neal right be-fucking-side you. And you know what, right now, that's
exactly what you deserve. Nothing and no one."

Her last words are punctuated by the door to the room slamming.

Once the walls stop shaking, she goes right back to her heavy bag.

And every jab and kick and punch reminds her that she is a loser.

She is going nowhere.

And she doesn't deserve Regina.

And as much as this hurts her, as much as this will probably always hurt her, she wasn't good
enough.

She offsets every miserable, self-loathing thought about herself with a list of things Regina deserves
that she could've never have delivered on.

After regret had come anger. Burning, red hot anger.

At first, anger at Regina. She was angry at how easy it was to convince her she had cheated.

Had she really had so little faith in me all along?

But then that anger had turned inward when she remembered the look in Regina's eyes. They had
begged her not to say something she'd regret. Begged her not to set fire to everything they had built
together.

But she had done it anyway. All in an effort to save Regina from her.

She remembers crying in the shower so hard she thought she'd be sick.

She lets the water cascade over her for almost an hour until finally, her eyes have dried up. She's
had a good cry for what almost was.

She scrubs the feeling of Regina away and takes an extra-long time, reminiscing on all the memories
they made in here.

She's glad for them. Glad they happened. Glad that they had what they did for as long as they did.

And the truth?

The truth is that she does love Regina, probably always will, but this was for the best. Everyone else
can call her crazy but she knows in her heart it was.

And it kills her, but it comforts her, to know that for once, she wasn't selfish.

For once, she did the right thing.
And that's where she found the third stage: acceptance.

It came slowly. Very slowly.

Admittedly, it had taken a month for her to call Ruby and apologize. And it probably would've lasted longer, if not for the fact that it was Christmas.

No matter how things ended between her and Ruby, she wasn't about to let the holiday pass without saying anything. And apparently, her call had been what they both needed. They had talked for over an hour, until it was time for them to head to Belle's father's for dinner.

And while they hadn't resolved everything, she appreciated Ruby telling her she'd give her a call in the New Year so they could catch up a little more.

She tentatively ended the call with an 'I miss you' and Ruby had only sighed before whispering the same.

It had taken even longer to tell her mom the entire story. She had answered the phone that day just long enough to tell her that they had decided to end things so Regina wouldn't be joining her for lunch but then she had hung up and had declined every phone call thereafter.

She was in a bit of a downhill spiral, drinking alone at home and smoking weed again, until her mother had finally had enough.

She knows how she got in, so she doesn't bother asking how or why she's here.

She knows that her mother has been home for nearly two months and she's only seen her twice, for Thanksgiving and Christmas, where she barely held it together.

All she could think of was how it would've been their first Christmas. The first time they exchanged gifts and her first time spending a quiet time with just family at her parent's house. She would've spoiled the brunette. Would've recorded her opening every gift just so she could watch it back later.

They would've worn cute matching sweaters and Regina would've made cookies with August and helped her mother set the table while she and the kid played with his new toys.

But Regina wasn't there.

She wasn't going to be joining in on any of their traditions.

She wasn't going to be cementing herself as part of the family like Emma had imagined.

In fact, nothing was like Emma had planned. And as much as she wanted to stay, she left shortly after Christmas dinner, citing she wasn't feeling well, because she couldn't bear to be around the happy family one more second.

Her mother had all but begged her to stay. Had urged her really to enjoy time with family, claiming it would make her feel better.

But she had snatched her arm away from Ingrid's pleading grasp and muttered that nothing would make her feel better.

Now, she's back to stage one of missing Regina and, to make matters worse, there's no escaping her mother.
She has invaded her space and has clearly committed to staying until she gets the full story out of Emma.

"You...you just haven't been yourself since you and Regina split. And I just want to know what I can do."

A hand settles on her knee but she stares straight ahead at the tv.

Her mother sighs.

"I hate seeing you like this Emma."

She blinks slowly and contemplates whether speaking of it after all this time will cause her to revert back to stage one of her grieving process.

Then she realizes she's already there.

So what's the point? She might as well tell her mother everything. Maybe it would make her shoulders ache less if she could share the burden of what she's done.

She wonders briefly if it's fair to wish for everyone around her to be as miserable as she is.

*It isn't*, she concludes, but it doesn't stop her from licking her lips and speaking anyway.

"I pushed her away."

It's the most honest, straightforward answer to why things ended with Regina.

"I...We were fighting when we got home. She was mad about dinner at first and then...she wasn't anymore. She told me she loved me. That she forgave me for acting like a jerk at dinner and I... instead of telling her I was sorry, I told her that I didn't love her. Instead of just saying *sorry*, I told her I had been cheating on her."

She speaks to herself as much as she speaks to her mother.

Every time she's played back that fight, she hears how immature and how juvenile she was being.

She hears how selfish and foolish she was.

In the arms of a girl who was willing to love her, not in spite of her flaws but *because* of them, she responded with the lowest, cruelest thing she could think of.

"And I don't know why mom."

At the word, Ingrid sinks from the coffee table onto her knees in front of Emma, wiping tears away and, it may just be her own tears obstructing her vision, but it almost looks like her mother is crying as well.

"Oh sweetheart."

A gentle kiss on her forehead has her crying even harder.

"I don't know," she hiccups, "I don't even know why I said it. It wasn't true. I wouldn't. I..." she wipes her large tears away with the sleeve of her shirt. "I don't know why I just...hurt her like that."

A soft hand pushes her hair back and a kind voice coos that it's all "okay" and it feels like a final
straw. Because the reality is that,

"It's not okay, mom!" She manages to push herself into a sitting position while pushing her mother's hands away. "She left me and there's not anything I can say or do to get her back and so it's never gonna be okay so just go away. I don't want you here!"

Her voice cracks at the end and that's how Ingrid probably knows she doesn't mean it. Because she couldn't even say her final sentence with any real conviction.

She swallows and places her hands on her thighs, probably to keep from reaching out to touch her.

"Emma, I…I know that you're hurting right now. But…I'm going to tell you something that…maybe I should've told you, or asked you, I suppose, years ago."

That peaks her interest.

There's a moment of silence which she takes to mean that Emma is listening.

"When you first came to live with me, you were having nightmares every night. I'm sure you remember. You were terrified to be in the dark, or left alone at night and you…you used to come into my room every night and you must've thought I was asleep but…I could hear you, crying quietly. And every time you stood there, every night, I kept hoping you'd come in and wake me. I had hoped you'd…just tell me. So we could talk about it or even just…deal with it together. But you never did. You would stand there for a few minutes and then head back to bed, I guess. I don't really know what you did after that actually because you'd never even talk about it in the morning."

She remembers those moments. They seem like so long ago now. Now that she knows safety. Now that she knows what family means and what it feels like to be taken care of, it all seems like a distant memory.

But a tear runs down her cheek despite what she feels now because she remembers being that scared teenage girl, wishing she could crawl into Ingrid's bed and seek shelter in her arms.

"One day, I got so frustrated and…terrified that I was doing something wrong that I called your therapist and I explained everything. Everything that had happened since the day you'd moved in. And do you know what he said to me?"

That hand comes forward once more to stroke her cheek. Her eyes close involuntarily and she shakes her head.

"He told me that you were a kind, sweet and loving young lady but that…that you were afraid of demons I couldn't scare away. He told me that no amount of affection or comforting words were going to make you less afraid. And I….ever since then, I've wanted to ask but didn't know how…"

As if under a spell, her eyes open and bear right into Ingrid's.

"What are you so afraid of, sweetheart?"

Without warning, without hesitation and without travelling through the filter that usually keeps her biggest insecurities buried, she speaks.

"Me," her voice cracks and a solitary tear trickles down her cheek.

Ingrid doesn't catch that one. In fact, her fingers are frozen in place.
She barely looks like she's breathing for a moment until she lets out a deep sigh.

"That's what I was afraid of. What…what has you so scared of what you see looking back at you in the mirror, love?"

Her heart clenches. It's a sad reality but nothing has ever been closer to the truth.

She doesn't like the person looking back at her in the mirror. She despises her really. On days like this especially, but every day too really.

And she doesn't know why. She doesn't know what it is about her reflection that frustrates and frightens her so much.

The only thing that made her not hate herself so much was when Regina entered the picture. When she wrapped her arms around her and stared straight at her through the mirror. Like she could see everything Emma couldn't say out loud. And loved her anyway.

"I miss her so much mom. I…was happy with her. I," another hiccup, "I only like myself when I'm with her."

Ingrid sighs and her voice shakes, seemingly devastated. "Sweetheart, while I'm glad that you liked Regina…or, maybe even loved her, I…I wish you could see yourself and love yourself the way we all do. The way I do and Ruby does and David and August and it sounds like even Regina does. You are such an incredible girl, always thinking of others and wanting to see other people happy. But…I want you to be happy. And more than that, I want you to like yourself. I want you to love yourself just the way you are. Because I sure as hell do. But…I can't do it for you. And, believe it or not, Regina can't do it for you. Sometimes Em, whether you like it or not, you're going to have to stand in the mirror alone and you have to like the person looking back at you. Because you know better than anyone…sometimes that person is all you have."

The truth of her mother's words hit her like a freight train. They're so honest and it's the most real conversation she's ever had with Ingrid.

The idea of 'loving herself' continues to play in her mind long after her mother is gone and she rings in the New Year alone on her couch, surrounded by pamphlets and applications and paperwork galore.

Come January 1st, she's reached acceptance again.

One day, she'll love Regina fully and faithfully the way that she deserves to be loved and she accepts that that day isn't going to be today or tomorrow or really anytime soon. But she resolves that not until she can learn to love herself will she show up at Regina's doorstep asking for another chance.

Until that day comes, she'll work on learning to just…like herself.

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Tough one to write, so I look forward to your thoughts! Until next time!
Chapter 23

Time passes slowly without Emma.

It drags and slips by aimlessly as she cries alone in her own little brownstone...and waits.

She waits for an apology. She waits for the "I'm sorry" or "I didn't mean it" that she knows Emma feels deep down.

She nearly gives up until one night, well past any respectable hour, she hears a knock at the door. It's both with hesitation and utter excitement that she stumbles towards the door, refusing to turn on any lights.

What greets her is the furthest thing from Emma.

Well, perhaps not the furthest, she thinks as she takes in a bundled up Ingrid.

Her hair is down and she looks quite comfortable apart from the obvious shivering. Snow falls around her and she looks effortlessly and timelessly beautiful.

She eventually stares so long that Ingrid must give up on a formal invite.

"May I?" She asks as she steps over the threshold.

"Sure," she mumbles before closing the door.

By the time she turns around from locking it, Ingrid is removing her scarf and gloves.

"I know this is sudden and I can understand if I'm one of the last people you want to see..."

She shrugs out of her coat.

"I also fully recognize that we barely know each other."

She hands her coat to Regina and she resigns to the fact that the woman is obviously going to be staying awhile.

"But I know how my daughter feels about you. From the way she talks about you, you'd think you created the earth in seven days. So...I came to check in on you."

Her eyes widen and she probably looks comically surprised.

"Uh...why," she clears her throat, "If she cares so much, why didn't Emma check on me? Why did she send you?"

Ingrid's eyes cast downward and there's her answer.

She didn't send her. Because she doesn't care.

"Nevermind, no need to answer that."

She breezes past her towards the kitchen, suddenly in desperate need of wine.

"Regina..."
Her eyes roll instinctively. "Why are you here? Really?"

"Because I have no doubt in my mind that Emma loves you."

She scoffs. "If that was true, she wouldn't have cheated. If that was true, she'd be here apologizing, not forcing you to do it."

She uncorks a new bottle and, against her better judgment, she pours it immediately.

"I admit, I don't really know the entire story. Or any of it really. But...I think you and I both know that while she has her flaws, Emma didn't cheat on you."

That makes her finish her glass in one gulp.

"Well she certainly had the pictures to prove it."

Ingrid frowns.

"Mmm...well do you believe in your heart that she would do that? Be honest with yourself. After everything you two experienced together, do you think that she would do that to you?"

That brings her pause, just as her hand was raised to grab the bottle and top off her glass.

While it feels like lifetimes ago, standing there face to face with Emma, she remembers it vividly.

She remembers seeing the photos and her stomach turning, quite ready to be sick. She remembers the first few nights when she couldn't get the images out of her head.

She remembers feeling like everything they had was a lie.

But really, when she's completely honest with herself, she knows...in her heart, she that Emma probably hadn't cheated. She didn't know where the photos came from, or why Emma had them, but one thing she knew was that everything Emma had confessed to her before couldn't have been a lie.

Lying in bed with her, hearing about Emma's hopes and dreams for them had felt real. That had felt authentic.

Those photos didn't.

So..."No...I...don't think she would. We were...really happy."

"I don't doubt that. You know...ever since meeting Emma, I feel like all I ever think about is her. I know it may not seem like it because I travel often but I'm obsessed with my kids. August of course because I carried him for 9 months and that's a bond that nothing could break or replace but...even still, I always worry about Emma. Always think about her most when I'm away. I wonder what she's doing and I see things and think, 'Emma would love this or that'. I just really love her."

The adoration and wonder in Ingrid's voice and soft smile is nearly infectious and she feels bad at how surprised she is to hear her say this. The way Emma had described it, August had been the apple of Ingrid's eye. She had always made it seem like Ingrid thought of her as a secondary priority to the young boy. And as understanding as Emma was about that, she wonders how she'd feel if she knew that her mother fussed and fretted over her while she was away.

"Why..." She notices her own biting tone and sighs. One deep breath. Then two. As badly as things ended between her and Emma, she doesn't have the heart to be rude to the woman's mother.
"Why are you here?" Her tone is much better this time. "Why are you telling me this?"

Ingrid sighs and slips onto a stool.

"May I have a glass as well?"

She pauses for a moment before turning to grab another wine glass. She pours a generous amount and slides it back to Ingrid and then waits patiently.

"Emma is a sweet girl. A thoughtful woman. When she loves you, she's not great at telling you or even showing you sometimes. She hesitates to hug me almost every time I see her and I've been her adoptive mother for almost 10 years."

Ingrid's eyes widen before continuing, as if she can't even believe it's been that long.

"And I don't know why she's like that. I don't know if maybe...if maybe she thinks she doesn't deserve good things...or I don't know. But...I know that even if she never said it to you, even if she acted the exact opposite, she loves you. So much."

Her jaw clenches at that.

"That's what bothers me most. The fact that we ended because she couldn't just...say it. She'd rather..." she takes a sip of wine in an effort to calm and collect herself.

"She'd rather break my heart, and her own, than just...admit that she loves me. When...if given the option between," she flails her arms in an attempt to think of an example, "between being stabbed a thousand times or denying that I love her, I'd take the former. I would never pretend to not care about her. And she...it's like she just doesn't even care."

She hears Ingrid sigh. "I know what you mean. And I know exactly how you feel sweetie, but...with Emma, you have to have trust and patience. Trust that she loves you even when she does a poor job showing it and show patience when she just completely gets it wrong."

"I tried Ingrid! I gave her every opportunity to just recognize that she hurt me and promise to do better! I would've...I was willing to put up with so much, so long as she was growing. You know?"

Ingrid nods gently and the understanding in her eyes prompts Regina to keep going.

These last few weeks, she's had no one to vent to. Kat had listened and held her for a few days before insisting she move on and find something better.

Belle had called to issue her own sympathies but still it felt almost felt like an insult to Emma to steal her friend away so she had kept the conversation brief and the few conversations that happened post-break up remained about anything but the break up.

Now that she has an empathetic ear, she can't help but allow the dam to break.

"I mean, it's not like this was our first fight! We've fought before! The first time after we went through our...separation because I wanted more and then, when we finally talked through things and were just getting back on the right track, she came to my job to bring me flowers and gave one of them to the receptionist!"

Ingrid's appalled face is actually a little funny and she can't help but chuckle to herself.

"Looking back on it, it was actually sort of funny. And...even then, I thought it was going to be a big
huge argument. She fought me a little and then realized she was wrong, apologized and we moved on from it. I just...I was willing to do that here so..."

"You're wondering why wasn't she?"

She nods solemnly.

They both sigh and she takes another sip of wine.

"I,,,,” Ingrid starts, "I'm sure nothing I say can make this better but I will say this...Emma is a smart girl. Stubborn, but smart. If you're meant to be, it'll be and she'll realize it soon enough. If she loves you, the way I believe she does...the way you believe she does, then she'll get her act give it time."

Ingrid's hand covers hers gently and she nods again but after weeks of no communication, she's quite certain that there's no fixing what Emma broke this time. There's no healing this particular hurt.

And, as expected, it doesn't get easier. Especially when she realizes that whatever short-term relationship she and Emma had ended with long-term consequences.

Just as the crying had stopped, the vomiting started. The sensitivity to all sorts of smells and foods had kept her from eating some of her favorite things.

Just as she thought the hardest part was over, the life-changing news had been delivered.

She was pregnant.

With Emma's child.

They were going to have a baby.

No...not they...Regina was having Emma's baby and that was it.

There was no they. Regina was having a baby and Emma...Emma was gone.

She regrets that time has gotten away from her the way that it has.

She regrets that another month has gone by and she still hasn't told Emma about the baby.

Her baby.

She's starting to show and she berates herself daily for letting things get this out of hand.

She wants to call.

She means to call.

But for them, fate has always had a hand in their relationship and it strikes again at the most inopportune moment.

It's not a date...it really isn't. It was more of a mutual interest in farmer's markets that had led her and Robin to this particular place at this particular time.

But surely that's not the way Emma sees it. Especially when his hand lays gently on her back as he
reaches across to grab fresh basil. Especially when he leans in to tell her something and his lips linger near her ear. *Especially* when she laughs with her entire body and grabs onto his bicep to illustrate how funny the comment is.

The moment they make eye contact, she drops her hand from his arm as if she's been burned.

The touch lasted for less than a second but the hurt on Emma's face tells her she's been watching them for longer than that.

She takes an unconscious step forward and that seems to spook Emma because she bolts.

Emma is tall but it's crowded and she manages to lose her within moments of her departure.

She sighs.

Suddenly she's not in the mood to grocery shop.

And she tells Robin as much.

He's a gentleman about it and they pay quickly before he walks her to her subway.

He offers to see her home and make them dinner.

She refuses and actually grows nauseous at the thought of turning what they have into something more.

As she rides towards home, she wonders if she'll ever get over Emma Swan.

When she arrives at her place and sees the familiar blonde sitting on her stoop with her head in her hands, she knows the answer is no.
The silence is deafening.

Having Regina right in front of her makes her want to cry.

*She looks so damn good.*

For the millionth time, she feels nothing but regret. She hates that she let her go.

"You uh...you look good."

She shuts her eyes. She didn't mean to say that out loud.

Regina puts the few groceries away in silence and the urge to help is surprisingly overwhelming.

"Do you...want some help? I can help with-"

"Emma."

The tone stops her in her tracks, preventing her from coming any closer.

"Yeah?"

"What are you doing here?"

She sounds more tired than irritated and she hopes that maybe that's a good sign.

"I...I came to say sorry. I know it's belated, but I wanted you to know. That I was sorry. For before."

She's rambling and the apology wasn't exactly how she practiced it but it was still good.

"You're sorry? Sorry for what exactly?"

She clenches her teeth, slightly annoyed that Regina is going to make her spell it out.

"I'm sorry for not standing up for you with Neal, that was dumb. And completely my fault. And I'm sorry for what I said before you left. I didn't mean that stuff."

"You mean the part about you cheating or the part about you not loving me?"

She can tell that it took Regina everything she had to get that out. Her knuckles are gripping the counter so tightly and her jaw is clenched.

"Uh...both?"

Her eyes narrow.

"Are you seriously asking me what you're sorry about?"

"No! I mean, I'm telling you...both. I'm sorry for both of them. Like...just, all of it. I just...I wanted to say sorry in person. That's all."

Regina shakes her head and rolls her eyes.
"Well, I appreciate the apology."

She nods and then stands uselessly in the middle of the room.

She hadn't come for a second chance. She wants one, more than anything. But knows she doesn't deserve that.

"Was there something else you needed, Emma?"

That cold tone is back. Not that it ever really left. Regina sounds so done. So over it and so over her and she has to blink back the tears.

"No...guess not."

Despite the finality of her words, she doesn't move.

She knows she should. She knows it's over. But she also knows that walking out of Regina's door will be the end of them. And...even though it's inevitable, even though it's always been inevitable, she can't bring herself to do it just yet.

But in order to stay, she has to say something. Anything.

So, she says the stupidest thing. The first thing that comes to mind even though she doesn't even want to know the answer.

"Are you...are you happy with him?"

At Regina's confusion, she elaborates. "The guy from the market." She swallows the bile in her throat. "Are you with him...are you happy?"

"That's none of your business Emma," she whispers, rubbing her forehead.

"Yeah, no. I...you're right."

She looks off into the living room.

She thinks about the movie nights. The wine and conversation they've shared on that couch.

The kisses and the hugs.

The hugs she's missed more than anything else. The warmth of Regina is the hardest thing to part with, even after all these months.

So she hesitates. She lingers hoping that Regina will say something else. Give her something else to work with.

And just as she's about to give up hope, Regina speaks again, and she congratulates herself for hesitating.

"But...you should know that...I'm pregnant."

That deafening silence is back.

And...now she wishes she had never even come here. She wishes she had left when she had the fucking chance.
Now it doesn't matter how fast she blinks to keep the tears at bay or how hard she wills her heart not to shatter right here in front of Regina.

The tears still fall and her heart still smashes at those words.

"Pregnant?" She repeats back, in disbelief.

Regina nods, not even bothering to make eye contact, and anger and disappointment are at war in her.

This was supposed to be their future.

The house in the suburbs. The kid. The fucking rocket ship bed.

It was all supposed to be theirs.

And now, Regina is building it with someone else.

And she has no one to blame but herself.

She uses her coat sleeves to wipe the tears from her cheeks and she picks up her helmet from the stool where she placed it not ten minutes ago.

"You know what...you're right. I shouldn't have asked. It's none of my business. Congrats though."

If her voice breaks while congratulating Regina on a future that has no room for her, she ignores it.

And when she trips on the rug, in a desperate hurry to escape, she ignores that too.

But the one thing she can't ignore, just as she reaches for the handle on the door, are the words that fall from Regina's lips in barely a whisper.

"It's yours, Emma."

Maybe it's the hurt that's still pulsing through her veins. Maybe it's the anger or the disappointment. Maybe it's the surprise and shock and fear. Perhaps it's a combination of all of those feelings with a hint of disbelief thrown in for good measure.

Whatever it is, it causes her to turn the handle and leave anyway.

"So she just...left?! You told her you were having her baby and she left?!

She sighs. "Yes, Kat. She left."

"How could she...well, I mean, she's a fucking coward, so nevermind."

Kat shrugs off her own question and takes a seat in a tiny chair.

"Lower your voice, I'd hate for someone to overhear you."

Kat rolls her eyes, "They're all in specials. It's fine."

Regina nods.

"So...what are you going to do now?"
She sighs. "The same thing I was doing before, I suppose. Going to check ups, taking vitamins, getting a healthy amount of sleep and exercise. Plenty of single women have babies everyday, Kat. I'll be fine."

"Yeah, I know but..."

"There are no 'but's' Kat! It's been two weeks since she walked out. And almost 4 months since she all but pushed me out of her life. It's high time that I realize that she doesn't want me and she definitely doesn't want this baby."

"That's not true." Both of their necks suffer from whiplash as they turn to find Emma standing in the doorway.

"That's...," she takes a step inside. "That's the furthest thing from the truth, Regina."

"What are you doing here?"
They both ask at the same time, in two completely different tones.

Where Regina's is weary, Kat's is strong and defiant.

But Emma takes two more steps forward, her eyes remaining on Regina the entire time.

"I came to see you."

"Well, that's unfortunate because she doesn't want to see you."

"If I could just talk to you, Gina, for just 5 minutes. Please?"

"Ms. Swan, you need to go. She doesn't-"

"Kat, please just..just give us a few minutes."

Kat's eyes scream betrayal but she huffs and leaves, slamming the door as she goes.

They're alone now.

And she uses Emma's lack of eye contact as a great opportunity to give her a once over.

She looks good.

She always looks so good.

She's wearing a simple button up, rolled up at the sleeves with tight black jeans but even still, she looks so damn beautiful.

When her eyes finally trail back up to Emma's lips, they linger for longer than they should, before connecting with her eyes that hold just a hint of amusement.

She's been caught and that makes her own lip turn up in a small smile that she isn't quick enough to hide.

It lightens the atmosphere for a moment and Emma lets out a breathy laugh before clearing her throat.

"I..uh, I feel like every time I see you now, I'm apologizing but...I came because I wanted to say I'm sorry for leaving that night. I-I had no idea what to say. I had no idea what to do. But I've had some
time to think about it and talk through it and Regina…,

She watches as Emma approaches her at her desk, coming around and kneeling just in front of her.

She waits with baited breath as Emma hits her knees and reaches out tentatively to touch her stomach.

"I want you to know that I do want this baby, and I definitely want you too. I know that I fucked this up. I know that I was immature, I was selfish and I ended things in the worst way possible. I know I have a lot to work on but Regina, but right when I thought we were finished, this baby proved to me that we're not done yet. Our story isn't over. We can still have the future we dreamt of. I want that house and that yard and dog and...this kid...I want it all with you. I know I don't deserve another chance, but I'm on my knees begging for one because we deserve to be happy. Our child deserves to have both of us."

She swallows the lump in her throat. Admittedly, she never expected this from Emma. And a part of her swoons harder than ever. A part of her falls even harder for her.

But a larger part of her, the part of her that is quickly beginning to think like a mother, the part of her that has to think about more than just what she wants, but rather what she and her baby need...that part of her is neither convinced nor impressed.

She places her hands over Emma's and for a minute she gets lost in the feeling. She gets pulled into the warmth and the electricity that flows between their fingertips.

"Emma, our little boy or girl is going to have a great life. I'm certain of that. He or she is going to be so loved. So well-taken care of. I believe that, despite everything, you're going to be a wonderful mother. We're going to be wonderful parents. And you can still have the house, the yard, the dog, the life you dreamt of. . . ." she pushes gently until Emma's hands slip from her stomach, "You just can't have it with me."

She watches Emma's eyes fill with water. She watches the realization come to life in her expression. And the part of her that's still so in love aches to fix it. Aches to make this easier for Emma, despite the fact that Emma has never once made this easy for her.

"Emma, our child deserves the best of us, not what's left of us."

A single tear falls down Emma's cheek and, out of habit, she's quick to wipe it away. "We're so broken, dear. We always have been. And...when we started this, I thought for sure we could put each other back together. But...I've realized that's just not possible. I can't fix you. I can't chase away your demons and your shadows, even though I really wish I could Em."

"I'm...I'm working on me, Regina, I swear. Please just don't tell me it's over."

Those slender hands that once worshipped her body from head to toe are back, this time gripping her waist in a way that's almost painful. Emma looks up through teary eyes and the urge to hold her is so strong.

The urge to comfort and console is overwhelming and it takes everything she has to push her away once more.

"Emma, I want to be with someone that isn't afraid to say 'I love you'. I want to be with someone that I can trust. Someone who makes me a priority. I can't worry about taking care of a baby and you. I can't let you back in just for you to run after this baby is born because you're scared or stressed.
or..bored! I need a partner to share a life with and that's just not you.”

"I'm not going anywhere Regina! I'd never leave you guys like that."

"Again, you mean?"

Emma opens her mouth to speak but nothing seems to come out.

They both sigh and eventually Emma stands up again, placing a more manageable distance between them.

"I know you don't believe me, Gina, but I'm trying so hard to be good for you."

She runs her fingers through her hair in frustration, "Emma, stop trying to be good for me! Just be good for you! Be good for this baby! That's where our focus should be right now. Because beyond this child that we share, there's no us…"

Emma shakes her head at that, but she presses on because she needs to make it clear. She needs to make the boundaries and expectations clear. For her sanity and for her heart's sake, she needs Emma to move on so that (maybe) she can too.

"We're co-parenting together. That's it. The baby will stay with me full-time but you can obviously visit."

"So...that's it? You just, never want to see me?"

"No, of course not. I...I have an appointment next Thursday at 4pm. I'd like you to come. I'm also taking a course on swaddling next month and newborn do's and don'ts the month after. I'll text you the dates. You're welcome to join me."

The look on Emma's face confirms that that's not what she meant. She wants to see her. She wants them to be more.

And, truth be told, she does too. While a relationship is off of the table, she does hope they can at least become friends one day. But that day is not today. Today, Emma needs room to grow and that requires space.

"Thursday at 4pm Emma. Please don't be late."

#####

Very much looking forward to your comments. Until next time!
"Are you going to go?!"

"I...I think so. I should right?"

"Hell yes you should Em! I'm surprised she even invited you but you should definitely go."

She nods, while keeping her eyes on the screen, fingers moving furiously over the controller.

"I...I want to."

Ruby glances over at her quickly, trying to make something of her tone and expression.

"How are you feeling about it all?"

"It's all pretty surreal. Like, I think that's why I wanna go, you know? I think I'll believe it more when I see it."

"You think she's lying?" Another quick glance.

"No no! I just...can't wrap my brain around the fact that I'm having a kid. That she's having my kid."

"Excited?"

She scoffs. "More like terrified."

"You'll be alright. You've got all of us to help you, you know? Between like 5 of us, we can figure out a baby, right?"

She cracks a smile and sighs contentedly. "Definitely."

They're so close to back to normal and she's glad for that. She's glad she hadn't ruined everything all those months ago.

"Have you told your mom yet?"

"Nah, she's in Italy with David relaxing and I don't want to ruin that. She'll be back soon I think. I'll tell her then."

"How do you think she'll take it?"

"I honestly don't know. She...she really thought highly of Regina so hopefully...hopefully, she'll be cool with it. Or...maybe not cool, but at least happy for us."

"Hmm, yeah."

"Have you told Belle yet?"

"No, I thought maybe you'd want to in your own time."

"Hmm, yeah."

"...Are you going to?"
"Yeah, I just...like I said, I think I want to see it for myself before I start telling everyone you know? I just...don't want to get my hopes up and then have something go wrong."

"Hmm, yeah. But you're happy yeah?"
She glances over once more just in time to catch Emma's lips turn up slightly.
"Like crazy happy."
"Good. Good. Love you Em."

She doesn't look over or say it with any sort of inflection but Emma knows she means it more than ever.
"Love you too Rubes."

"So she begged you for another chance and you said no?"

"Yes Kat! This is the third time you've asked. I said *no*. Why is that so hard to believe?!"

She didn't mind replaying the events of Emma's visit earlier but now Kat was just wearing on her patience.

"Because I know you, Regina! You fall for her charm everytime!"

"Well, not this time! I told her we could maybe be friends one day but that there wasn't a snowball's chance in hell we were getting back together."

"And she was fine with that?"

She sighs. "No...she looked pretty hurt. I-"

"She wants to act hurt?! Are you kidding me? She left you! She doesn't have a right to be mad about this."

"I know that Kat! I just think...before everything fell apart, I told you, we talked about kids and a whole life and...I think for a second she thought she could have all of it back. Which...I get. If we had fallen apart amicably, I might have felt the same."

Kat sighs and she can tell there's another lecture about being strong coming her way.

"Save your breath," she says quickly, putting her hand up. "I'm not taking her back, I'm not giving into her and I don't really want her back. So there's nothing to worry about."

Kat rolls her eyes but smiles anyway. "I'm just looking out for you, Gina. You deserve better."

She grabs the bottle of wine and two glasses and they both fall onto the couch, preparing for a long night of rom-coms.

The silence between them lingers for a bit before she mumbles around her glass. "I know I do. I just...wish she could've been better."

Kat sighs, and takes a long sip before responding. "I do too and...for what it's worth...I'm sorry that it didn't work out. I know that I wasn't your biggest cheerleader, but I wanted you to be happy at the end of the day. I love you."
She stretches out the blanket over them and heaves one more sigh before resolving to let Emma go for the night.

"I know...and I love you too, Kat. I don't know what I'd do without you."

"Lucky for you and this kid, you'll never have to find out."

Her lungs are burning.

This is her entire week's worth of cardio, right here, but she refuses to stop running.

She can't stop running. Because it's Thursday, 4:17pm.

"I'm so sorry Regina, but it's 4:30. We really do need to get started. I'll be sure to make two copies though, okay?"

Her eyes are burning, partially out of humiliation, but a larger part of her is disappointed.

"Yes, of course. I'm sorry for holding you up, Dr. Wilkins."

Reese offers an understanding smile and she tries to reply in kind with a smile of her own, but she's sure that it comes out as a frustrated grimace.

"Alright, lie back and let's have our first look at your baby!"

Her thighs are killing her by the time she reaches the office, it's 10 past 5 and, though the lights are still on, the doors are locked.

She leans forward, hands cupping the glass, trying to get someone's attention but no one is around to see her desperately pulling at the handles.

"FUCK!" She pushes off the door and leans over to finally catch her breath.

"Fuck," she sighs and heaves and sighs a few more curse words for good measure.

"Jesus Emma, you couldn't even...," she shakes her head and runs her hands through soaked, sweaty hair.

She takes a seat on the step and lays her head on her knees, still gasping for air.

Though, at this point, it's hard to tell if she's still recovering from her 9 mile run or just hyperventilating.

She's breathing so loudly that she actually misses the sound of the door opening and closing.

And if not for the unmistakable perfume, she would've missed her.

She ignores the fact that her legs are 2 seconds away from giving out underneath her and stands abruptly.

"Regina, I am so sorry. One minute it was 2 o'clock and the next-"

"Just stop Ms. Swan. Just stop."
She hasn't even looked up but her tone is chilling.

"Gina, I know you're mad."

But, as always, she realizes a moment too late that that's the wrong thing to say when Regina looks up at her with a glare that could set her on fire.

"Wrong again, Ms. Swan. Not mad at all. Just utterly disappointed. At myself this time though because why did I ever think you'd take this seriously? Why did I ever think you'd be able to do this? Fool me twice, right?"

Regina scoffs and pushes harshly past Emma to make her way down the stairs.

"Please just let me explain. I...I know you don't want my excuses but I was...I got held up. I had something at 2:30 and I just didn't think about the time it would take to get from there to here. I'm sorry."

"Stop apologizing Emma! I don't care!"

But her voice cracks at the end and Emma knows it's not true. She does care. So much.

And despite the fear of losing the very little pride she has left, she decides maybe the best course of action is just to lay it all on the line.

"Regina, I...I hate myself for missing this appointment and I'm just as disappointed as you are with me.

She doesn't stop walking but her pace has at least slowed to something a little more manageable.

"I've been looking forward to this all week. I... I had a 2:30 with my old therapist and I was just telling him how...how excited I am about all of this. So believe me when I say I'm sorry. It won't ever happen again, I swear."

"You can't promise that Emma," Regina turns towards her and her face shows nothing but exhaustion.

"Well, no I can't because I'm not awesome with being on time in general, but I won't miss the other ones, okay? I..."

She remembers what her therapist told her not long ago, and though it feels a bit like plagiarism, she repeats it right back to Regina because she knows it's what she needs to hear.

"Listen...I know you need me to be dependable. I get that. I can't be an hour late to pick up our kid. I...can't just show up with a handful of excuses for why I missed a game or a school play and expect that to fly. I know that. I know I need to work on being a rock for you and this baby. Whether we're together or not, you need to know that you can call me anytime and I'll be there. I hear you on that and I'm working on it. SO we'll start small, okay? I can't promise to never be late to these, but I won't miss another one. I won't just...not show up. I swear to you guys. Okay?"

She's met with radio silence for a least a full minute and it terrifies her because this can end a million different ways. But, as always, Regina surprises her.

"Okay."

It's faint but it's there and she'll absolutely take it.
She nods resolutely and then...she's not sure what to do. The office isn't far from Regina's place so Regina will likely walk home but should she just...say goodbye? Should they talk about the appointment? No doubt she's curious about how it went but she's unsure if she even has the right to ask.

As if allergic to her awkwardness, Regina rolls her eyes and reaches into her purse and carefully pulls out a small envelope, opening it and removing a small 4x6 photo.

She holds her breath, already knowing what it is.

"Is that…," now it's her voice that cracks.

"Yes, Dr. Wilkins was kind enough to make you a copy."

She reaches out to grab the photo and immediately upon seeing it, the tears come.

She can't help it. Never in her entire life did she imagine she'd be able to have children. And yet, she's staring right at her little baby boy or girl.

"Do we...," she clears her throat, "do we know if it's a boy or a girl yet?"

Regina shakes her head, "I...wanted to find out this time but…"

She looks up abruptly and feels so much love for the woman in front of her.

Even after having her heart broken and being stood up for an ultrasound, she still refused to hear the baby's sex without Emma present.

"Oh...shit, I'm-"

"Sorry...I know."

She nods, knowing how old and tired her sorrys must sound.

"Yeah well, thank you so much for this. It's beautiful."

She doesn't know why that's the first word that comes to mind when describing this little gold blob. But really, it is. Her baby is beautiful, even if he or she has sort of a large head and odd little shape.

"Of course. She uh...she said it's about the size of an avocado."

Her eyebrows raise at that. The picture make it seem huge.

"Seriously? I...love avocados."

Ugh. She's pretty sure nothing makes her sound less qualified to parent quite like inadvertently saying you'd like to eat your baby.

Though she doesn't respond, Regina's small smile tells her that she can't be too annoyed.

"Well, I...I'll let you go. But will you let me know about the next one?"

"Three weeks from today, same time. Or...should I try to change the time since you have your...?"

She arches an eyebrow, unsure of where Regina's headed with her sentence but then remembers she does have weekly sessions now at 2:30.
"Oh, oh no! Please don't worry about that. I'll see if I can do something way earlier with him, otherwise I can switch days. That's...not a problem. Thursday at 4, I'll put it in my calendar and I'll set reminders and stuff. And maybe next time...maybe we can figure this thing out."

Regina nods, "Yeah, I'm sure we can. I'm dying to know."

She nods in agreement, desperate to know as well.

"Alright, so..I'll see you soon Emma."

"Yeah for sure. If you need anything, like…," she tries to quickly come up with two or three things pregnant women need and comes up so empty, "like whatever, then just let me know. You're not bothering me or anything."

Regina gives her a small smile and nods and she thinks it's best to leave it there. On a good (?) note.

But as she turns away, the electricity from Regina's touch surges from her wrist all the way up to her shoulders and it makes her spine tingle.

"Emma, I just...I want you to know that I'm glad you're seeing him again."

The urge to connect their hands is everything right now but somehow, she refrains. She refrains from saying that it's all because of her. She knows it's not what Regina wants to her. But if she can't say that, she doesn't know what to say.

Instead of speaking, she just nods and pulls her arm away gently, her own limbs marking her a traitor.

Before there's more time to say or do anything regrettable, she heads off in the direction she ran from initially.

She wants to look back, she wants so badly to know if Regina is watching her walk away. If she's waiting for her to turn around and come back but she keeps her eyes forward because she already knows, the only thing that comes of turning around is disappointment. Regina's long gone and couldn't care less about her.

"Kat...it was like...I stood there and fell in love with her all over again. You should've seen her. She...she held the photo and cried. In the middle of the sidewalk, she was crying looking at our baby. I never in my life thought she'd react that way."

"Wow…"

"I know…"

"I had no idea she was so sentimental."

"I know."

"How are you going to survive a whole pregnancy?"

"No clue, especially if she keeps crying over ultrasounds and delivering sidewalk speeches and going to therapy. At this rate, I'll have proposed by the time my water breaks."

She says it with just enough mirth in her voice so Kat doesn't feel the need to lecture.
"Ha...ha. Well, what do you say we see if she keeps a promise for once before we hire a wedding planner, hmm?"

"Seems fair enough." Her eye catches the clock as she changes positions on the couch. "Mm, you know what, I've got to go. I have lunch with Robin in an hour and I'm a tragedy right now. I'll call you later?"

"Wait wait, lunch with Robin? This is a new development!"

"No, it's no development at all. I told you, we're just friends. I think the fact that we're both sort of single parents gives us quite a bit to talk about."

"So this definitely isn't your way of making Emma jealous then?"

"No! I genuinely enjoy his company. And I told you, Emma and I are done until further notice so trust me, no plots or plans here."

Kat lets out a disbelieving grunt.

"Alllllright, goodbye Katherine."

"Goodbye Regina. Keep your heart and your vagina away from Emma Swan and I'll see you Monday."

"A little too late for both of those but understood!"

3 Weeks Later

"10 minutes early and it looks like you didn't have to run a marathon to make it happen."

The words are (mostly) in jest and Emma smiles at her, removing her sunglasses and placing them atop her head.

"Yeah well, I was nervous about being late so I've been here for a bit."

She shrugs as if it's no big deal but the thought of Emma getting here half an hour early just to show she's serious warms her heart. She struggles to not to let it show all over her face.

She clears her throat. "Shall we, dear?"

Emma makes a sweeping, "after you" gesture as she holds the door open.

"Thank you."

"Of course."

She signs herself in as Emma takes in her surroundings and being the last appointment of the day, she's invited right to the back.

"Do I...can I come to this part?" Emma asks taking a step forward then two back, waiting for some sort of direction.

"Of course, come on."

Emma eagerly, albeit a bit nervously, follows her and takes a seat in the room as she takes a seat on
the high bed.

"Oh, here let me help." Emma stands back up quickly and grabs her hand, helping her up.

"Thank you," she replies, doing her best to ignore the quickening pace of her heart.

"Of course. You comfy?"

"Not in the slightest but I'm alright, thank you."

"Yeah, sure." Emma takes her seat once more and they wait in a semi-comfortable silence until the lean obstetrician enters with her clipboard.

"Good afternoon-," she only looks mildly startled to see two females in the room, but she recovers quickly, "ladies. So lovely to meet you, Emma, I presume?"

Emma stands to shake her hand and nods. "That's me. It's nice to meet you too."

"You as well. Alright, let's get right into it. How have you been feeling Regina?"

She answers all the usual questions as the doctor does her usual routine check up.

"Hmm, pressures a little higher than normal." She jots it down on her notes and Emma leans forward in her seat.

"Is that bad for the baby? Or for her?"

Dr. Wilkins smiles softly. "Not at this point. It's to be expected really but don't worry, we'll keep an eye on it. If it keeps climbing, we can discuss some medications to help bring it down."

"But the meds are safe for the baby too right?"

"Of course."

"Emma."

She chides Emma at the same time that the doctor responds and Emma at least does a good job looking guilty.

"I'm sorry, I'm sure you wouldn't prescribe it otherwise. It's just...first kid. You know?"

The words take her aback. She knows it's their first child, that neither of them are at all adept with babies or pregnancy and she would've eventually asked the same question given the opportunity but she's genuinely surprised at Emma's attentiveness and curiosity. She had expected to find, at best, a passive partner in all of this but so far, Emma is proving to be anything but a passive participant.

"I completely understand Emma. It's perfectly normal to be concerned, first child or fifth. I'm glad you're thinking like that. It is important that Regina watch what she puts in her body. Like I've told her, she's breathing, eating, exercising, living for two right now. What she eats, the baby eats. What she drinks, the baby drinks. The stress she feels, the baby feels."

She looks over to find Emma nodding thoughtfully, absorbing the info like a sponge.

"That's...I never thought of it like that. Is there a list of like...approved stuff she can eat or do?"

Reese taps her stomach gently, prompting her to lift her shirt as she nods at Emma.
"Absolutely. While there are very few items on the list that you must have or must avoid, I do have a few pamphlets up front that I can give you on the way out that will help you both determine what's best for the baby and what you should maybe avoid."

She spreads the gel as Emma nods resolutely and she already knows they'll be leaving with the same handful of trifolds she received weeks ago.

There's a long moment of silence as she attempts to find a heartbeat and, likely to fill that silence, Dr. Wilkins invites Emma to stand up and come over for a closer look.

She stands tentatively, and approaches carefully, as if one wrong move will ruin the entire process.

Finally, just as Regina starts to worry, a rapid succession of thumps fills the room and her face breaks into a smile.

This isn't her first time hearing the baby's heartbeat, though she realizes now that it'll never get old.

This time though, she's experiencing it with Emma and somehow it's even more meaningful.

"Wow. That's…?"

"That's your baby, Emma. And right here is the head. We've got two arms, two legs and we can even see right about there, the ears are developing."

Emma's mouth is open in awe as she takes it all in and having her here is like experiencing it all again for the very first time.

And, even though she doesn't want to lead Emma on, she wants nothing more than to hold her hand as they take in their baby together for the very first time.

Before she can inevitably overthink and talk herself out of it, she reaches for Emma's hand and places hers over it.

She sighs internally. It feels natural to have her skin on Emma's, as if no time has passed at all.

She must feel the same because she doesn't pull away or even look over at her. She just flips her hand over and cups their hands together.

"So," Emma clears her throat before continuing, obviously a little choked up, "How big is it now? Last time, Gina said it was like an avocado."

Dr. Wilkins laughs. "At 18 ½ weeks, it's about the size of a bell pepper now."

Emma squeezes her hand and finally tears her eyes away from the screen to look at her.

"Can you believe it? We're having a bell pepper."

Her own smile widens as a tear falls down Emma's cheek. "We're having a bell pepper." She repeats and finally, it all feels more real than ever.

They're doing this.

It's not how she envisioned it, it's not even under the best circumstances, but she and Emma are officially having this baby.

#######
Very excited to hear your thoughts and we'd love to hear any suggestions about any scenes you might want to see during the pregnancy. Nothing life changing but we can certainly squeeze in some smut or some fluff, so if you have a mini-prompt, just ask and I'll do my best to fill it along the way! Until next time! :)

"Holy shit!"

"Right?!"

"That's your kid?!"

"That's my fucking kid, Rubes!"

She says it with still so much disbelief. Even after seeing it, it's still crazy to think about. And boy has she been thinking about it.

It's the only thing she's thought about for the last two days.

She's read every brochure that Dr. Wilkins gave her and instead of finding herself bored like she usually is with reading, she's hungry for more knowledge. She hasn't felt this way since she first started high school after moving in with Ingrid.

For the first time in so long, she's desperate to learn more, to absorb everything she can about pregnancy and babies.

"Look at this thing, it's adorable!"

"Seriously, I can't stop looking at it," she leans back on the couch, beaming proudly. "It's the size of a bell pepper right now!"

"Shit, that's so tiny."

"Right? And she's like barely showing, she looks great. She's got like a tiny little lump that kinda just looks like a food baby right now."

"And it went okay? Like she was cordial?"

She nods immediately, thinking back to their appointment. "More than cordial. She was perfect, as always. She..." she wonders if she's allowed to share her next comment. She's not sure if that was a between them moment only.

"She what?"

"Well, I...she held my hand."

That seems to get Ruby's attention. "She did?"

"Yeah but...I don't think it was a romantic thing. I think she just...I think the moment just kinda felt right."

"Don't sound so disappointed," she jokes and elbows her in the ribs gently.

She laughs a little too but really can't help but be disappointed.

"I...I know I have no reason to be sad. I fucked up and I ended things so it's like...I only have me to blame for the way things are now but fuck. I just...I wish I could go back in time and do it all over
again."

The silence around them is comfortable and stifling all at once.

"You know, that night after dinner, I tried to apologize and...she told me that saying 'sorry' means you won't do something again. If that's true, I've never been more sorry in my entire life. If I could go back in time, I would do it all differently. If I'd known she was carrying my baby...I...", a tear slips down her cheek and Ruby, always knowing just what she needs, just throws her arm around the back of the couch.

"Look Em, you made a mistake. You know you did and you're trying to fix it. And it's going to take time, but you're going to be on time for appointments moving forward and you're seeing Dr. Hopper again and that's all a start. Just don't rush her. Just take it all one step at a time okay?"

She nods. "Yeah, one step at a time.."

She takes Ruby's words to heart. One step at a time, she reminds herself constantly.

It's going to take time she reminds herself.

But that doesn't stop her from wanting to text Regina. Or talk to her. Or just be near her.

But the biggest issue is that there's no reason to. She can't just go over or invite her over without a valid baby reason.

Their last appointment was two weeks ago and they don't have another one for two more and so...that's what leads her here.

It's not like it's a silly or wasted trip.

Does Regina have all of these necessary items at home already? Probably.

But this is the best excuse she can think of.

She pushes the cart down the aisle slowly, reading labels and cross checking ingredients with the list of fetus no-no's saved on her phone.

An hour later with 10 vitamin bottles, and 2 handfuls of groceries, and one smoothie that's 2 seconds away from slipping through her fingers, she's desperately trying to ring Regina's doorbell without dropping it all.

As she waits patiently for an answer, she plays her speech again in her head.

*Hey! What's up? Just bringing this random stuff by. Also, a smoothie for you that's got a fuck ton of-don't say fuck ton- a bunch of antioxidants and calcium in it. All that's supposed to be good for the baby? Well, don't say it like a question, you'll look like an idiot that didn't do any research.*

*Antioxidants and calcium are totally good for the baby, fyi.*

*Ew don't say fyi, she's ten times smarter than you, she definitely knows alre-

Her inner musings are cut short by Regina's voice.

Behind her.
She takes a quick deep breath and turns but the two faces staring back at her take her completely off guard.

The guy from the farmer's market.

The new guy.

Right.

She actually forgot about him.

"Emma...hi?"

She tears her eyes off of his dumb face, finally, and finds she can barely even look at Regina. If she looks at her, really looks at her, and sees everything she's lost, she'll break down. And she's absolutely not doing that in front of fuck face.

She clears her throat and look down at her full hands. "Hey, we've...we've gotta stop meeting like this." She throws on a fake chuckle that she hope doesn't sound as forced as it is.

"I...I was just in the area and thought I'd bring you a couple of things. Good timing."

"Wow...uh, okay, here let me grab the door. Robin, will you help her?"

There isn't enough time to dwell on the fact that his name is Robin, the worst name on the planet, before she pulls all the bags closer and re-affirms her grip on the slipping smoothie.

He reaches out but she stares him dead in the eyes. "Nah, it's cool. I bench ten times this. I got it."

He looks taken aback but smiles anyway. "After you then."

The moment her back is turned, her eyes roll harder than ever.

Of course he has a fucking accent. Of course!

"Here you can just...uh..." Regina moves some books around on her table and takes the smoothie from her as she places the bags gently on the table, making sure to flex so Robin can see what the fuck he's dealing with.

Once that task is complete, she tries hard to remember her speech.

"Sorry for like...just dropping by but like I said...just thought since I was over here I'd bring you a couple things. All good for the baby of course."

Regina's eyebrow raises, silently asking how she knows what's good or not for the baby.

"Is that so?"

"Uh, yeah. It's super nutrient dense and it's got an organic flax hemp blend in it so it's got your fiber, antioxidants and even like lignans, which is like this hormone balancing phytoestrogen...thing. So...should be...good."

Oh my God. This could not be any more awkward.

"Well, thank you dear. I appreciate it."
"Of course," she says so adamantly that she's almost certain Regina picks up on the 'anything for you' that hangs on the tip of her tongue.

"Anyway, I'll get out of your hair I guess."

"Okay…"

Sure, she doesn't know everything about Regina but she swears that tone is far from 'please leave me alone'. It's not quite 'come here and kiss me' but she knows that tone.

"Uh, I…," she wants to ask her to come over for dinner, even as just stupid friends.

She wants to tell her that if she needs anything, to just call her, anytime.

She wants so much right now. But the one thing she doesn't want is to be shot down right in front of this stupid tool who hasn't stopped smiling since they walked in.

The urge to punch him is strong but she doubts that would solve anything.

At the end of the day, it'd just be one more reminder to Regina why she's with him and not her.

"I…I'll see you in a couple weeks."

Before anyone can say another word, she bolts towards the door, feeling as though her heart is breaking all over again.

That's the last time she drops by unannounced.

The silence is calming. Years ago it used to feel stifling. When she first started seeing him, the silence between them felt like it gave him more time to judge.

Now it's peaceful. Contemplative.

"So, how have you been?" He finally chimes in, seeing that this week she isn't going to open up willingly.

"Good. Well," she shrugs, "I've been okay I guess. I wouldn't call it 'good' but definitely not bad."

"How's taking it one step at a time going?"

That's been their focus lately. Taking things as they come. Dealing with today and letting tomorrow be its own day with its own struggles. Even if it's the exact same as the day before.

"It's…it was hard this week. I lost my patience."

He nods and crosses his legs, silently prompting her to continue.

"I was missing her and so I grabbed some stuff, all for the baby and for her health, and just sort of…went over unannounced."

She rolls her eyes remembering just how painful it was running into Robin there when she least expected it.

"I take it that didn't go well?"

"No, not at all. She was...she was just getting home. With her boyfriend."
The last word pours from her mouth like vinegar.

"Hmm." To his credit, he at least sounds unfazed but his thoughtful 'hmm' indicates this is an unexpected development to him as well.

"Yeah so, I...I think I just ended up looking desperate. So...totally won't be doing that again."

Dr. Hopper nods and jots something down.

"How does that make you feel? To see her with someone else?"

"Sick," is the first word that comes to mind. It's...like being nauseous and breathless at once."

He writes quickly and looks back at her and she already knows what's coming.

"Any other emotions swirling around in there?"

She swallows thickly, hoping to squash the one emotion that she's been trying to tamper down because it was the least fair of them all. The least warranted feeling.

But the truth is that she's furious and there's no sense in hiding it from him. He probably already knows anyway.

"I know I shouldn't be. I know I don't have the right but it makes me so fucking mad."

Teeth clench and fists tighten as she allows the feeling to consume her in the safety of his office.

"I just think that if you're going to tell somebody you love them, you shouldn't be cozied up to someone new 4 months later. Like, trust me doc, I know I'm not perfect. I pushed her away and I was prideful and I hurt her but I...I just thought I'd be a little harder to get over if she was sooo in love."

He nods and jots and she's on a roll now so she takes a deep breath and deep dives into everything she's been too afraid to really feel ever since she met Robin.

"And I don't get it. He's not hot. His accent is gross. He the kinda guy that always looks dirty, even fresh out of the shower I bet. And it's not like I was the best, but what the fuck?! I didn't expect a total downgrade. And I definitely didn't expect her to just move the fuck on. What kind of love is that?"

"And you believe she moved on because she didn't love you?"

She sighs. As angry as she is right now, she's would never say that.

"No. Not even close. I know she loved me, I felt it. All the time," she whispers, feeling herself back away from the angry place she was in just moments before. As if, even now, Regina's love and affection calms her.

"I just...I guess I selfishly hoped she'd love me forever. I was...I was counting on the fact that she would because if she did, then..."

"Then you'd have an opportunity to mend things," he finishes for her.

"Yeah," she shrugs, "and that just doesn't even seem possible now. And if it's really over, then what's the point? You know? What's the point of bringing smoothies and shit if it's never going to do anything?"
He jots once more then puts down his paper.

"Now Emma, I want to be careful about that sort of thinking. I think it's crucial to remember that she's carrying your child. She's housing a life that you created...together. You bringing smoothies and vitamins is just as helpful as her eating healthy and you seeking help here. It's important to remember that the end goal is not to restart a romantic relationship. The end goal is to get to a place in 4 months that will allow you to be seamlessly transition into parents of a newborn. That will require communicating regularly. It means being reliable and respectful of each other. It means taking the focus off of what you two have and redirecting your attention to what you two have made. Which is a life. That needs to take precedence. I want you to also consider that your thoughtfulness can be selfish at times. It sounds like you went to her house, with little regard for where she was or who she was with at the time, to deliver a gift in the hopes that she would...jump back into your arms?"

She averts her eyes, unwilling to admit verbally that that was one of the scenarios that played through her mind while standing on Regina's doorstep.

His judgmental "Mm," says he knows without her saying a word.

They sit in silence a minute before he picks up his notepad once more.

"This week Emma, I want you to really focus on the reality of the situation. Focus on what you are, not what you'd like you and Regina to be. Lastly, just...keep in mind that there is no substitute for earning forgiveness. Okay?"

She nods and sighs.

Not gonna lie, I didn't think he'd shit on me this hard, she muses as she shakes his hand firmly before heading out.

She definitely feels better at least. He does give great advice.

She takes a deep breath of humid, polluted air once she's outside and exhales slowly.

They're raising a baby together.

That's her focus.

Like Regina said, they're raising a kid and that's their only common bond for now. Maybe one day, if she proves she can do this, Regina will see her as more but right now, they're coparenting and she's got to learn to be cool with that.

"Emma, is everything okay with you? You've been quiet this entire evening."

David asks kindly and quietly enough that she actually doesn't snap at him for once.

She just shakes her head, "I'm fine. Just a lot on my mind."

He nods understandingly and for the first time probably ever, the hand he puts on her back isn't completely unwanted. In the midst of falling apart, she actually finds it comforting.

"Alright, well if you ever need to talk, I'm here. I uh...your mom mentioned you and Regina ended things so if there's anything I can do...," he trails off, gives it a minute then pats her knee once before getting up from the couch.
Sometimes she calls him her dad. It's easier than trying to explain his role in her life as her half brother's dad plus it's not like she has one anyway, but this is probably the first time he's ever felt like a father to her. She leans back on the couch and closes her eyes, patiently waiting for dinner to be ready.

Just as she gets the two minute warning to go wash up, her phone pings.

She looks down to find Regina's name lit up.

She still has a heart and a crown next to her name.

**Thank you for the year supply worth of vitamins. I appreciate it.**

The message is simple. It's bland and lacks emojis or any personality really but it still gets her heart racing because it's something.

*You're welcome! Let me know if you need anything else!*

**No no, I should be good. Speaking of, that smoothie was VERY good.**

*Awesome!*

Her hand lingers over the emoji blushing emoji and then thinks better of it.

*Don't push your luck, Emma.***

"Emmy, time for dinner!"

She hits send quickly before tucking her phone in her pocket and making her way to the table.

"Alright, alright, aliiight!" David does his best Matthew McConaughey impression and Ingrid giggles as August picks it up.

"Okay, my loves! I've got one of everyone's favorite on the table, even though steak, mac and cheese and jalapeno poppers do not exactly go together!"

She smiles at her mom before taking a seat and picking up her brothers plate to pile on the mac and cheese he loves so much.

"So, August, are you excited about spring break? You're going to have the whole week off!"

"Yeah yeah! What are we doing mommy?!!" He bounces in his seat as she puts the plate down in front of him and hands him his plastic spoon.

"Well…I was thiiiinking, maybe you could pick the family activity, since you're such a big boy now!"

"I'm almost 6!"

David asks how many fingers that is and when he puts up a whole hand and only one thumb, he ruffles his hair proudly!

"That's my boy! So, since you're 6, what do you want to do?"

"Uhhhhhh," his thinking carries on for almost longer than anyone can stand before he finally shouts an answer they both light up at.
"I wanna go to outer space to see Disney World!"

She laughs as she cuts into her steak, "Disney World is in Florida, Augs. Not outer space."

"Then how come it's called Disney Worrrrrld?"

He's picked up an annoying know-it-all voice from school and she can't help but roll her eyes.

"Because that's just the name. It's bigger than DisneyLand so it's called "world" I guess."

"Nu uhhhh. Mommy, is that true?"

That gives her pause. She wonders if her own kid will do the same thing one day. Question her intellect, ask his/her other mother to confirm everything she says.

"Yes, baby, Emma's right. That's just the title but it's here on Earth, in Florida. And I, for one, think that's a wonderful idea!"

"Are we all going?!" He bounces again and almost falls out of his seat.

"August, be careful," David delivers the stern warning while Ingrid's hand instinctively reaches out to catch him even though she's the furthest away from him.

She wonders which parent she'll be in five years, when their son or daughter is misbehaving. She wonders if they'll be doing every other week custody and if she'll have to be both the stern voice at bedtime and the gentle hand that rubs away tummy aches and fixes scraped knees.

"Sweetie?"

She looks up, probably seeming startled. "Yeah? What?"

"I asked if Disney World sounded good to you?"

"Oh, yeah. That's cool."

She nods and goes back to her meal but before she can get back to her thoughts about what life will be like with a kid in the picture, August speaks up.

"Can Ms. Mills come too? She never goes anywhere with us no more. Not since the zoo!"

She looks down at her brother, wide curious eyes staring back at her, but before she can break his heart, her mother's beats her to it.

"Actually, honey, Regina's been very busy with work and...so we should get used to seeing her less often. We'll see her at school, but that's about it."

"Oh…," his face falls immediately.

There it is, her opening. She needs to tell her parents and she's put it off long enough. She had hoped not to do it with August present, in case he hit her with 'Where do babies come from?' questions, but it's really now or never.

"Actually mom…"

The look in her eyes tells her at once, she thinks they've gotten back together. She hopes this news isn't too much less disappointing.
"Uh...well...we'll probably be seeing Regina more than we thought. She's...she's pregnant."

She thought there would be deafening silence but the sound of silverware clanging back onto the plate is much worse.

Her mother, who was already looking at her, still hasn't dropped that eye contact but she can't for the life of her figure out the look in her eyes.

"Sweetheart," when she finally looks away, it's to August, "Would you like to eat on the couch in front of the t.v.? Would that be fun?"

The words are exciting but her tone is certainly not. But the 6 year old hardly notices. He bounces in his seat and nearly drops his mac and cheese in excitement. He never gets to eat on the couch and that's how she knows she's in trouble.

"I...will go get him set up...." David leaves zero room for comment before leaving, and she can't be sure but she really thinks he was speed walking.

The moment he's gone, her mother moves her plate from in front of her and places her elbows on the table, face buried in her hands.

She wants to say something but she's not sure exactly what's making Ingrid act this way.

So she sits.

And waits.

And...waits.

"Emma. I can't believe this. I...we...the doctors said this was impossible. I...don't know what to say."

"Well...," she swallows, "Congrats would be cool. You're going to be a grandma."

She's knows it's way too soon for jokes but she's not sure what else she could possibly say.

Nothing.

"Uh, we had an appointment a couple weeks back and everything is good with the baby. So...."

Aaaand nothing again.

"I mean...call me crazy, but I thought you'd be happy about it. I know...I know it's not perfect. The circumstances are less than-

"Less than what?" Her mother cuts her off, looking up with a stern face that dares her to interrupt right now. "Less than ideal? Yeah, I'd say. Emma, sweetheart...," she takes a deep breath.

"Trust me when I say that if you're happy, then I'm thrilled. I just...this is all so unexpected. You're not ready for a baby."

Her eyes immediately flick down to her plate.

She knows that.

"I know that."
"I thought you were using protection."

"We...might've forgotten a few times."

She blushed knowing just how often they forewent condoms. Her cheeks warm at the amount of times she came inside of Regina in the secret hopes of this very outcome.

She just...wasn't quite prepared to deal with the outcome so soon.

She knows that, she doesn't need a lecture.

"But it's okay mom. We're going to be fine. We're going to co-parent and I've got a class on swaddling with Regina coming up and it's going to be fine."

"How far along is she?"

"Uh, about 5 months, 1 week, couple of days.....roughly."

"And I'm just hearing about this? And have you baby proofed your place yet? Have you prepared a nursery? Are the two of you back together or will you have to work out a custody arrangement? When the baby is born, are you going to fit the car seat in the back of your two seater? I mean, Em, have you thought about any of these things?"

"Of course mom! Honestly...it's all I think about! I get it, okay, I'm not prepared to be anyone's parent! I know that! But I just need people in my corner telling me I can do this and I thought for sure that would be you."

She grits it out angrily and throws a jalapeno popper in her mouth, literally just for something to do.

"Oh stop it. Of course I'm in your corner. I always am. I just think that a baby is a great responsibility and you have to walk in as prepared as possible Emma. There are so many things about kids you can't control but...", she sighs and rubs her forehead before picking back up her fork. "It's happening one way or the other so I'm happy for you. I am."

She nods and they sit for a moment before her mother speaks up again. "Are you happy? You've never mentioned wanting children."

"I've never wanted them until her," she whispers, her head tilted and resting on her hand.

"More than wanting kids with her, I wanted a whole life with her so this is all kind of been hard. Having half of what I wanted."

This is the first time she's told her mom or perhaps anyone, apart from Dr. Hopper, about the future she wanted for them. Saying it aloud to her mother feels like a weight from her shoulders.

"And have you told her that? That you wanted all of these things?"

"Yeah, I did...and she wants them too. Just...not with me. She's," here comes the urge to vomit again, "she's actually seeing someone else."

She doesn't hear the chair move. She doesn't see her mother round the table. She doesn't even register the tears that are slowly tumbling down her cheeks. All she feels is strong arms pulling her close.

"Sweetheart, it's going to be okay. No matter what the universe has planned for you two, things will work themselves out. I promise you that. So don't focus on this other person. Focus on being there.
for Regina and on being the best mom you can be and everything else will fall into place. Okay?"

She squeezes tighter and burrows deeper into the safety of her mother's arms. "Okay."

Ever since chatting with her mom a few nights ago, she's been a woman on a mission.

Focus on being there for Regina and the baby.

She can do that.

She has to do that.

After learning her lesson, she texts Regina midday to ask if they can chat.

**Of course. Come by anytime after 5. Unless you'd like to meet elsewhere?**

*Nope, that's perfect. 5 it is.*

And she isn't late. In fact, she arrives a 4:50 and gives it a respectable 8 minutes before knocking.

"Hey, come in."

She tries to contain her smile. Regina is just barely showing but she's certainly glowing.

"You...you look beautiful." Regina blushes and seems to subconsciously rub her stomach.

"Thank you, Emma. So...what's up?"

"...well,"  *deep breath Emma, deep breath,* "I came over to apologize. For the other day. I was outta line just coming over. I know that you're moving on from us and you got this new guy so I need to respect that."

Regina opens her mouth to speak but she raises her hand, knowing that if Regina interrupts, she'll never get it out.

"No no, let me just...look, I messed up. You gave me so many chances to get it right and I didn't. When things got serious, I pushed you away and...what's worse, I lied to you. I looked you in the eyes and told you...," she's brought back to the look on Regina's face when she had 'admitted' to cheating on her.

The look on Regina's face says she knows exactly what she's referring to.

"Anyway, I fucked up. I should've been honest about how I felt and I get that it's too late now but I...I still want you to have your happy ending. You deserve that and so much more. Way more than I could give you. So...I hope this new...accent guy is great and treats you better and really appreciates everything he has because...cuz you're the best. You really are. And you deserve the best. And,"  *do not cry Emma.*  "I'm sorry that I wasn't the best for you. All I wanna do is go back in time and fix it. But I swear, I'm gonna be the best I can for this kid. I promise you that. I'm working on getting a job and I'm gonna figure out the car thing and I'm gonna be better. Okay?"

Regina nods lightly, as if lost for words. "Okay," she whispers.

"Alright well...didn't mean to spill my guts to you just...I just wanted you to know that I want you to be happy and I won't get in the way of that or whatever."
She nods with finality but Regina still says nothing. She just stares at her with an unreadable expression.

"Alright, well, let me get out of your hair. Let me know if you need anything."

She gives it a few more seconds, watching Regina fidget which she never does, before grabbing her keys from the counter and heading towards the door.

She's said her piece. She accomplished what she came here to do and she'd be lying if she said she wasn't a little proud of herself for actually doing it.

She actually makes it all the way out the door and down two steps before she hears her name, said the only way Regina can say it.

"Yeah?"

"I just...wanted you to know that he and I aren't...we're not a couple."

"Oh, you're...not?" She's sure that her face is twisted in utter confusion.

Then why's he always around?

"He's just a coworker. He's a single father so he's been quite helpful in helping me prepare for the baby. He's been wonderful actually," she says it looking down as if she can't believe they're not dating either and it makes her uneasy for what's coming next.

"He's thoughtful and timely and responsible. He's really everything you're not," she sighs ruefully, "but I guess that's the problem, isn't it?"

She's not sure what to say to that and eventually Regina shrugs, as if giving up, and whispers a goodbye before shutting the door.

#####

Until next time!
"Oh come onnnn. Pick up, pick up."

It goes to voicemail again and she sighs, throwing herself back against the couch.

It's Friday and while she's grown accustomed to spending her late nights alone, that was before the cravings.

She'd do just about anything right now for dark chocolate or maybe a..what was the sandwich Emma used to eat? The peanut butter and marshmallow sandwich she used to snack on between rounds of intercourse used to sound so disgusting but now she literally has a hankering for them and it makes her so angry.

Because it makes her want to call Emma.

And that definitely seems like the worst option at 11pm.

So she rolls forward in an effort to just go get it herself when she's hit with the most excruciating cramp of her life.

She grabs her side and lays back down, hoping that will ease the pain but immediately she realizes that the movement only exacerbates it.

"Ahhh," she hisses and reaches for her phone, heart already racing from the fear of what could be causing this.

She thinks calling Kat, who hasn't answered any of her last 5 calls.

Briefly considers the ambulance, then upon realizing that's too dramatic, she settles on the next best option.

The call comes at nearly 7 a.m. If she were a normal person, she'd probably be furious to be awoken on a Saturday morning this early but as luck would have it, she's been up three hours, creating a resume and doing some at home workouts to clear her head.

So it doesn't wake her, but it certainly alarms her.

Because it's Kat.

And Kat never calls.

"Hello? Kat? Is everything alright?"

"Hey Emma, everything is fine...it's just…"

She's already headed back to her room to grab shoes, fearing the worst.

"Where's Regina? Is she okay?"
"She's fine, Emma, don't worry! She's okay, she just had a little scare. She-"

"What? What kind of scare? Where is she now?"

"She's at New York Pres...but, she's really alright-"

She hangs up with a quick 'be there soon' and jets out the door.

She opts to run again, it just seems faster than car or subway.

She rushes through the doors a sweaty mess, running on pure adrenaline after sprinting for the better part of 23 minutes.

She's just about to approach the counter and demand to see Regina when a voice calls her name.

"Kat, what's going on? Where is she?"

"Calm down, Emma, show your ID, sign in and I'll take you to her. She's fine."

Even as she signs her name and shakily hands over her ID, Kat murmurs all the while not to worry and that Regina is fine and it does wonders.

Until she reaches the room and her blood runs cold.

"What the fuck?," she mumbles as she rolls her eyes.

The door pushing open abruptly clearly frightens them both and she delights in it for his sake as much as she feels bad for Regina.

"Emma," Regina legitimately looks surprised which only serves to frustrate her more but she'll tend to Regina before dealing with fuck face.

"Gina, what's going on? Are you okay? Kathryn said you were in pain? Is the baby alright?"

She wants to reach out and touch Regina's stomach but she's not sure if that's allowed so she keeps her hands where they are but clinches the side of the bed in a death grip.

"I'm fine dear, perfectly fine. I was just having a bit of stomach pain."

"Why didn't you call me, Regina?"

Regina actually rolls her eyes. "It was hardly anything to worry you about, Emma."

She thinks that statement is supposed to anger her. It's the first emotion that pops up but she knows it's only because it hurts.

"I...baby....., she stops because her voice breaks but also because 'baby' slipped out and she has to swallow to regain her composure.

"You're having my baby, Regina. You should've called."

"I didn't want to bother you if it turned out to be nothing, which is exactly what it was so-"

"Is that what you think? You honestly think you'd be bothering me?!"

Regina opens her mouth but he's actually the next to speak.
"I'm just going to step out."

"Yeah, you do that Robin," she says it with a sneer that he most certainly deserves after showing up here to take care of her gir…. 

She's not yours, remember?

Girlfriend or not, the fact remains that she should've called me.

The moment the door clicks shut, she closes her eyes and counts to 10.

"Emma, don't be upset. I had a small cramp in my side that was worrying me so I came in just to see what it was. I just wanted to check in on the baby. If anything was wrong, I promise I would've called you sooner."

"But I wouldn't have been the first to know," she says slowly opening her eyes and staring right into Regina's brown orbs.

She swallows because she knows that she's right about that.

"If something had happened to you, or God forbid, this kid, I would've been the last fucking person to know and that's not fair."

Regina at least has the sense to look guilty about that.

"When did you get here? When did the pain start?"

"Around midnight."

"Did he drive you here or was he already...?"

"He drove me, I called him."

That comforts her and drives her crazy all at once.

At least Robin wasn't already with her but to know that she went out of her way to call him instead eats away at her a little.

"I would've done it."

"It was late."

But they both know that's a lame excuse. She knows exactly how little Emma sleeps.

"I thought you might be out. I didn't want to interrupt."

She sighs, barely holding back restrained tears.

"We can't function like this. We can't...we can't raise a kid together like this."

The vibe in the room shifts as Regina stiffens.

"What's the supposed to mean? If...if you don't want to do this, I-"

"Regina, that's not the issue! That's the exact opposite of the issue! I'm right here. I'm showing up, on time mind you. I'm learning to swaddle, I'm at the appointments, I'm reading the pamphlets and shit but I can't help if I don't know what you need! I need you to communicate with me. Just like you
need to know that you can rely on me to pick up our son or daughter, I need to know if you're not feeling well! I need to know if you're headed to the hospital. It's my kid too, I'm new at this too! I know it seems like I don't have a care in the world, but I worry just as much as you do and it's not fair to just leave me in the dark about everything! I don't want to be the last to know about cramps or bloating or...whatever because before we know it, I'll be the last to know about soccer games and school performances! And I sure as hell don't want Robin standing there in my place. I don't want someone else having to show up for my kid and I don't want them thinking I wasn't there because I didn't want to be there. Because it's all I want."

She takes a deep breath. She honestly doesn't mean to yell.

She sighs and tries to internally fix her volume before continuing.

"I just...I just want to be there for you. Whatever you need. You're the mother of my child. You're never bothering me. Nothing that you ask for is an inconvenience to me."

She places her hand gently on the sheets covering Regina's stomach, toying with the cheap fabric.

"You're giving me so much right now. I...wanna give it right back..."

"I-", Regina clears her throat before continuing, "I didn't realize you felt so strongly about all of this..."

She looks up at Regina again and sees her eyes filled to the brim with unshed tears.

"Yeah, well, safe to say I feel pretty strongly about you and mango."

One tear slips as her eyes crinkle in a laugh. "Mango?"

She reaches to catch it before it stains her face. She hates seeing Regina cry.

"Yeah, at this stage, it's a total mango in there. Almost a foot long and I read that she can feel you dancing."

"She?"

She blushes. "Selfish of me to want a little girl that's just like you?"

Regina doesn't acknowledge the statement verbally, but she does bring her hand to cover hers over her stomach, playing with her fingers and she delights in it.

"I'm sorry for not calling right away. If we're being honest?"

"Always."

"...I think that I want this with you but...I don't want you to let me down. I don't want to call and have you not answer. I don't want to worry about baby things just for you to wave it off."

"If we're being honest, I get why you'd feel like that. I know that when we first started all of this, I was pretty anti-baby, anti relationship, anti-strings. And then...," she flails her free hand around, hoping it makes some sort of sense. "It all changed for me. You changed everything. I know you don't believe me yet, I know I need to prove it, but...I wouldn't let you down. I won't." She grips Regina's hand a little tighter and leans in to place a gentle kiss on the bump, unable to stop herself..

"I'm here for you, I'm not going to disappear. I'm not going to disappoint you and I'm not going to let you down. Either of you. You'll see."
She’s talking to the mango just as fiercely and she hopes this baby is on target for hearing development.

She hopes her words resonate even behind layers of skin.

She's not going to mess this up.

She and Regina may never have another shot, but this is the one thing she has to get right.

It takes a week for her to get the courage.

She wasn't lying when she told Emma the reason for her lack of phone calls and info.

The only thing more terrifying than having this baby is feeling like she's going at it alone.

The only thing more heartbreaking than raising their child by herself is giving Emma the opportunity to be apart of it all, only to be rejected or neglected.

But Emma had said she'd be there, had said she wanted to be there, even for the little things so she's about to test that.

She taps the phone icon next to Emma's name lightly and puts her on speaker, as she paces the length of her kitchen.

Two rings is all it takes.

"Hey Gina, what's up? You okay?"

That greeting makes her smile and instantly eases her fear.

"Of course, Mango and I are great!" She covers her own face, thinking about how ridiculous that sounds, though admittedly, the name mango has really stuck with her.

*Better than bell pepper, that's certain.*

"We're calling because we wanted to know if you wanted to maybe go do some crib shopping? It's probably...probably too early to start thinking about that sort of stuff, but I want to get the big stuff taken care of before I'm too big to take care of it. Plus, summer will be here before we know it, and my ankles are already starting to swell so I just don't think I'll be up for it, the further along I get. So...if you want to-

"Yeah yeah, I definitely want to. I can pick you up in an hour if you want? I just need to jump in the shower."

"Yes, that sounds great. Thank you, dear."

"No...thank you."

The silence lingers for a minute and she wonders if Emma is smiling as wide as she is.

"Right, well I'll see you in an hour then?"

"One hour. Don't be late," she says with a hint of mirth.

"You know I won't be."
And for once, she wholeheartedly believes it.

From the moment Emma showed up at her door, she started having regrets about extending this invite.

The reality is that she's in love with Emma.

The reality is that she finds her incredibly sexy and so, of course, she almost always wants to be touching her.

While that desire went away post break up, it seems to have returned with a vengeance and with each passing minute, it's getting tougher to remember why she vowed to keep her hands and lips to herself.

Because Emma has opened every door for her. She's stood unfairly close and smells unusually good. The hand that continues to find its way at the bottom of her back isn't helping either.

But the thing that's really starting to get her is watching Emma talk concerned parent.

She can honestly say she's never been more turned on by this woman than when she's asking about a stroller's safety features or crouched down on the ground inspecting a crib's structural integrity.

Watching her muscles flex as she pushes a stroller back and forth to check out "how well it glides."

"I don't know, it just seems a little thin. I just don't want it catching every rock or bump while I'm running, you know?"

"Why would you be running?"

"I've read babies find it soothing. Something new to look at every step of the way but I also want it to be comfortable enough and smooth enough for Mango to fall asleep if they want to. You know?"

Emma doesn't wait for her response. "Yeah, let's keep looking. I want to love it. And if I don't love it, I doubt the baby will."

This is a moment where 6 months ago, she absolutely would've grabbed Emma's hand and kissed her like no one was watching.

Now she wrings her hands together just to keep herself in check.

The last thing she wants to do is give Emma mixed signals.

Okay so….there might be a chance she's giving off some mixed signals.

Admittedly, she didn't mean for this to happen but one minute they were purchasing a crib and the next, she was watching Emma effortlessly put it together and that was it.

All it took was watching her attach 12A to 13C and she was gone.

She probably could've cum from that alone, just listening to Emma read instructions and hammer a few nails.

But what would've been the fun in that?
So when Emma finally brushed her hands together after an hour of manual labor and asked if there was anything else Regina needed, it took less than a second for her to cross the room and claim her lips.

And while initially Emma seemed surprised, she certainly wasn't pushing her away.

Even with the extra weight, she had effortlessly carried her back to the master and set her down as if she might break, before leaning down and placing another gentle kiss on her lips.

She's sweet as she runs her fingers through her hair and tender as she kisses a path from her jaw to her neck.

And it's all great...but not at all what she's looking for right now.

While Emma had certainly opened her eyes to a million different ways to experience sex, she rarely ever felt like she needed it any particular way.

But this baby must be doing something to her body because today she knows exactly what she wants and it's not this.

She needs to speed this up.

She claws at Emma's shirt and pulls her in for another kiss, teeth biting her lip to indicate exactly what she's in the mood for.

And Emma picks up the hint as if it hasn't been months since they last did this.

Emma arches her eyebrow and upon receiving a nod, she dives in.

Kissing and nipping at her neck, all while pulling her sundress up and over her head.

Emma steps back to admire her and for a minute she feels self-conscious, knowing that she's obviously put on some weight.

"God, how is it possible that you've gotten more beautiful?"

She smiles in relief and then scoots up to the top of the bed towards the pillows.

Emma has given her just enough confidence to take the control she wants.

"Strip for me."

Emma still takes instruction as well as she remembers.

Her shirt is off in seconds and she unbuttons her jeans and slides them off quickly as well.

The only thing left is her underwear.

Those fucking underwear.

She's missed this sight and she lifts her hand to halt Emma from removing anything else.

"Leave those on for now."

Emma swallows but does exactly what she's told.

"Be a dear and help me get out of these?" She snaps the hem of her panties.
Emma slides on the bed and reaches for them, slipping them down her legs gently. 

"Can I touch you now?"

Her first thought when Emma asks permission is 'good girl' and that turns her on even more.

All this control is really doing something for her.

"No. Not yet. First, I want to watch you touch yourself. Can you stroke yourself for me?"

She's never asked Emma to do that before.

She's certainly watched it happen and God, it's the sexiest thing on the planet but she's never been in the mood to watch it like she is now.

"Yeah," she answers breathlessly. "You want these off?" She pulls at her own waistband.

"Mmm, yes. Let's get rid of those."

She pulls them off with a little trouble, as she's on her knees, but once her dick springs free, they both let out a moan and as if perfectly in sync, their hands each inch their way down the own torsos.

She rubs her clit as Emma grasps herself firmly and starts to slowly jerk herself off.

"Fuuuuck."

"Mmm, does it feel good Emma?" She asks just as she slips a single digit inside of herself, throwing her head back, eyes screwed shut. It's been waaaay too long since anyone has been inside her and she's so tight.

"Yeah, feels amazing."

"You keep doing that and I'll-," she breaks off to insert a second finger and closes her eyes again.

"Ahh, God."

Emma groans as she continues to watch attentively and while her moaning combined with the slick sounds of her jerking off just for her is helping, she needs a little more.

And apparently so does Emma.

"Gina, fuck. This feels good but I'd rather be inside you babe."

She shakes her head instantly. She's already crossed a line by initiating this, she can't let it get completely out of hand.

But at the same time, she needs her touch. She craves it.

"I have something different in mind for now," she removes her fingers and they glisten with moisture.

She pushes them towards Emma who wastes no time in leaning forward and licking them clean, never once taking her hand off of her cock, pumping harder with one hand while squeezing her balls with the other.

Emma's moan around her fingers send vibrations all the way from her hand to her core and she turns
her head to the side, other hand clutching at the pillow.

"Lick me, Em."

Again she takes instructions flawlessly and dives in, lapping her up like she just walked through a desert for 40 days and 40 nights.

Both of Emma's hands are on her and it's exactly what she needs. One hand on her incredibly sensitive breasts and the other is wrapped around her leg that's been tossed over Emma's shoulder.

Her knuckles are white, clenching the sheets harder than ever.

She can't tell if Emma's somehow gotten better at this or if she's really just forgotten how good this feels.

The former frustrates her, even if she can't verify its validity. Has Emma improved because she's been sleeping with other people?

Seems like a silly question. Sleeping with other people is what Emma does.

And that thought makes it easier to forego Emma's pleasure in lieu of her own.

"Right there. Fuuuu-yes, yessss."

She grips blonde locks to hold her right where she is, right where she wants her.

Her hips thrust up into Emma's mouth, forcing her tongue as deep as it can go and she cums loudly, arched off the bed, forcing Emma to arch with her.

Emma doesn't let up until she's literally shaking and writhing underneath her, licking and sucking until eventually she pushes her head away.

"Fuck, no more. No more."

Emma is grinning with pride and she rolls her eyes, but smiles because she knows how to give credit where it's due.

Her eyes slip closed as her breathing settles but it picks right back up when she feels lips on her torso, inching their way back up.

*You've already gone way too far. You cannot have sex with her,* she reminds herself.

And even if she could go again, she knows she can't. Sex would be way too intimate. While she originally had kissed Emma out of a heated need, now that that's been taken care of, she can only see them making love, which is, *by definition,* a mixed signal.

"You think," kiss, "you've got," kiss, "one more in you? Cuz my first one is still locked and loaded."

Emma kisses her lips once, "Get it?" and then twice, "loaded?," she's grinning when she pulls away and sighs, "I've missed this. I've missed you."

She sighs internally.

This is what she was afraid of.

Of course she's missed Emma.
Of course she's missed the sex.

But this doesn't mean they're back together. And if the light in Emma's eyes is anything to go by, she isn't picking up on that fact.

Well what did you think was going to happen?

She sighs outwardly. "Ah, not tonight dear. You've certainly worn me out." She does her best to sound uninterested but it must not be working because, to her surprise, Emma grins, kisses her once on the cheek and rolls over off of her.

"Fair enough. You are kind of exerting energy for two now. Did...did you want me to make you something? I could prob-,

"Oh no, it's fine. I think I'll actually just grab a shower and then head to bed."

She tries to make it clear that she plans on sleeping alone but again, it seems to go right over Emma's head.

"Well you sure you don't want something to eat first? I don't have to cook. I can just order something. Oorr maybe you'd like some company in there?" Emma sits up and leans back on her hands while she opens her drawer to grab a fresh pair of panties.

She looks over to find her grinning ear to ear, one eyebrow arched playfully, and her heart breaks for the heart she's about to break.

"Em...I don't think that's a good idea."

"No no, you're right. There's so much shit in take out and you should really be watching your cholesterol. Okay, settled. You shower, I'll cook."

"No I mean, you...staying...doesn't seem like a good idea."

Emma's halfway out of bed, facing away from her, when she says it.

She sits for a moment, not moving, not saying anything and she's torn about whether she'd rather be able to see Emma's face or not.

"Oh, yeah." She leans down to grab her underwear and by the way she quickly puts them on and searches for the rest of her clothes without looking her way, she knows she's hurt her.

"Em, I'm sor-"

"No. Nope. I'm sorry. It's...it's my fault for reading into it."

"No, it's my fault. I got carried away. My hormones are a little all over the place and I just...let this go too far already. I wouldn't want to blur the lines anymore than we already have. And...I don't want to lead you on at all. That wasn't my intention."

"No need to explain, Regina," she says tossing on her shirt, foregoing a bra, probably in the interest of escaping asap. "You needed a body, you needed a release. You got what you needed. Believe me...I get it."

She shrugs. "Yeah...", while Emma isn't wrong about her body's need, she certainly wouldn't have just done it with anyone.
But now she's wondering if it would've hurt Emma less to sate her need with someone else.

"Em, can we just forget this ever happened? We were making progress and I just don't want to take 10 steps back."

"Yup, got it. Forgotten. I'll see you at the next appointment Regina."

Emma's gone before she even finishes her sentence and all she wants to do is take it back. All of it.

"Em? Em, it's me! It's dark as shit in here. Where are you?"

She hears her trip over something. "Alexa, turn up the living room lights."

"Turning up living room lights."

"Em, what's up? You 9-1-1’d me on date night. Belle and I literally just got back, and I'm pretty sure she's in a sex mood so I've got like 10 minutes so spill quick."

"Regina...used me tonight."

"To do what?"

"To get off."

Ruby laughs out loud but realizes after seeing her face that it's no laughing matter and promptly closes her mouth into a frown.

"Oh….oh. So...basically she pulled a you?"

"Yeah okay but a me from like a year ago! And I didn't even get a chance to…." she makes a jerking gesture, causing Ruby to cringe.

"Oh shit, seriously? Did she thigh you and 'bye' you?! Wow. I didn't know she had it in her."

"Worse. She had me naked and literally on my knees for her. Got off and then said she was tired and basically kicked me out. Like, what the fuck? All the shit she gave me about sleeping with her and then neglecting her feelings and then she literally does the same thing to me? What kind of shit is that?"

"Uh….the kinda shit you literally did up until you fell for her."

"Yes, but then I did...and I thought she did...so why sleep with me if you don't want to be with me?"

"Wh-I-I can't believe I'm having this conversation with you of all people. Emma, look, she slept with you -correction, she got off on you- to take care of an itch. You know her hormones are all out of whack, it probably caught her by surprise too, knowing how uptight she is."

Even angry, she interjects, "She's not uptight."

"Whatever. Moral of the story is that she probably had a moment of weakness, now she's trying to reinstitute boundaries. My advice? Just forget it ever happened."

"That's what she said! How the hell am I supposed to forget it? It was the first time I've kissed her in
months. And for me it was great but it sounds like for her it meant absolutely nothing."

"I wouldn't go so far as to say nothing, but I also wouldn't make it more than what it was. Think of it as being...baby mamas with benefits."

She rolls her eyes. "I don't want benefits. I want her." Ruby shrugs, having already shared her opinion.

"Whatever. We'll forget it ever happened," she says in air quotes, "and we'll just go back to seeing each other at appointments. We were going to go get paint for the baby's room next week, but I'm sure she can handle it just fine."

Ruby's eyes widen. "Oh no no. Of all of your options, that's the worst one. You cannot cancel on her or it will remind her exactly why she's keeping you as a baby mama with benefits and not something more."

"Stop saying that!"

Ruby finally takes a seat on the couch, forcing Emma to move her legs.

"Em, listen. I...I know she hurt you tonight and I can only imagine how it would feel if B did that to me but you can't hold a grudge. You can't retaliate by not being the best parenting partner you can be. Just like she forgave you for all those times you hurt her, you've gotta cut her some slack for her one lapse in judgment and keep moving forward."

She swallows and her heart hurts just imagining leaving Regina feeling this way for months.

"Yeah, okay."

"Okay okay? Not just 'yeah okay'?"

"Yes, I'll forget about it. Keep moving forward."

"That's my girl," Ruby rubs her thigh before shoving her legs off of her lap. "Alright, I gotta go bitch. I'll text you later. In the meantime, apologize to baby mama. Let her know y'all are good."

She actually laughs aloud. Ruby always seems to know what she needs when she needs it.

"Bye, tell wifey I said hi. And..thanks Rubes."

"Of course, see you later slut."

She sighs and pulls her phone from her pocket, feeling just encouraged enough to text.

Just as she's about to click on her messages icon, she sees Spotify and has a thought.

Regina has long since deleted all of the songs from their playlist. It had actually surprised her one day to open it only to find every song gone. And she cried for the rest of the day.

But now she thinks it's time for a fresh start. Maybe they won't get a fresh start as a couple but this kid they share is a pretty cool thing.

She's never met him or her, they don't even know which one they're getting, opting at the last minute to be surprised, but she knows she's already in love.

And that's worthy of a playlist for sure.
She adds two new songs and changes the title of the playlist from "Us" to "Mango".

*Added a few songs to our new family playlist.*

"Kat, you should've seen her. She looked devastated. Which I can't blame her for. She left in a hurry right after and said she'd see me at the next doctor's appointment but honestly,...I'd be surprised if she even shows up to that. God, I can't believe I screwed up like this. I usually have so much control it's just...she was working so hard and it's like now her talking about prenatal vitamins is the new dirty talk and she just smelled so damn good."

Kat laughs on the other end which makes her chuckle as well. "I wish I was exaggerating."

"Anyway, it's late. Mango and I should get to sleep—well, because it's the size of a mango n—well, no, but we're holding off on a gender. We kind of decided on a whim to wait. I think it builds up a lot of expectations to know the gender. So mango for now."

She turns off her kitchen light and heads back upstairs.

"Mmm, okay. Well, thanks for the terrible pep talk."

"Yes, I'll call her tomorrow. She won't answer but sure, I'll try."

"I promise. Alright, goodnight Kat."

She hangs up to find that she's received a text.

From Emma.

Her heart rate picks up. She hopes to God, it's not an 'I can't do this' text.

Immediately upon reading it, she feels guilty about her last thought. Because this is far from that.

It's an olive branch if she's ever seen one and she's not going to waste it.

It's late, almost 11pm, but the response is almost immediate.

*Mango. Cute.*

*Omg. "You're Having My Baby". Clever.*

*OMG. It's the Glee cover. I essentially have two kids on my hands.*

She laughs out loud. THE SEED INSIDE YOU, BABY, DO YOU FEEL IT GROWING?!

*Stop.*

YOU'RE HAVING MY BABY!

Okay, you sent it at the same time he screamed it.

That's going to be my new favorite thing to scream.

*Mid-orgasm?*
Psh. What orgasm?!

She sends it with a tongue out winking emoji so that she knows she's kidding.

She laughs and sighs in relief, knowing that Emma doesn't seem to be holding tonight against her and it encourages her to have a little fun too.

**Wanna sext? Would that help?**

She includes the same winking face that Emma sent and waits for a reply.

Bubbles pop up. Then disappear. Then reappear again.

*Please stop trying to have sex with me. God, you're so fucking thirsty. ;)*

She laughs out loud.

**I would but that tongue is talented AF.**

**Isn't that what the kids say?**

She manages to laugh with her whole body while also getting turned on, the oddest combination in history.

*Yes, correct usage. But next time, let's not follow it up immediately with an old people phrase. Lol. And thank you. ;)*

She includes a tongue emoji too, at the last minute, for good measure.

Who knows? Maybe they will end up sexting. She certainly wouldn't be upset about it.

**Oh my. There's a tongue...What other emoticons have I been missing out on?**

She sends the a-okay emoji and the pointing finger.

*Fingering.*

Regina sends back a scandalized face but then immediately follows it up with…

**I actually prefer two**, with the two fingers emoji.

*Thoughts on this?, with the whole hand emoji.*

Regina sends a smiling devil and that's when she decides to go all out.

She sends three eggplants with no text.

It takes a few minutes before she gets a response but when she does, she realizes it's worth the wait.

Three mouth wide open emojis.

Okay, two can play that game.

She sends back three water splashes, wondering if Regina will piece it together.
She laughs harder than she ever has when she gets back three drooling faces.

"Oh my fucking God. This girl is amazing. And she's HAVING MY BABY!"


The second song on the playlist is "I Can't Wait For You To Get Here" by Mat Kearney, if you're trying to give it a listen. Until next time!
"So...how's the whole 'we're just co-parenting, not dating' thing going?"

She sips on her non-alcoholic moscato and shakes her head.

"We are just co-parenting. The problem is not falling harder for her along the way."

"Mmm. And how's that going?" Belle asks as she takes a sip of her mimosa.

"Well let's see...she's made us a family playlist on Spotify, she calls twice a day religiously to check in on me and Mango, she calls our baby Mango, aaaand she has a certificate in swaddling now."

The whole group coos. She rolls her eyes. As sweet as it all is, it doesn't make getting over Emma any easier.

"Wow, I'd pay money to see Emma Swan swaddle a baby."

She laughs sardonically. "5 more months and you will, no payment necessary," she shakes her head again thinking back to their 3 hour class on proper swaddling techniques.

At the end, the instructor had invited anyone interested in what he defined as a 'Swaddle-Off' to the front of the room. Fastest and most precise swaddle wins and no one was more surprised than her when Emma volunteered, but she was downright speechless when Emma won.

And thus she had received a silly, paper certificate and a $20 gift card to Carter's.

"How excited are you?!!" Aurora gushes and she can't help but blush and do the same.

"More excited than I ever thought I would be. I've always wanted kids but this has been an experience I never could've imagined so far. My doctor is a life saver, Emma's been the best partner so it's all been great. Though, I am not looking forward to being the size of a hot air balloon during summer."

"Good news is though, we just changed to a nine month calendar year at the academy, finally, so you'll have the summer off."

She nods, relieved. "That's true. I haven't had a summer off in years. Our due date is August 12, but I'm hoping they arrive early, that'll help me get the most out of my maternity leave since school starts the 21st."

"Oh, were you planning on still teaching next year?"

She shrugs. "Of course. After all of these bills are paid for, I don't have the money to take any more time off. I'd love to be a stay-at-home mom, but that's just not feasible. At least not right now."

"I'm sure Emma wouldn't mind contributing more to make that happen, if it's something you'd want to do. Have you two talked about it?"

"No, our most pressing issue right now is paint color. Speaking of…," she checks her watch, "we're supposed to be heading out to shop at 1 so I should get the check."

"Oh no, don't worry about that. This is one me," Belle eagerly chimes in. "Or...shall I say Ruby."
They smirk at each other, knowing how well she has Ruby wrapped around her finger.

"Thank you. Also, I do want to put together a small baby shower so be on the lookout for invites. I just need to get done with school before I can even think about that."

Aurora sits her glass down and leans forward. "Oh my God. Let us plan it!"

Ashley jumps in enthusiastically. "Oh hell yeah! We live for this kind of stuff. I literally do this for a living, I can't believe we hadn't thought of it."

Before she can even get a word in edgewise, Aurora waves her off. "Perfect, it's settled. You tell us a few good dates and we'll set it all up. Don't you worry about a thing."

"Well-but-,

"Nope, no 'buts'. We're doing this. We'll get all your preferences from Kat and take care of everything. Great, glad that's settled!"

Aurora claps her hands together and Ashley and Kat actually high-five and for the first time, she feels what it's like to have more than just a single best friend. She knows the feeling of having essentially a team behind her.

And it feels great. She murmurs a 'thank you' and barely keeps from crying.

_Damn hormones._

"Just remember who planned it all when you're giving out "godmother" titles, okay?"

"Of course, you will not be forgotten," she laughs genuinely, grabbing her purse.

"Okay, before I get a worried phone call about why I'm not out front, I should get going. I'm sure Emma's been waiting for 20 minutes. She's literally early to everything now."

"Actually, looks like someone got tired of waiting in the car," Kat, who is sat opposite her, is looking over her shoulder and smirking.

Before she even really gets the chance to turn around, she feels those hands on her upper back.

Even if Kat hadn't said anything, she'd know that touch anywhere. They still send shivers down her spine.

"Sorry to interrupt ladies, I know it's a girl's day." All too soon, the soft pressure on her back is gone as Emma puts her hands up, looking guilty.

"Oh no no. Please sit. There's room for one more," Ashley's tone feels dangerously close to flirtatious but that's probably just the hormones again.

Even still when Emma sits and places an arm around her chair, she feels like she's won an invisible battle with a probably unknowing opponent.

"So, I heard you guys are going paint shopping?"

Emma nods and smiles over at her. "Yes, ma'am. I'm super excited too. Then Ruby and I are going to paint this weekend."

Every woman at the table, including Kat, is leaned in to listen and 'ooh' and 'ahh' and she really does
feel like the luckiest woman in the world. Together or not, Emma's been doing an excellent job taking care of them.

"Are you painting both bedrooms the same color?"

"Uhh, hadn't really thought that far in advance. I guess we'll see," she shrugs but she knows Emma and she can tell there's so much more bubbling under the surface.

She's dying to ask but she knows this isn't the time.

"Yes, we shall see. Alright dear, are you ready?"

"Yeah, for sure. Ladies, thanks for letting me crash your party for a few minutes."

Emma gives her usual charming gaze before standing and helping her out of her chair, one hand in hers and the other pulling her chair away as she stands.

"Alright girls, I'll see you next Sunday! Kat, I'll see you tomorrow."

They all wave and she can feel their eyes on her as she walks away, Emma's hand never leaving her back as she guides them through the restaurant.

The ride is relatively quiet. In fact, Emma has been oddly quiet this entire time and it's beginning to make her uncomfortable. A feeling she hasn't felt with Emma since their very first fight.

"What do you think of this one?" She holds up a lavender square sample and Emma shrugs.

"Eh, not in love with it."

"Okay," she puts it down and keeps searching, trying to find a color that they can both agree on.

After a few more minutes of silently searching and feeling like Emma is as far from her as she can be while standing 2 feet away, she feels the need to say something.

"Is...is everything okay, Em? You've been unusually quiet."

She strokes her wrists just to get her attention but somehow their fingers latch at the last minute so that their middle fingers are wrapped around each other loosely.

Neither makes an effort to move and she hardly has the time to overthink it because Emma speaks softly. "I want to be brave and say something but...I don't want it to come out the wrong way."

She steps closer.

"Just say it. Whatever it is, just tell me and we'll figure it out once it's all on the table."

She puts a hand on Emma's waist for comfort. For Emma's...not her own, she says to herself, convincing no one.

"I...I've been thinking more and more and especially since they asked about room colors and...and I want you to know that I'm not saying this because I don't want to take care of this baby or because I don't want to be fully invested or anything like that..."

Her heart is pounding now and she has to admit that she's fearful of what's coming next.
"I know we talked about 50/50. I know we've kinda briefly talked about trading off but I just...I just think that the baby should stay with you full time."

The amount of energy that takes to get out is apparent by how Emma swallows midway through the sentence and looks like she's 2 seconds away from crying. Something she's only ever seen once, that night on Emma's balcony.

"Emma, that's not necessary. I trust you with this baby. I know it's scary but-"

"No, I know. I'm a master swaddler. I have a certificate," Emma says it so seriously that she has to laugh and that causes Emma to crack a smile too.

"I know I can be good at this. It's just...I think Mango loves you already. Needs you so much already. I just...I just wouldn't feel right about taking this away from you, for even a second, let alone a week. You're gonna be such a kickass mom and this kid deserves that 24/7. And I'll visit and take her anytime you're feeling overwhelmed or while you go to work, if you still wanna work, or whatever... I just think that this baby belongs with you and...I'd rather be realistic about that now than get attached and wanna bring her home with me, only for you two to realize you need each other."

She's crying. In the middle of Home Depot. In aisle 7. While looking at paint swatches.

She's so overcome with emotion that she can't bring herself to feel ashamed.

Emma's thoughtfulness never fails to amaze her.

Her kindness and care never ceases to warm her heart.

For a moment, she leans forward to rest her forehead on Emma's collarbone, needing to collect herself before saying anything.

After a moment, she takes Emma's left hand that's still tangled in hers and brings it to rest on her stomach, while her other hand wraps itself around her neck.

She brings their foreheads together and they share the same air before she says a word.

"Emma Swan, against all the odds, we made this baby together. We created a life that's half of me and half of you. It's going to have all of our best qualities and hopefully none of our worst. He or she may be growing in me but we're all growing together. You're going to knock this mom thing out of the park and this baby is going to absolutely love and adore you. So...we're not going to carve anything in stone right now, okay? We'll paint two rooms and buy two of everything and we'll see how it all goes, alright?"

Emma nods and the motion causes the tear that was hanging from her chin to fall onto her chest. She knows she shouldn't, she knows what comes of mixed signals but she leans up and kisses her cheek anyway.

"We're going to be fine. One step at a time, right?"

Emma had told her during their crib shopping trip that that's what she and her therapist had been working on lately and she was happy to re-emphasize that philosophy.

Emma takes a deep breath. "One step at a time."
"Good, now," she pulls away and unnecessarily fixes her hair, "let's get back to it. I can only imagine how crazy we look. Having a breakdown in the middle of the paint aisle."

She sniffs and wipes her eyes, careful not to smudge her makeup.

"Oh my God. How many people do you think we scared away from this row?"

"Oh, so many." Emma laughs wholeheartedly and they continue down the row, somehow still attached at the pinkies.

"Okay, what about this? I'm kind of digging it."

Emma holds up a hot pink and she has to squint. "That's not easy on the eyes at all. You're not going to like a whole room of that."

She picks up a lighter shade. "What about this one? Less aggressive?"

Emma nods. "I like it."

She adds it to their handbasket of favorites. "Me too. Though, it doesn't leave much room for it to be a boy."

"Well, does it matter?"

"What do you mean? It's a pastel pink."

"Well, I mean, are we the parents that care if our boy likes pink or if our girl likes black or something?"

She has to give that an honest minute. Everything in her own upbringing screams "yes".

Her mother would throw a fit if she received photos of her granddaughter dressed in a blue jumper or a grandson with a pink room in the background.

But the part of her that is blessed to be a mother at all, the part of her that is eager to be better than her own mother, says it doesn't matter. The part of her that is already so in love with this creature growing inside of her knows that it doesn't matter. This baby could come out with two heads and she'd still think it was the cutest thing in the world. So what difference would it make if they wanted to wear blue or orange or walk around naked?

They'd still be perfect.

And you also don't have the greatest relationship with your mother. Do you really want to follow after her example?

That solidifies it and she nods resolutely. "No, you're totally right. We're not those parents."

"Cool," she swears she hears Emma breathe a sigh of relief and she swings their arms playfully.

"Speaking of, what kind of parents are we?"

Emma smiles her way. "Well, for starters, we're super cool moms."

"Oh of course. I foresee us being yelling on the sidelines parents."

"Oh my God, yessss. With signs. Huge ass signs that say 'That's my fucking kid' but with those little
symbols to bleep it out, you know?"

She wants to laugh but she knows Emma's 100% serious.

"Hmm, okay, let's not commit to that particular sign yet. But yes! Definitely need a sign. And juice boxes. And a first aid kit because you never know."

Emma groans and laughs and she picks up another color. "Noooo, we're not going to be the moms that bring the first aid kit. I'm sure if they're playing a sport, they have those on hand."

"Okay, no, dear. I'm not leaving that up to chance. And what if they don't have the proper size band-aids?"

"I'm pretty sure it's one size fits all for children," Emma says, grinning widely while holding up another color.

"Oooh, I like that." It's a forest green and it instantly feels like Mango's style.

"Me too. And you know what, I've been looking on Instagram and a lot of people are doing like murals and patterns these days. Maybe on this we could do a cute forest scene with some animals or something? Think Mangs would be into that?"

"I do, however, I don't think he or she would appreciate being called 'Mangs'. These nicknames are getting out of hand."

Emma throws her head back in laughter. "That's fair. Time to start thinking of names then?"

She shrugs. "Sure, I just don't even know where to start. I had a million names on my list as a little girl."

"Well hit me with it. What names were on your girl list?"

"Oh gosh. Uhh, well, Emily for one. And Isabelle."

"Emily is too close to Emma. But Isabelle Swan. I like that."

She can hear in Emma's tone that she's not in love with it and she feels the same.

"How about you? Any names on your girl list?"

"I don't know, I kinda like unisex names. Like, Phoenix or River."

"River Swan...are you serious right now?"

"You know what, that's actually the first time I'm hearing those together." Emma covers her face as they laugh hysterically. "Maybe we'd have to go with River Mills, if we liked that one."

"One, I'd definitely want to hyphenate. That only seems fair. Two, I don't think River is going to work with either of our last names."

"Yeah, you're probably right. It sounds weird no matter what."

She notices that Emma glazes over her mention of hyphenating and she can't tell if that's a good thing or a bad thing.

"What about this for the outline of the trees and everything?" Emma holds up a light grey and she
nods.

"Love it, throw it in the basket and I think we can get rid of these others, right?"

"Yeah, for sure," Emma confirms as she grabs the other 6 options and she doesn't need to be looking to know that she's put them back haphazardly on the shelf in places they don't belong.

"Back where they go please, Emma."

As she walks away, she hears Emma grumble loud and clear. "Well, we know what kind of mom you're going to be, Nagatha Christie."

"Okay, see this is what I mean," Emma leans across to show her her phone.

"Ooooh, I like that."

"Seeee? Cool right?"

"That's...awfully elaborate though. Are you sure you and Ruby are going to be able to do all that by yourselves?"

Emma nods as she takes a big bite of pizza. "Yeah yeah, we got it."

She arches her eyebrow, highly skeptical, as Emma hasn't shown much of an affinity for art.

"Seriously, we'll be fine. We'll probably have to get Belle to sketch it out for us on the wall first but it'll be great. You're gonna love it. It may take a little more time though, so be prepared for a two or three week thing."

She shrugs. "Fine by me. And if you guys are free, you can actually do it during spring break next week. I don't have any plans."

Emma looks up suddenly, eyes widening. "What?!" she asks, suddenly on edge.

"No, nothing bad. It's just, I've been meaning to ask and I've kinda been putting it off but I…," she wipes her mouth before continuing and the suspense is actually killing her.

"I wanted to ask-well, first, every year my family goes on vacation for spring break. This year August chose DisneyWorld and my mom was wondering-well, I was too- but-well we were all wondering if you wanted to come with us. Seeing as you're...part of the...family now."

The awkwardness of the ask barely even registers as she replays those words over and over again, fork permanently frozen in the air.

Part of the family.

She grew up an only child. With a mother that seemed to never want to be bothered and a loving, but incredibly busy father.

So to be considered part of Emma's family, it makes her heart soar.

"Uh...are you," she clears her throat, feeling overcome with emotion. "Are you sure? I wouldn't want to intrude."

Emma shakes her head immediately. "No no, no intrusion at all. You're the...mother of my kid."
She wonders briefly what Emma really wanted to insert before that pause and change of direction.

"Plus, they want you to come. My mom really wants to spend time with you and August misses you and even David has been cool lately. You should come."

Out of that entire list, there was one crucial person missing. She doesn't want a pity invite.

"Yeah but...do you want me to come?"

Emma smirks. "Always."

She quirks her eyebrow again, doing her best to look unamused. "Come on, be serious."

Her smirk morphs into a soft smile and Emma leans in to play with her fingers, refusing to make eye contact.

"Honestly...I always want you around. I think it'd be a lot of fun if you joined us. Plus, I'd probably be out of my mind worrying if you stayed. I don't know how much fun I'd be if we were 1,100 miles apart."

She slowly sits back in her chair and now it's her turn to smirk. "Someone's been on Google maps."

Emma immediately rolls her eyes and goes to move her hand but she flips her's over and holds her in place.

"Stop, it's cute that you mapped it."

"Ugh, shut up."

"Aww, don't be moody."

Emma only sulks further and her heart swells with so much love.

She ignores her brain and brings their hands up to her lips, softly kissing Emma's knuckles.

"I'd love to go with you, Emma."

Emma rolls her eyes but smiles widely at her and doesn't move to take her hand back, so that's how they finish their meal. With their fingers laced on the table and stars in their eyes.

"Hmm, so when you said plane leaves at 10am, you really meant plane leaves at whatever time you want it to because it's a private jet?"

She blushes but grabs Regina's bag and kisses her on the cheek. "In all of our defenses, we all know how to fly commercial except for the kid. He's the loudest traveler I've ever met. He literally shrieks as we're taking off. As a baby, we just assumed it was a baby thing. Now we've realized it's just an August thing."

She hands the bags over to the gentleman by the stairs and then takes Regina's hand to help her up.

Yeah, it's only 4 steps but she'd rather be safe than sorry.

"So, you excited?"

"I am actually! I think this is going to be fun. I've never really been on a fun family vacation like this."
I went to Italy in my teens but that's about it. We didn't really do fun, family vacations."

"Wait...so you've never been to Disney World?"

"Babe, I've never even been to Disneyland."

She knows it's probably just a slip of the tongue. She knows that she probably didn't mean it. But that doesn't stop her heart from skipping a beat.

Midway through deciding if she should make fun of her for the slip up or let it be, she hears yelling and knows it can only be one person.

One very tiny person. He steps on holding her mom's hand but immediately lets go upon seeing them.

She thinks for a minute he's going to knock her over with how quickly he's coming towards her but he takes a hard left at the last minute and barrels right into Regina.

"Giiiiiiiiiaaaaaaaa!" He holds her around the waist until she crouches to his level so they can hug properly.

She hugs him tight at first and then, just to amuse him, moves and shakes him around, planting a million kisses on his cheeks, leaving a little lipstick behind but he doesn't seem to notice.

"You caaaaaaame!"

"Volume, mister. Remember what we talked about."

David comes bounding on just in time to chastise.

She arches her eyebrow at her mom. "We had a very long discussion in the car about the definition of 'close quarters' and 'enclosed spaces'."

She nods, "Ahhh, and that lecture lasted for all of two seconds."

Her mom nods before taking a seat next to David.

"August, you can sit next to Regina until the pilot comes back, then we'll need to put on our seat belts."

"I wanna sit next to Gina!"

"Sweetie, Emma is-;"

"Oh, don't worry about it. I'll...sit somewhere else."

Regina gives her a pity smile but she shrugs it off. She gets to spend a whole 5 days with her.

She can give the kid 3 hours.

She takes the seat across from them facing them and watches them talk.

As they take off, August shrieks just as expected but Regina just runs her fingers through his curly locks and tells him about the science of how planes fly.

He quiets faster than usual to listen, utterly fascinated, and asks a million questions and before they
know it, the pilot is coming out to tell them that they've hit 10,000 and can freely move.

Of course, his first move after David gives him the all clear, is to go chat up the pilot.

And when he does, she makes a move, unbuckling her seat belt and claiming the seat next to Regina.

"Hey, come here often?"

"No, but my baby's mama is loaded so I imagine you'll be seeing me here more often."

The smirk on Regina's red lips is enough to make her heart flutter and her member twitch.

"She sounds like a keeper then," she shoots back, nudging Regina in the shoulder.

"Eh, I suppose but I-," she looks over abruptly as Regina stops mid sentence. She's clutching her stomach and immediately, her heart rate picks up.

"What's wrong? Is it that pain again? Mom-"

Regina's hand grasps her leg lightly, as she shakes her head. "No no, I'm fine. It's just...Mango just...I think she kicked me."

Regina's eyes are filled with tears and so much joy and instantly hers do the same, but her heart rate doesn't even out.

Now it's racing out of pure excitement.

"Seriously?!"

"Yes, I think? It's my first time being kicked from the inside out."

Regina grabs her hand and moves it across her stomach placing it right over a little lump.

"I...I don't feel anything."

"Just wait maybe she...," Regina moves her hand around again but she starts to deflate as nothing happens.

"I swear she kicked Em. I just don't know how to make her do it again."

She groans. "Maaaango, come on. Move for mommy."

She expects absolutely nothing but the strong kick she gets in return makes her pull away at lightning speed only to put her hand right back.

"Oh my fucking God."

"Language," her mother chides, now standing right over her with a grin. David's matching smile looking down at them too.

"The baby kicked. Feel!" She grabs her mom's hand and places it just to the left of Regina's belly button.

They give it a long moment, and Ingrid expertly presses her fingers around the area, hoping to get a reaction but nothing comes of it.

"Aww, come on Mango. Don't be shy now!"
Almost instantly, a gentle nudge pushes at her hand. "Oh my goodness."

David takes his turn and again, Mango doesn't move a muscle until she hears her speak softly, encouraging her to show off a little.

"She loves your voice," Regina whispers as she plays with the ends of her hair. For a moment, she's overloaded with sensations. She's eager to revel in Regina's touch but her baby is moving.

She's heard the heartbeat, so there was never a doubt that Mango was a living being, but to know that she is alive is the best realization in the world.

After a few minutes of hubbub, August must overhear and suddenly feel left out because he comes bounding over into her lap.

"What is it doing?"

"The baby is moving inside of me, August. Would you like to feel it?"

He suddenly grows timid and lays his head on her chest, shaking his head.

"It's alright August, don't be scared. It's just a little baby. In fact, you were the same size once in mommy's tummy. Did you know that?"

He nods.

"Augs, what if we touched it together? Same time?"

He nods again and she holds her hand out, palm up. "Hand please?"

He places his tiny hand in hers and she grasps it and stretches her arm out until both of their fingertips are gently resting on Regina's belly.

Nothing happens and she's grateful for that, wanting to go at his pace.

"Ready?"

He nods and she chances a glance up at Regina, who's staring down at them seemingly mesmerized, before she lays his hand flat on her stomach with hers on top.

"Hey Maaaaango. Meet your Uncle August."

Right on cue, there's a swift kick that causes August to shriek in fear, but her hand is firmly over his to keep him from moving.

"See? That wasn't so bad."

"Speak for yourself dear, that was a quite the kick."

She looks up abruptly, "Oh, man. I forgot about that. You okay? I'll stop summoning the kid if it's taking a toll on you."

But Regina shakes her head, "No, it's a weird feeling but 100% welcome. It's nice knowing that there's a moving, hearing baby in there."

"I was thinking the exact same thing," she opens up, looking right into Regina's eyes.
The brief moment they share is ruined by the five year old bouncing in her lap.

"Again, again."

"You know what, bud? Let's give Em and Regina some grown up time. I bet the pilot needs another co-pilot? Want to see the cockpit?"

That invitation has August up and grabbing David's hand in no time at all and, more and more, she's realizing that he isn't the absolute worst.

Her mother sort of slinks away too, but not before squeezing her shoulder the way she always does when she's proud.

She turns back to Regina to see her smiling with her eyes closed while both hands cradle her small baby bump.

She places her hand over one of them and relaxes into her chair sideways.

"I've...I've wanted this my whole life," Regina whispers softly as her eyes flutter open to look directly at her and she can tell she's two seconds away from a dam breaking. "And I'm so glad that it's with you."

She swallows the lump in her throat and nods, "So I am. I-I never pictured being a parent. I'm still learning how to take care of myself but...I can't wait to meet this baby. I love it so much already."

Regina moves her hand a couple of centimeters to the side and she can feel a slight, movement.

"And she loves you too. Right Mango?"

For the first time, as if knowing just how important this moment is, there's a soft kick on command at the sound of Regina's voice.

"See? She can't wait to meet you either. Also, why couldn't she do that when everyone was standing around watching?"

She sounds scandalized.

"Because she likes me more. I'm the cool mom," she smirks and kisses her on the cheek.

"I thought we were both the cool mom?"

"Yeah in public but at home, someone needs to be the responsible, stern parent. That's gotta be you. Sorry bout it."

"No you're not, dear."

She smirks, "Nope, I'm not."

"Well, in 13 years when she's telling you about her crush on a boy a school, you better tell me right away, even if she says not to! I want to be in on these things!"

She scrunches her nose. As much as she wants a baby girl that is a little replica of Regina's perfection, she never considered what having a girl meant.

"Uhhh, no no. There will be no boys. No crushes."
"Emma, she's...she's going to date eventually."

"Yeahhhh but not like...until she's way older. 13 is way too young for that stuff."

Regina laughs, "Are you kidding me? What were you doing at 13?"

She thinks about that. "Stealing from stores and tossing my homework in the storm drain. Which she won't be doing either!"

"And you never thought about girls? Never once?"

Regina's hand is on her knee now, inching up just slightly.

She clears her throat. "That's irrelevant. I'm...me. Boys only want one thing and they're absolutely not getting it from her."

Regina squints playfully and turns her grip on her thigh into a light, comforting scratch.

"Oh I can see now dear that I have nothing to worry about. You are not going to be the cool parent. You're going to be the 'my daughter's not dating until she's married and when she does bring someone home, the first words out of my mouth are 'what are your intentions with my daughter' parent."

She shrugs. "I'm comfortable with that."

Regina leans over quickly and kisses her on the cheek and it sets her whole body on fire. "Yeah, I am too."
"I'm so sorry again girls for the mix-up here."

"Mm."

Perhaps she'd give him more if it weren't so dreadfully obvious that he's not sorry at all, what with the small smirk on his face as he shuts the door to their large suite, Ingrid and August in tow behind him to their own suite next door.

"So...," Emma lulls, letting her duffle bag fall off of her shoulder.

She rolls her eyes. "Is sharing a room going to be painful for you dear?"

She laughs. "No, not at all. It's no big deal. You can take the room and I have no problem with the couch."

That gives her pause. "We've shared a bed plenty of times..."

"Yeah but...I know that was a one time thing and I...just...I'm just trying to be respectful. You know?"

"I think I can keep my hands to myself for 5 nights, if you can."

Emma chuckles, charmingly she's forced to admit. "I make absolutely no promises."

She rolls her eyes again and turns to head to the bedroom, but the hand gently slapping her ass makes her yelp.

"Watch it, Ms. Swan!"

"Oh trust me, I am," she doesn't need to turn around to know that Emma is staring at her ass as she walks away.

She may add a little saunter to her step, but that's neither here nor there.

"So, what are we doing first?"

They've just stepped foot in the expansive park and August is already roaring to go while David attempts to apply sunscreen on himself and Ingrid expertly manages to hold onto the enthusiastic 6 year old while reading a map.

"I'm good with whatever!" she says applying sunscreen to her pale arms and Regina nods at her side.

"Alright, well, perhaps we start with Harry Potter World?"

"Yeah yeah yeah!" August jumps at the words, but she's pretty sure he's never seen Harry Potter in his life.

"To Harry Potter World," David says with vigor but as they're headed that way, they pass a hat shop and immediately her little brother forgets about their trek to another world.

"Mommy, can I get a hat?"
"You have a hat sweetheart," she says tugging gently on his Mickey ears hat.

"But not that hat!" He gestures at a green Peter Pan cap and while she thinks they all roll their eyes, they enter the store anyway because it's just so hard to say no to that logic.

"Emmy, what kind of hat are you getting?"

Her first response is to snort, but then she looks down at him and finds herself compelled to join in on the fun, especially when she sees Regina trying on hats with David out of the corner of her eye.

"Hmm, I don't know bud! Which one do you think looks coolest?"

He picks up a Cars set of ears and she regrets asking him but fortunately she doesn't have to turn down his offer because Regina comes bounding over.

"Look what I found!"

She looks down to find a pair of relatively matching baseball caps, one with Mickey Mouse ears and the other with Minnie ears and a bow.

"We can match!"

Her heart skips at the idea of sharing something with Regina that she's never shared with anyone else.

And if there's one thing she's learned, nothing makes her heart sore like experiencing new things with the mother of her child. She puts on her own cap and the smile that graces Regina's lips is too much.

"Love it. Let's do it!" she finds herself saying with no hesitation.

They've been in Orlando for two days now and so far, it's been a dream come true. No doubt this is the happiest place on Earth. What started as matching hats has turned into adorable matching hers and hers shirts and even cuter "family photos", as Ingrid had dubbed them.

Admittedly, the shirts had been her idea which is contrary to the part of her that didn't want to mislead Emma, but being around her and her family makes her forget that they're not together. Between Emma patiently holding her bags every time she has to pee and feeding her Dole whip anytime she opens her mouth obnoxiously wide, it's getting harder to remember the hurt.

If Emma installing cribs turns her on and Emma swaddling a baby makes her swoon, then watching this relaxed, family-oriented version of Emma makes her melt into a puddle. Watching her laugh and be silly with August makes her fall in love all over again in a new sort of way.

And sure, it doesn't cancel out the things Emma said on Thanksgiving night, which now feels like a lifetime ago, but it does get easier each day not to hold it against her.

"Oh look! Mickey and Minnie are together! Let's go get a picture."

August lights up just like he has every time a character appears and takes off towards them, and maybe they'd be concerned if Emma weren't right behind him, just as eager.

They wait in line nearly 10 minutes before it's their turn and finally when they approach, Mickey high fives them and Minnie blows them a kiss.

They do the usual family pose that they've mastered now: David and Ingrid on Mickey's side, she
and Emma on the other and August in the middle. His poses change each photo and this time it's legs spread out and arms wide with a grin that makes even the photographer chuckle.

He snaps a few before giving them a thumbs up and as they prepare to disperse, Minnie points at her "Hers" shirt and puts both hands on her cheeks, as if in shock, before looking to Emma's shirt and pointing.

Emma chuckles and nods, casually throwing an arm around her shoulder, "Yup, all hers."

Emma looks down at her, grinning so radiantly that she has to lean in to kiss her cheek.

Minnie's foot pops and Emma rolls her eyes, but the blush on her cheeks refuses to dissipate and the arm around her shoulder doesn't move for the rest of the afternoon.

"Today was fun."

"It was," Emma whispers back in the quiet.

August lays between them, fast asleep, only managing to stay afloat for the first 10 minutes of The Lego Movie 2.

Up until now they'd all done dinner together and got back to the room each night at almost 10pm, but they offered earlier in the day to take him tonight for dinner and a sleepover so Emma's parents could have a night to themselves, with a promise of having the favor returned the following night.

So now they find themselves both propped up against the back of the bed, shyly smiling at each other in the dark.

"This whole week has been fun so far."

She nods. "It has. I...I've never really had anything like this before so I...I'd love to do it again."

She feels more than sees slender fingers gently grab onto her own.

"I told you, you're part of the family now. We do this every year."

She plays with Emma's fingers with one hand while using the other to lightly scratch up and down her arm, just the way she knows Emma likes.

"I know, but I mean, not just this. Not just spring break with your family, I want to do this with Mango too."

"Oh. Yeah, totally," even when whispered, she can hear the excitement in Emma's voice.

The sit in silence for a few minutes, fingers still locked, just passively watching the movie, enjoying the quiet. "What...what are you most excited for?" Emma asks, out of the blue, but she needs no time to think about it.

While there's so much she can't wait for, the number one thing that has been on her mind since day one is just, "Holding her. Honestly, some days it doesn't feel real. That's why her kicking has been so crazy. It proves she's in there. Living, moving, listening. It's just...I don't think I'll really grasp that we're having a baby, until she's in my arms."

"Mmm. I have a feeling it'll hit during labor."
They both share a laugh. "You're probably right. That's going to hit me hard."

She gives it a full minute before asking, "What about you?"

"Oh...uh...all of it?" Emma's awkward chuckle tells her that's not even close to what's on her mind.

She brings her hand up to her lips, bringing Emma's fingers with it, and kisses them softly.

"Anything specific?"

Emma sighs and she gives her the time she needs to sort through whatever she's thinking, knowing well enough now not to push too much.

"Probably just...I don't know."

Emma sighs again, and though she doesn't mean to get annoyed, she does. It was Emma who had brought this up in the first place.

"You don't have to answer if you don't want to. I don't want to push."

"You're not," but the way she all but growls it out isn't very convincing.

"Okay, well...how about you go get him set up on the couch for the night and I'll pee for the millionth time today and then we can call it and get some sleep?"

She does her best not to sound frustrated but she's not sure how much it works because Emma doesn't speak, she just lifts August gently and effortlessly, taking him out to the living room of their suite for the night.

By the time she makes it back to bed, all but a faint light is out and she can see the same can be said for the living room where August sleeps soundly.

Emma has already gotten under the sheets and she ignores her crawling in, scrolling on her phone instead.

She watches her for a few minutes before deciding this is one of those times she needs to just ask. Ask for what she wants, ask Emma what's wrong.

"Why are you so...what's so hard about telling me what you're excited about? Are you...are you not excited? Is that it?"

"You know I am."

"Do I? I mean - ,"

"Are you kidding, Gina?" Emma drops her phone into her lap. "You know I'm stoked about this. I tell you all the time. I show up to everything. I'm here."

"Then what's so hard about being here with me right now in this moment? If you're so excited about all of this, just give me one thing Emma!"

She told herself while brushing her teeth she wasn't going to get mad about this, but that's getting harder and harder.

"This just...I'm excited, this just isn't how I pictured it."
She unwillingly sighs. "And how did you picture it?"

"We...we talked about it. We wanted a house, we wanted joint bank accounts. We wanted to be happy."

She turns up her nose at that. "I am happy."

Emma sighs back at her, growing just as agitated. "I meant together."

"We're literally spending a whole week together. We have, at the very least, 18 years together, Emma."

"You know what I mean."

She scoffs. "Yeah, I know what you mean. You want us to be together and you'll make me feel guilty about it until you get what you want."

"What? Are you kidding me?"

"No, I'm not. You were the one who made me feel bad after we slept together and then every time I think we're fine, you do this. You make me feel bad about things not working out like it's my fault."

"I'm not saying it's your fault, I get that I fucked up Regina, but it's not like I'm not trying. I'm here aren't I? It's not like I've been going out all the time on dates or whatever. I'm trying to figure out work and I'm seeing someone about my shit and I'm...trying and I just feel like you're not! We hold hands half the day and David even called us lovebirds today and you didn't say anything but it's like it means nothing to you. I feel like you couldn't care less if we never get back together. And if that's where you're at then just say that but...this is hard. It's harder than I thought it would be being with you all the time and never being...with you."

She knows Emma's opening up, baring her heart and being vulnerable but honestly, for once, she's in no mood to be sensitive to her feelings. For once, she can't let Emma play the wounded victim.

"Emma, there was a time when you had me daydreaming about you 24/7. Making up excuses to see you, then when you were leaving, you had me all but begging you to stay. Em...I was...so in love with you that I overlooked the fact that we're such different people. I paid no attention to all the warning signs that you would hurt me and instead I dove in head first. I put my own insecurities aside and let you have the freedom of being in a 'not quite relationship' so you didn't feel tied down. I let you shut down and get moody and took it all in stride. I sat through that God awful dinner feeling like nothing more than one of the many girls you've slept with and the only thing that kept me from getting up right then was the knowledge that we were more. That you knew it was more. That you may be too...embarrassed to say it in front of everyone else, but that I wasn't just some girl you fucked on the side. What we had was more than that. What we had, I could just tell it was different for you and I loved that. I loved you and so I sat through your bullshit, and even Neal's bullshit, because I knew that deep down...you loved me too. But it was like the second I needed you to say it, the one time I needed just a little reassurance, you couldn't do it. And instead, do you know what I got from you? Do you remember what you said to me, Emma?"

Even in the faint light, she watches Emma swallow the obvious thick lump in her throat and part of her knows it'll hurt her to hear it again, but a stronger part of her just doesn't care about protecting Emma's fragile feelings right now.

"You told me you didn't love me. You told me I wasn't special. In fact, if I remember correctly, you said 'please don't think you're special just because I fuck you slowly.' That's what you said,
remember? And when I refused to believe that, when I tried to see the good in you, you told me you did the one thing you promised you wouldn't."

The pictures, forever seared in her mind, rise to the surface and it's all she's sees. She swallows the bile in her throat.

"I...I told you I didn't cheat," her voice is barely a whisper which makes her response feel even louder.

"But that's the worst part of all. Because that means you said it...just to hurt me, Emma. That's the worst part. Not that you had cheated and you were just being honest. That would probably be easier to recover from. But the fact that you...that you were purposely wanting to hurt me and that's why you said it? Honestly, I have to forgive you for the sake of this baby Emma, and I...I do forgive you because I love you and I don't know how not to, but I can't say I'll ever forget it. I can't honestly say that we're ever going to recover from it."

She's standing now. She doesn't know when that happened but she's standing and as she finally looks up and over at Emma, her heart breaks.

Because even in the faint light, she can tell that Emma is crying. Not just a lone tear here or there, which she's seen once before.

Emma is truly crying and it pains her more than she thought it would.

She doesn't try to stop the tears. She doesn't try to hide them. She lets them pour freely and she sniffs, clutching her knees tighter.

She doesn't have a remedy for this. She doesn't know how they're supposed to move forward or move at all really so she stands there, staring at the ground, listening to Emma cry until the tears seem to finally subside.

At least enough for her to speak.

"I-," she clears her throat, voice hoarse, "I'm sorry. I know I say it so much. It feels like all I ever say to you. But I am. God, I am. I'm sorry that I said those things and I'm sorry that I hurt you and I'm just...so fucking sorry. I don't deserve you, Regina, and I've always known that and I just thought...that if I pushed you away then it would spare you from me. I thought that you could do better than me so I-",

"I don't want better than you, Em," she interjects, as frustrated as she is tired, "I just want you to do better. And you are, okay?"

She sighs and ultimately, finally caves. She sits on the edge of Emma's side of the bed and puts her head in her hands, more exhausted from this fight than the day as a whole.

She's so tired of apologies. She's tired of crying over Emma and she's tired of coming back to this same argument.

"Look, I appreciate everything you're doing for me and Mango. I'm glad you're seeing Dr. Hopper again and I'm glad that you're trying to get a job. I'm happy that you're trying and I see it. I see you trying. I just think...", she sighs and stares up at the ceiling. "I think we just need a fresh start."

Emma runs her sleeve across her face. "How do we start fresh after...everything?"

"I...I don't know, Em. I don't know. It's easy in theory. It's easy to sit here and say we're moving on
Emma sniffles but says nothing.

"We should get to bed," she clears her throat after a few minutes of silence.

The tension is palpable and it nearly chokes her. Even as she gets underneath the sheets, she finds it nearly impossible to sleep.

Emma doesn't lay down right away but even still, she falls into a fitful sleep not long after laying her head on the pillow.

The rest of the week passes by quickly. They don't hold hands or buy anymore matching shirts.

They don't hug or kiss each other on the cheek and she doesn't dare bring up anything else heavy.

Unsure how to deal with the sudden change, her parents walk on eggshells around them.

She's ruined their vacation.

It doesn't need to be said. She can feel it every time she and Regina lock eyes.

It's...awkward. Which is rarely an emotion she'd associate with Regina, but it is.

It's not uncomfortable but their conversations are surface level now, neither of them wanting to strike a nerve.

And on their last day, it's not until they're aboard the plane that she dares to even touch on anything substantial.

She waits until they're an hour in. August has stopped screaming, distracted by his iPad and her parents are both asleep.

She takes a deep breath, counts to three and just says it.

"I was thinking maybe when we get back we...and you can say no, I know it's a little weird, but maybe we could see Dr. Hopper. Like together," she rushes out. "Not like couples therapy or anything like that, I get what you're saying about us being together together. But if we want to hit the reset button...maybe he knows how to do it."

She chances a glance over at Regina who has her eyes closed.

She lets out a long breath. *Guess not.*

She lays her head on the window and shuts her eyes.

She doesn't know how long it takes but it feels like she's finally able to breathe normally when she hears a faint, "Okay."

She doesn't open her eyes, or say anything in return but she can't help the smile that just barely reaches her lips.
He stares at them briefly, allowing them to speak in their own time then chuckles to himself when they just continue to avoid eye contact with him.

"Alright well, I suppose I'll start us out. How have things been Emma?"

"Good, good."

He arches an eyebrow. She knows better than that so he waits.

"Well, it's been a mix. It's been good, great even, some days and other days are just really rocky."

He nods. "Care to expand on that?"

She shrugs.

"Well, tell me about the good days. Let's start there."

"They're perfect, really. We get along, we laugh, we talk, I try to open up. It's good."

"And what are the rocky days like?"

Emma swallows and glances over at Regina. "We fight."

Another nod, a few scribbles on the paper. "And how often would you say you fight?"

"Not often, really. Honestly, with us, it's like really high highs and really low lows. They sort of come out of the blue and we just...butt heads."

He grimaces and scribbles quickly. "Hmm, okay."

He puts the last period on his thought and looks up at Regina, who seems to be fiddling with the hem of her dress.

"And what about you Regina? Would you agree with the idea that you have really high days followed by low days?"

"Sure. I-," She stops abruptly. She opens and closes her mouth a few time, clearly searching for words.

"You know, I want you to know Regina, that I'm not looking for a right or wrong answer and I promise, I'm not psychoanalyzing every word. Just share honestly how you feel things have been going since learning you two were having a child."

She lets out a long breath. "It's been difficult. I feel like some days it's such a blessing to share this child and...and some days, it's challenging."

Emma stays looking straight ahead, but he sees from his peripheral that her expression changes. It's small, but he's trained to notice those very micromovements.

"What are some things that make it challenging?"

"The...," her hands flail around until the fall back into her lap. "Honestly? The pressure. It's a lot of pressure. From her, when she keeps saying that she's not happy because we're not dating and then-.,"

"I didn't say I wasn't happy, I just-,"
He clears his throat and immediately Emma deflates.

"Sorry. Finish your thought," she mumbles.

"Sometimes she just makes it seem like she's never going to be satisfied until we're back together. That's all I was trying to say."

"Okay. Before diving into that, Regina, I'd like you to practice using assertive statements about your emotions. That will help us stay away from accusatory language that Emma may not agree with which could escalate a conflict. So, try framing your statements like so, 'Emma, when you do x, it makes me feel y.' Try that out."

They both roll their eyes and it takes everything in him to keep from chuckling.

"Emma, when you bring up the fact that we're not 100% together, it makes me feel like you won't be 100% satisfied with me or this baby."

He waits for Regina to make eye contact with him before continuing.

"Now, Emma, would you like to respond to that?"

"Uh...yeah, I feel frustrated...and a little disappointed, when you tell me you feel that way because I feel like I tell you all the time how happy I am about the baby."

"But you don't...," she pauses to correct herself and he gives an encouraging nod, "I feel like while you're happy about the baby, you're not happy about where we stand."

"Because I'm not happy about where we stand."

Regina looks directly at him. "And therein lies our problem."

Emma rolls her shoulders and Regina crosses her legs and he can feel their defensive walls flying up.

"Okay, well let me ask you this Regina, and while it's a big question, I feel the answer determines how we all move forward...do you want a romantic future with Emma?"

Silence envelops them and, for a moment, he feels for Emma who he knows is internally shaking right now in anticipation.

"I...I...", he watches her struggle and thinks of the books he's read on troubled couples.

"How about this...how about you turn towards Emma, as best you can. Emma, adjust your body as well to face her. Now...look at her and ask yourself honestly, do you even want to try and pursue a romantic future with Emma?"

The longer they stare at each other, the longer he watches them, the more he begins to feel like an intruder.

Without prompting, Regina takes her hand and, while he was going to guide them through the exercise, he decides to just let it play out.

"This really hasn't been easy with us, has it? It always feels like two steps forward and ten steps back and I just...I just want to get to a point where it's healthy and we're happy. And not the pretend happy where we just avoid talking about anything that could start a fight. I mean really happy. And if we could get to that point, if we could get past everything, I'd want us to...I'd want us to try one more time."
He watches Emma exhale a breath she probably didn't even realize she was holding.

"Emma? What about you?"

"I want that kind of happy with you more than anything. And, honestly, I am happy. I...I don't want you to feel like the only way I'll ever be happy is if we're together because that's not true. I just...I broke my own heart the day I let you go and I don't know how to fix it apart from fixing us."

"And I want there to be an us Em, I just...don't know how to make it happen."

Emma nods remorsefully and he gives them another moment before cutting back in.

"Well, this is a great start. And, knowing that you're both on the same page about what you'd like to do, I'd like to give you a bit of homework, if you will. And before you do your usual groaning, Emma, allow me to finish."

Emma promptly closes her mouth, causing Regina to smirk without even looking her way.

"First, I'd like to see you both again, bi-weekly. I think that even just this past half hour has been very productive and I hope you feel the same."

They both shrug half-heartedly and he nods, willing to take what he can get.

"Alright. Second, before our next session, I'd like you to take some time to sit down and think of all the ways that you've been hurt by the other. Every time she's ever made you sad, made you cry, left you feeling hurt, confused, unhappy, anything that comes to mind, write it down. We'll review your lists during our next session. I also want you to write down one moment that made you feel most hopeful throughout the course of your relationship. Just one. We'll also talk through that."

They both look apprehensive, but nod again.

"Wonderful. Regina, it was a pleasure to finally meet you."

"Same to you, Dr. Hopper."

He gives her a gentle nod and sees them out. He watches them stop by the door to make another appointment and, despite their issues, he has a good feeling about them.

"So you two are actually giving it another go?"

"I mean, I don't know right now. I think we're seeing if we even can. If we can get past the shit from before, you know?"

"You mean, if she can get past you being a total fucking idiot."

Emma sighs as she does another squat.

"Yeah, basically. Thanks."

"Just being honest."

She eases back up, the weight in her hands feeling heavier than it did on the way down.

"That's why I keep you around Rubes."
"Mhmm. Hey, when you're finished, will you spot me?"

"Yeah, just two more."

She squats once, then twice more before setting the weight down and taking a deep breath.

She approaches the bench where Ruby is already laying down and leans over her to pick up with weight and ease it into her hands.

"So," Ruby starts once she's situated, "did you start your list of grievances yet?"

"Don't call it that."

"Why not? He basically told you to write down everything you don't like about her."

"No, he told me to write down the ways she's hurt me. It's not a list of things I don't like."

"I don't see the difference. Are you counting for me?"

"Yeah, yeah," she answers, knowing full-well she hasn't been counting. She decides to just start at 7 and go from there.

"There's a difference. 9. I could think of things I don't always like about her. But my list of 'grievances' as you put it, is blank. 11. I don't have anything. I can't think of a time where she hurt me."

"Well there has to be something. I mean...didn't she go on a date with that guy? Didn't you see her at the market with him or whatever?"

"14. I don't know. That doesn't feel like it counts. She didn't go out with him to hurt me."

"But it did though. So...I don't know."

"Yeah, I don't know. 16...17...18...19..." she can tell Ruby gets winded at 20 so she grabs the bar and replaces it on the rack.

"Well, are you actually just going to go in there with nothing? How's that productive?"

She sighs. "No clue. And I don't know how I'm going to respond to having to listen to all the ways I've fucked up."

Ruby chuckles and beckons her to start again. "Your ego is just going to loooove that."

She has to laugh at that. This is why she loves Ruby. She's always calling her on her shit.

"3. Hey, I know this probably isn't the time or place but I just...5...I just want you to know I appreciate you still sticking around after she left. I know I was completely out of line pushing you and everything but...9. Yeah."

Ruby gets to 20 and replaces the bar herself before sitting up and wiping sweat from her brow.

She takes a quick swig of water and just as Emma honestly thinks they're moving on from the topic, "You're my best friend Em. Seriously. Push me if you have to. Vent to me when you want to. Break down and fall apart as often as you want and you don't have to apologize later. I want you to. I can take it. Just don't put that on her."
She crinkles her brow. "Shouldn't I tell her how I'm feeling though? Isn't that the key to a great relationship? Communication?"

Ruby rolls her eyes, but smiles with nothing but affection. "Now you listen to me?! Yeah, I agree, communication is key but...for me, I tell B everything, but I'm starting to think it's different with you and Regina. You say dumb shit. You had a good thing going and you threw it away because you didn't know how to just shut up."

They walk upstairs to the track, both ready to finish the day with their usual two mile run.

"So, do communicate but not about my crazy thoughts?"

Ruby laughs out loud.

"I mean, basically. Look, you should be able to tell your girl anything. That's how you know she's the one: when you want her to know all of you. But I'm just worried you're going to freak out and say something stupid and I've met that woman. She doesn't seem like the type to give second chances, let alone thirds. So...I think this is it. Shit or get off the pot, you know?"

She wants to gag at the analogy, but it does resonate.

They're either doing this...or they're not.

"Thank you for picking me up, I appreciate it."

"Of course, you don't have to thank me."

She hears Regina's contented sigh and the urge to reach across and put her hand on her leg is strong. She drums her hands on steering wheel instead.

"You seem nervous."

"I...I am a little nervous."

"Me too."

That causes her to relax, just a bit. "Really? Is your list that bad?" She chuckles nervously, not really knowing if she wants an answer to that.

Regina tilts her head back and forth, but all the while refusing to answer.

She nods, understanding that while she only had a very short list, Regina's is surely much longer. And she can't be mad about that. It's her own doing.

So she leans back in her seat and just drives. Not at all eager to actually get to their destination.

"So...who would like to go first?"

"She can go first," Regina speaks quickly and clearly, leaving no room for her to argue.

He nods. "Okay, Emma. Start us off. What are some hurtful moments you've experienced throughout the relationship? Platonic or otherwise?"

"O-okay, well, yeah. Okay." She pulls her paper from her pocket and unfolds it.
She takes a breath.

She can hear her heart thumping wildly in her chest and wonders if Regina can too.

She chances one last look over at her and then looks down at her paper, reading word for word just so she doesn't chicken out.

"You...," she clears her throat, drier than ever, "You're very forgiving. You always have been. You give chance, after chance. You're patient with me. You always are. And I've never felt anything less than...", she swallows, "I've never felt anything less than loved by you...when we were together. But while we were broken up," she looks up abruptly, "the first time," she ad libs just to clarify. "I saw you one night. I was at a bar. Dancing on the floor when I looked up and just...saw you. You had your back to me, but my heart started pounding anyway. And honestly, right then and there, I wanted to go over and apologize, but then," she swallows, "Then the guy next to you put his arm around you and you both laughed about something and you looked over at him and from the side, it looked like you were happy. And that hurt me. When-when you get to the bottom of why we were apart, it was my fault, I know that and I know I have no reason to really be hurt but...God."

A tear she didn't even realize had escaped hits the paper.

"It just...hadn't even been a month and you looked like you'd moved on and that really really hurt me. So...", she clears her throat and wipes another tear before it gets all the way down her chin.

Dr. Hopper nods solemnly. "Thank you for sharing, Emma. It was very brave of you."

She sighs, his assurances making her feel much braver and stronger than she actually is, but she'll take it.

"Regina. Would you like to go now?"

"Sure. Uh," she watches as Regina silently clears her throat.

"Well, this...this is actually a second draft. I started the first one and it was, admittedly, quite long, but at the end of the day it really boiled down to two things so I just...condensed them. I...I was hurt, and also disgusted, by the photos you had on your phone and I was hurt that you denied loving me."

She says it in what feels like a rush but to her, it hits like a slow freight train. Somehow, that wasn't exactly what she was expecting. She was expecting a long list, she was expecting to hear about the flowers and the suggested cheating and Neal and....all of it.

They all sit in silence for a moment.

"Were you finished with your thoughts, Regina?"

"Yes." Regina is curt, and even though it's just two things, it makes her feel like the list is a mile long, uphill.

"Okay, Emma. I'll let you respond first. If you recall the memories Regina spoke of, would you like to share your thoughts or perspective on that experience?"

She opens and closes her mouth like a fish, gasping for water but nothing comes out. She debates what sounds better, the long or short version.

_Probably best to just get it all out there._
"Those photos were old. Like, way old. I dug them up from old conversations with Neal and then would send them back to him, pretending they were recent. Anytime he'd ask to hang out, or ask what I was doing, if I wanted to go drinking, I'd tell him I was 'busy' and send him those."

"And is a reason why you didn't feel comfortable telling him that you didn't want to spend time with him?"

She shakes her head, "It wasn't that I didn't want to, I just preferred to stay right where I was." She looks to her right. "With you."

Dr. Hopper nods. "So, to be clear then for my own notes, you've never cheated on Regina?"

"No, never."

"Would you like to tell her that directly?"

She turns effortlessly, more than willing to say it a million times over.

She sits and up straight and looks her dead in the eye, wanting her to know and remember the truth, despite everything she's said in the past.

"Regina, I want you to have no doubt about what we had. I never ever cheated. Never even thought about it. Not even when I gave that girl your flower. I...," she swallows and scoots a little closer, taking Regina's tan hand into her own. "I thought it would be so hard to commit to this. I thought that the second we made us official, I would get distracted by the first girl that walked by, but I couldn't have been more wrong. I...I only see you. You're always the most beautiful girl in the room. Ever since we started...dating," she knows it rolls off her tongue awkwardly, but Regina's soft smile makes it worth it, "and probably even before but I just didn't realize it, you're the only girl I want to leave with and the only one I want to come home to at the end of the night."

Regina swallows. And then nods. "I believe you."

She lets out a deep breath she didn't even know she was holding. "Thank you."

She's pretty sure it's not what you're supposed to say in response to something like that, but it's how she feels.

Thankful.

"Now, if it's alright with you, I'd like to table Regina's secondary concern momentarily. I promise we'll return to it, but first, I'd like to ask you Regina, if there's anything you'd like to say in response to Emma's hurt. While there's absolutely no requirement to respond, if you recall the memory Emma spoke of, perhaps you can share your thoughts and feelings about that moment she witnessed?"

Regina puts her paper aside and sighs.

"Yes, I remember it. I...I had gone out with this one guy, one time after Emma had left my house a couple weeks before. We had fought because I wanted more and I thought she did too but I misread it, I guess. SO. That night, I was just trying to find a way to move on. I-to be honest, he was a nice guy. The kind of guy I would've really liked, had I never met you."

It's brief. It's feather light. But Regina's pointer finger grazing her right leg sends a shiver up her spine.

"But that's every guy these days. He's nice, he's thoughtful, but he's no you. He doesn't make me
laugh or teach me patience the way you do. And, even though we're in a weird place, no one has ever cared about me the way that you do."

She cracks a smile at that, knowing her patience comment it's a backwards compliment but she's willing to take it.

"Even...even Robin?"

"Even Robin," and Regina says it so surely that she breathes a sigh of relief. "He's perfect on paper, and maybe if I'd met him first, even before Daniel, I would've married him. Been happy with him for a long time. But...if I'd run into you, even with a ring on my finger, I don't know what would've happened."

That gives her pause. That's a big admission.

"You really think that?"

Regina bites her lip. "I do. And, I know it sounds terrible dear, but I...something about us, it just feels so...inevitable?"

She swallows at that thought. It terrifies her but also gives her an endless amount of hope.

She leans in and whispers, forgetting all about Dr. Hopper for a moment, "So what you're saying...is that Swan Queen is endgame."

Regina's melodious laughter fills the air and she swears her heart grows three sizes.

"Yeah, it seems that they are."

####

Thank you to anyone who has made it this far and continues to stick with us. Until next time!
Chapter 30

Beware of the flashbacks, they're italicized and take you back to the therapy session they started in the previous chapter. Hope it's not too confusing!

Enjoy...

She returns to work the following Friday feeling brand new. It's a strange feeling, but for the first time in...forever (?) she feels like she's exactly where she's supposed to be.

She'd been walking on cloud 9 since they left Dr. Hopper's office last Thursday. They'd made strides while in his office but come miles over a quiet, hours long dinner.

He'd assigned them homework that they were eager to start so over a shared plate of nachos, they'd taken the 5 love languages quiz.

Emma had ranked highest in physical touch and acts of service, while Regina's languages seemed to be words of affirmation and quality time.

Emma's strong nod after she'd tallied her scores was comforting. She knew that look. It was Emma's 'absorbing' face. She was taking in the information, much like she had that afternoon as they discussed likes and dislikes in Regina's bed, so that she could do something with it later.

"No wonder we couldn't make it work. There's no overlap AND your biggest love language is my worst quality. I suck at talking about feelings."

She laughed good naturedly, so Regina joins in, seeing her point on that.

"Well, that's why we're doing this. Now that you know...you know?"

"Yeah."

"So I think....I just need to hear that you care. You can't just spend a day with me and make me feel like it means everything to you, then tell me, or someone else, otherwise. That makes me feel unloved."

It's brutally honest but that's what Dr. Hopper had asked of them. To be honest and upfront about their needs.

"I get that. And I think for me, the words just aren't enough, you know? I've heard people say they love me. And, I mean like, don't get me wrong! My...." Emma leans in and whispers, what feels like, conspiratorially, "My heart literally always skips a beat when I hear you say it. I just...I think so many people have said one thing and done the other, that like you said, it's confusing and it makes me feel like they didn't mean any of it. You tell me you love me and you want me to be happy, but then you send me away to another home. So...okay," she clears her throat, "I'll be better about matching my words with my actions."

The urge to take her hand is strong and knowing that touch is Emma's love language gives her the confidence she needs to do it.

"I mean it, Em. I love you. And...I know that's...a lot for you to take in, but I mean it. And I can do
more to show that, as opposed to just saying it, if you need me to prove it."

She watches Emma swallow thickly and stare at their laces fingers. "No, I-I feel it. That's all the proof I need."

They had wrapped up shortly after that and Emma drove her home, dutifully getting the door for her before walking her up to her door. They stood on the stoop for a moment before she just decided to go for it, pulling Emma into a tight, intimate hug.

"I won't lie, I'm glad that physical touch is your love language...I love this."

Emma sighs into her neck and squeezes her tighter. "I know. Me too."

"Okay, I'll see you later?"

"Yup, let me know if you need anything, okay? Otherwise, I'll see you Saturday."

"I certainly will. Goodbye Em."

"Goodnight."

She's not expecting the whole group over, but Saturday morning rolls around and it feels like her doorbell never stops ringing. First, it was Emma and Ruby, walking in with gallons of paint. Belle was about half an hour behind, pulling up in Ruby's car with a backpack on and two Starbucks cups in hand.

"Decaffeinated for you," she smiles widely as she hands it over.

"You're a lifesaver."

"You can thank me by naming the baby after me."

She laughs loudly and shrugs. They're still not sure of the sex, opting at the very last minute to wait, but she'll be sure to add Belle to a list of potential names.

"Alright, let's head up and get to work."

She watches from the doorway as Emma pulls out her phone and explains to the couple what she wants to do with the room. She measures and moves items around effortlessly and it's so sexy, she actually has to excuse herself to her study.

It's not until almost an hour later she hears her door creak open.

"There you are."

She turns abruptly, surprised to find Ruby smiling gently at her.

"Oh, hello dear. Come in. Is everything alright out there?"

She nods quickly, while closing the door behind her. "Oh yeah, for sure. Belle is sketching the walls right now and I got bored just sitting around. And while I can normally stare at B for hours, the conversation turned dark. They started discussing breastfeeding so," Ruby's eyes widen comically and it makes her put down her book and bring her legs underneath her to make room on the couch.
"Oh, I can understand why you might want to escape. Nothing more frightening than...breasts."

Ruby laughs and plops down right next to her. The move reminds her of something Emma would do and makes Ruby feel more familiar than she ever has before.

"So, how are you?"

"Me? Oh. good good. I should be asking you that. You're the one creating a life."

She exhales deeply. "I...I'm good. Things are looking up every day."

"Yeah? Well that's great. Em says you guys have been seeing Archie which I think is great. I hope it helps."

"I think it already has. I-I feel like it's what we needed. We just weren't getting anywhere. We were fighting and dancing around issues until we blew up at each other and I didn't want to bring a baby into that."

Ruby nods. "Neither did she. You know...she's really excited about this baby. She has been since the moment you told her."

An involuntary smile graces her lips, "I know she is. She's been the best mom I could ask for for my child, already. She knows the yes foods, the no foods, the make me feel better foods, she swaddles like a champ, and she learned all the burping techniques ahead of time so she could use the class time I booked to have her questions answered. She brought a notebook of questions to our burping class, Ruby."

Ruby laughs with her whole body and sinks further into the couch. "I believe it. She actually used our time in the car this morning to remind me that Belle and I need to get CPR certified before the baby comes otherwise we can't babysit."

She covers her face, "What is happening to her?"

"She's doing all of her adulting over the course of 9 months."

"Well, I'm just glad to hear I'm not the only one suffering through this total 180."

They both chuckle again and she's surprised to find that silence with an almost complete stranger doesn't feel strained at all.

"No, not at all. We're all in this together but...I wouldn't have it any other way. We scheduled our CPR class for end of May, by the way."

"You didn't have to do that."

She shakes her head, frowning, "No, I wanted to. Em is acting crazy but she's totally right. We should know that stuff. I might even cave and ask her to teach me changing and swaddling and stuff too. When you do finally manage to peel yourself away from this angel, I want you to feel like you're leaving him or her in good hands."

It's the hormones. She knows it, but that doesn't stop her from crying.

Ruby rolls her eyes but looks around for tissue anyway. She returns to the couch with a box of kleenex from the desk and doesn't hesitate to reach back out her hand for the dirty tissue to throw it away.
"She's lucky to have you, Ruby."

Ruby's lips turn up slightly and, if she didn't know any better, she'd think Ruby was on the verge of a tear or two herself.

"I was thinking the same thing about you, Regina."

Their moment is interrupted again by the doorbell and it makes her brow crinkle.

She's not expecting anyone else but when Aurura and Ashley walk in with snacks, her favorites no less, she moves aside to let them in anyway.

"What are you guys doing here?"

"A little birdy told us you guys were painting the baby's room today, so we figured, why not have a painting party!"

"And by that," Ashley pipes up while placing bags on the counter, "we mean, we'll party while they paint!"

Ruby chuckles from the doorway, "Well, Belle was sketching last I checked in but she might be about done. Let me check."

She smiles gratefully towards Ruby's back before turning back to the two ladies that have quickly become a staple in her life.

"You girls did not have to do all this."

"We wanted to! We figured you'd get bored fast from literally watching paint dry."

She scoffs, "As if Emma would let me anywhere near those fumes."

"Oh, is paint a no-no for pregnancy?"

"No, not really. Dr. Wilkins says I should be fine and even recommended a few brands she trusted and used herself during her own pregnancy, but Emma wasn't having it at all. I've been banished from going upstairs until Monday when she's sure it'll be dry, so I'm actually staying with her for the rest of the weekend."

Their eyebrows shoot up at that, but she's then saved by the bell.

"Oh, uh, I should grab the door. Sorry girls."

She smirks knowing she's not sorry and they respond in-kind, as if to say this isn't over.

The final guests to join them are Kat and Jeff, and he walks in with a toolkit around his waist and a drill box.

She wonders, not for the first time, if she should be concerned at all about what's happening in Mango's room.

But he nods confidently when she tells him second door on the left and so she shrugs and joins the girls in the kitchen, happy to let the others do the hard work.

"So...," Kat begins, "What's this I hear about you shacking up with Emma for the weekend?"
"Now, Regina had mentioned that another moment of hurt was when you denied loving her. Do you remember that, Emma?"

She sighs. "It's impossible to forget."

"Hmm. And is that how you perceived the interaction? Do you agree that you denied loving her?"

"Yeah, I do. I-I said some awful things, that included."

"And is it true?"

"No. It's not."

"So, you do love her?"

She opens her mouth. She wants to say those words, but…

She nods instead.

She feels more than sees Regina deflate next to her and it makes her hate herself.

"You know, Emma, I know we experienced this same difficulty when it came to your mother. Perhaps it might be helpful to explain how you feel about expressing love."

"Sure yeah, should...do you want me to turn towards..?"

"Whatever feels most comfortable for you."

She nods and stays put, taking three deep breaths and appreciating all the while that Regina stays silent.

"Just after everything that was drilled into me when I was young, bouncing around from home to home, I just don't always think I deserve love so I sort of hate it when people say it to me. Well, I don't hate it, it just takes me a lot of getting used to it. And I hate," another deep breath, "I hate saying it to other people because it feels like a leaving word."

She looks up at him, afraid to look over at Regina.

His smile is soft. "And what do you mean when you say it 'feels like a leaving word'?"

Two more deep breaths. "I used to throw it out when I was younger. If you fed me, clothed me, seemed to care at all about me I used to say it all the time. Then it felt like right after that, they would leave me. They would send me away. And...I...we've talked about it in sessions, and I know that it wasn't me saying it that made them leave, it was all the other things, first it was the bills, then it was the fighting with other kids and when I got older, skipping school and talking back. But I sometimes still feel like they're connected. I don't...I don't want to say it just to have you leave me."

She makes eye contact again with him so he knows she's finished but otherwise says nothing.

But then Dr. Hopper says nothing.

And Regina says nothing.
And it's quickly making her feel stupid.

She crosses her arms, a defense mechanism Dr. Hopper calls it and huffs.

"Look, I get that it's stupid and I know it won't make sense to you but-" 

"It's not stupid and it does make sense, Em."

Regina turns towards her and places a hand on her knee and it makes her arms fall back effortlessly to her sides.

"You know, my father used to say to me all the time that love is a doing word. You have to show it, it's not enough to just say it. So, I get it. I-I won't lie, it's...." Regina rolls her eyes, but smiles softly, "When you struggle to say you love me, it makes me question whether or not you do."

Her heart stops and she thinks it must be written all over her face because Regina leans in more.

"But...but then you bring me groceries or tell me a random baby fact you learned while researching, or talk to Mango while we're driving somewhere and pretend to have a full conversation with her and then I feel it. I feel you loving me the best way you know how. Okay? So, don't feel bad."

She nods, refusing to cry right now.

Thankfully, Dr. Hopper jumps in. "Thank you for saying Regina. I know it may be difficult to speak up and tell your partner that the way they love you essentially isn't cutting it, but that's the sort of honest dialogue you need to have if you'd like to have a happy future together. Withholding emotions may help you to keep the peace in the moment, but it'll end with an explosion of emotions, or I think the common phrase is word vomit."

He chuckles to himself the way parents do when they feel like they're relating to their teenage kids, but when they both remain silent, he takes his own deep breath.

"Okay, well, anyway that's actually a great segue into your homework over the next few weeks. One issue you two seem to have is showing love in a way that makes sense to your partner. You show it in the way that you would like to receive it, but that may not be what Emma wants or what Regina needs."

He alternates between them and his eye contact is piercing. "I'd like you both to take what's called The 5 Love Languages quiz. I think you'll find it helpful and, after you determine your love languages, I want you to practice giving love in a way the other can understand. It'll make more sense once you take the quiz and read each language's description, but if you have any questions along the way, you have my number."

"Okay, but seriously, how am I supposed to know what clothes to get if we don't know if it's a boy or girl?"

"Well, that's why there are neutral colors!"

"Yes, but that means all the cute shirts with the sayings are off limits!"

Aurora downs the rest of her diet coke before chiming in, "Yeah, I'm sorry, why did you decide to wait again? You were so excited to find out!"

"I was but then...Dr. Wilkins offered to write it down for us and put it in an envelope. She said we
could open it in our own time so that we could share the moment with just each other or whomever else we wanted to know, but then, we left the office and I could just tell Emma was terrified. I offered to let her open it and her hands were so shaky that I told her we could wait. Honestly, I'm not sure what we're waiting for, but I'm fine with waiting if it makes her feel better. Plus, it builds up so much expectation knowing the gender. I want a happy, healthy baby. That's the priority here."

"Well how sweet, but how damn inconvenient!"

"I know, I know, I'm sorry! Though…," she leans in and, eager for what seems like gossip, everyone around her leans in too, "I have a really good feeling it's a girl. I can just...feel it."

They all gush and it makes her put her hands on her stomach again, which is finally starting to have a true, prominent baby bump.

"And have you guys thought of any names?"

"Not really, Emma threw a few out, but they just don't work with our last names and I couldn't really-.,"

"Wait wait," Ashley jumps in, chocolate chip cookie half chewed in her mouth, "'last namessss?! You're combining?"

"Well of course, the baby is half Emma's, so it seems fair. If we," she brings her voice down again, "If we were married, I'd probably just take hers or something, but since that's not happening, I think the best approach is hyphenating."

Even though there's no reason for it, talk of marriage definitely has her blushing.

Kat nods next to her. "So no gender, no names. Have you guys at least decided on custody? I see we're only painting one room."

She pulls another cookie from the plastic container. She never liked hard cookies, preferring soft, fresh-baked goods any day, but Mango has taste buds of her own and now she inhales a pack of processed Chips Ahoy like it's nothing.

"Don't say 'custody', that sounds so…," she rolls her eyes looking for the word, "We're not a bitter divorced couple trying to use the kids as pawns in a custody battle. We're just co-parenting. And, either way, before we left for Disney World, she said she wanted the baby to stay with me full time."

Kat's eyes widen. "Well then when is she going to take care of her? Whenever she feels like dropping by?"

She opens her mouth to speak, but surprisingly Belle beats her to it, "I think that's a good decision, but I'm sure it was a hard one for Emma to make. She talks about the baby non-stop. So I don't think she's dodging responsibilities. I think she's just trying to be realistic, right Regina?"

The eye contact they make lets her know that before broaching the subject with her, Emma had already talked this over with Belle and, maybe even Ruby.

It makes her heart swell knowing that Emma agonized over the decision so much that she thought it over carefully with her closest friends.

"Yeah, right. I-I think she's just trying to think about what the baby might need. She's worried she might need me more and doesn't want to take that away from either of us. Honestly, I-," but before she can finish that thought, she's caught off by a loud commotion coming down the stairs.
"Ladies," Jeff claps his hands loudly, bounding into the room with a paint covered Ruby and Emma right behind him. "Your baby's room is officially painted."

The whole room cheers and Emma comes to sit down next to her, grabbing a cookie as she falls.

"I'm starving, Gina. You wanna kick everyone out and order something?"

"What? Are you kidding me? I was promised pizza. I'm not leaving until I get it."

"I meant in the future!"

"The future is now. Start taking orders, Em."

Emma sighs and pulls out her phone, preparing to order, as Jeff encourages everyone (but her) to come up and see their finished work.

After sitting in silence for a few minutes, just watching Emma's slender fingers glide across the screen, Emma speaks up.

"Alright, should I add a caesar on for you? Or do you want a wrap?"

"Actually uh…," she leans in closely, "Would you get me a deep dish? Do they have that?"

"Deep dish salad? I think that's just called a large."

"No no, I want pizza too. Deep dish if they have it, with sausage, olives and uh, pineapple."

Emma's fingers freeze and she turns towards her, eyebrow cocked with a smirk on her lips.

"You're serious?"

She rolls her eyes, "Don't look at me. Your child has a strange palette. Just order it."

Emma chuckles but clearly knows what's good for her because she says nothing else about it.

Hours later, once the pizzas are devoured and each guest has assured her she's going to love the room, they're finally walking into Emma's high rise as the sun sets.

She greets the doormen as always, but stops by the desk in front of the elevators.

"Hey Jim, can I grab an access form? I'll fill it out and bring it back down for you tomorrow."

"Sure thing, Ms. Swan." He hands over two stapled sheets of paper and Emma thanks him, but gestures towards her.

"Will you grab that, Gina?"

With Emma's hands full with two duffle bags filled with things she thought she'd need over the weekend, she reaches to grab the papers.

"Have a wonderful night, Ms. Swan."

"Same to you guys."

She waits for the elevator doors to shut to look down at what she's holding.
"You're giving me access to come and go as I please? That could be dangerous."

She leans against the wall, staring down Emma as Emma stares at anything but her.

"Yeah, well, if you need to pick up Mango or drop off or just wanna come by or anything, I want you to be able to do that. I don't want you waiting around for me or anything."

It's obvious that Emma is a bit embarrassed, so she nods and neither of them say more until they're inside of her home.

Once Regina's bags are placed in the bedroom, presumptuous but not unwelcome, Emma returns with a smile.

"So, what do you want to do tonight? Movie maybe?"

"Uh, sure. That could be nice. Do you...do you maybe have some popcorn?"

"Popcorn?" Emma scrunches her nose, "You just ate an entire-," but the narrowing of her eyes stops Emma mid-sentence.

"Uh, you know what, let me check."

She slips out to put on something more comfortable, leaving Emma to the popcorn hunt.

As she undresses, she looks around at Emma's room. It's the same as she remembers it. Except now, there's an art piece on the wall over the bed that they had picked out at IKEA on their first(ish) date.

Just seeing it puts her right back in Dr. Hopper's office.

"Now, before we call it a day, there's just one more thing I'd like to discuss. I know that you both wrote down some moments of hurt, but I had also asked you to choose one moment that made you feel most hopeful. Would either of you like to share that first?"

"Um, I can go first this time."

"Perfect, whenever you're ready Regina."

She takes a deep breath. "Well, we got into a fight one day. I jumped to conclusions about some things and after talking through it and making up, Emma took me on a date. She actually called it mystery date night and blindfolded me all the way there, which in retrospect was overkill, but when we got to our destination, I couldn't believe it. It wasn't anything fancy or expensive, it was just really thoughtful and just plain fun. I just remember holding her hand and walking through the aisles and feeling like I could do it forever. We were making jokes and talking about the future and it all just felt so natural."

She smiles over at Emma, who's beaming back at her, before nodding at Dr. Hopper to indicate she's done.

"Wonderful. And how about you Emma?"

"Oh, um, it was actually just before we broke up this last time. We...you wanted me to take care of your car while you ran errands and I was missing you like crazy the whole time we were apart. And then when you got to the house, we had a water fight with August and...kinda like you said, it just felt so natural. We went in soaked and we started kissing while drying off and August thought it was the grossest thing so we attacked him with tickles and kisses and I just remember looking up at you and
feeling so-so much. And as I watched you two make sandwiches for lunch and then you showed him how to roll cookie dough for cookies, I just remember thinking that I could do this. That I wanted to do this with you forever. I wanted water gun fights and make out sessions that gross out our kids and the smell of fresh baked cookies."

Emma smiles shyly over at her and, through her tear-filled eyes, she smiles back.

"Now, Emma, I want to ask an honest question and I'd like an honest answer. Knowing everything you know now, would you go through all of the painful, hurtful moments with Regina again if it led you to that water fight? Would you still think it was all worth it if for every one of those there were 4 or 5 rocky moments?"

Emma opens her mouth to speak then closes it again.

"I ask because that's what love is Emma," he continues gently. "It's not all bad, but it's also not all good. It shouldn't feel like a constant war that you're losing, but it will certainly feel like a battle at times. And it's important to ask yourself, is it worth it? Are the one or two good days worth everything I'm about to go through? So...is it worth it? If you had to compare your deepest hurt with your most hopeful memory, which one would win?"

Emma swallows. She sees it and the tension in the room is palpable as it feels like Dr. Hopper is all but pushing her to freak out.

"I-She...," she sighs and turns a little to look at Regina, "Look, you and this baby are worth everything. Everything we've been through and anything we will go through, I know you're going to be worth it. I'm in this, for better or worse. And I...I honestly can't promise a ring or anything like that but I can promise that even when everyone else around us has given up, we'll still be standing strong. We'll still be us."

She inhales sharply at that.

She remembers those words. She remembers that late night in Emma's bed following their balcony heart to heart. She remembers the quiet, inadvertent promises made on both sides.

She reaches over and wraps her fingers around Emma's forearm.

"We'll still be us."

"Hey, you alright?"

She jumps, not expecting Emma to be right behind her, shaking her from her memory.

"Oh, gosh, yes, I'm fine dear. Just changing."

"Oh, okay well popcorn is ready. I called, but I-,"

She doesn't know what comes over her but she surges forward and forces their lips together.

Emma, for her part, keeps her hands at her sides, but it's the last thing she wants.

She reaches up to place her arms around her neck and tangles fingers in her hair as she goes which that seems to spur Emma on.

She grips her hips and deepens their kiss and she lets it continue for just another minute, enjoying the
feel off soft lips on her own, before she pulls away slowly.

"I don't...I don't want to give you the wrong impression. I'm not trying to rush into anything, but also, I think...maybe it's helpful to kiss you when I feel like kissing you?"

"There are no rules against it," Emma whispers and her breath hits her softly.

"Thank God."

Emma chuckles and places their foreheads together. "Thank God."

They stand their in silence for a moment, before she shifts slightly to lay her head in the crook of Emma's neck, squeezing her arms tighter around her neck as Emma takes a deep breath.

Emma bends down a little to accommodate the intimate hug and strong arms wrap around her waist, while she inhales.

"Thank you, Em. Thank you."

"You don't have to thank me, babe."

"Not just for today. For the room. But for...for everything. You've been so good to me and Mango. I...is it okay to say?"

Emma tenses for a moment and it makes her pull away just slightly, so she can look into her eyes.

"I won't say it anymore if you don't want me to."

Emma stares down at her and it's one of the rare times that she really can't read her.

"You can say it," her voice is barely a whisper and Regina gives her nearly a full minute to take it back.

And when she doesn't…

She cups Emma's face, and kisses her softly once more.

"I love you, Emma."

A single tear rolls down Emma's cheek but neither of them make a move to stop it.

But Emma does wrap her up one more time to pull her into strong hug, where she lifts her off the ground and spins her around once and she lets out an honest to goodness giggle. And, in this moment, she's so glad that despite everything, they're still them.

"Em? Emma. Sweetheart, wake up."

She feels a push against her bicep, but groans and moves away.

"Baby," the kisses on her neck, however, have her very much alert in a matter of seconds.

"What is it, Gina? You okay?"

The lips continue to trail from one side of her neck to the other and she realizes that Regina is straddling her. Her dick twitches at the thought.
So much for not rushing things.

Her hands find Regina's hips and she turns her head to find her lips.

The kiss is slow and so damn sexy, but all too soon, Regina pulls back.

"Baaabbbby."

"What do you want babe? Just tell me and it's yours."

Regina reaches forward and nibbles on her lip, pulling it just so before licking it and it takes everything not to cum in her boxers.

"Anything?"

"Anything," she answers back effortlessly, propelling herself forward to kiss Regina once more.

Regina's hands find her hair and her lips find her ear.

She takes it in between her teeth and the desire to flip her over is a strong one, but she wants to hear Regina say she wants this first.

She needs permission to take them to the next step.

"I want…", Regina groans out.

Her hands travel up Regina's back, nails scratching lightly.

"Say it."

"Pickles."

Her eyes fly open and she pulls back slowly.

"Is that your new nickname for my penis because honestly I'm not in love with it?"

Regina laughs with her whole body. Inadvertently rubbing her ass on her dick, and it reminds her of just how turned on she was before this sudden turn of events.

"No, Em, I'm in the mood for pickles. I tried to find some but didn't see any."

"I-I don't like pickles."

"Neither do I, but Mango loves them apparently."

She sighs. Regina doesn't say more, but she's getting good at reading between the lines.

"Okay, well, I can go grab some for you. If you really want them now? Like, right now? As in…," she grabs her phone, "4:42 in the morning now?"

Please say 'nevermind'. Please say -

"Well, only if you don't mind baby. I know it's late. Or early, rather."

The hands are back in her hair and Regina's lip is in between her own teeth, looking somehow both adorable and sexy all at once and she's not sure how she could ever say no to her.
"Yeah, no I don't mind. It's fine. I'll go."

She climbs out of bed and slips on track shorts and a hoodie. She grabs her wallet and phone before leaning back down, kissing Regina on the cheek.

"Sit tight, I'll be back in a flash. With pickles."

"The whole ones, not the cut ones! Get a big container too, please!"

She throws a thumbs up in the air on her way out of the bedroom.

Her continuous knocking is finally interrupted by the door wildly swinging open.

"Emma, what the hell?! Do you know what time it is?"

"Believe me, Rubes. I fucking know. I've literally had less than one hour of sleep, but Regina just woke me asking for pickles. Whole pickles! Please tell me you have something, literally even just like one pickle to hold her over until the sun fucking comes up. Please."

Ruby lays her head against the open door, laughing quietly to herself. "I'm so sorry, Em. I really wish I did but we both hate pickles."

"Everyone hates pickles!"

"Except for your baby mama apparently."

She laughs humorlessly, "Yeah, except for her. Okay, well, thanks anyway I guess. I'm off to find a 24 hour store that sells large containers of pickles."

"Good luck, kid."

She rolls her eyes and pushes off of the door frame to get back on the elevator.

The sun is starting to rise as she makes her way back into her apartment.

But she has the pickles and she's never felt like such a champion.

"Okay, I know it took forever but-you've got to be fucking kidding,"

Regina is asleep. Diagonal on her bed, supported and surrounded by pillows.

The soft snoring would be cute, if not for the fact that she's dead tired because Regina had insisted she needed pickles.

"No, you're gonna eat these pickles woman." She comes closer and pulls the container out of the bag, exerting more energy than she has to spare just to get it open.

"Hey Gina. I'm back babe." She sits on the edge of the bed, gently rubbing her leg but then remembers something.

"You know what, you hate having dirty hands so let me grab a plate."

She sets the container down on the side table and races to get a plate. She grabs a water for good measure, but when she gets back, Regina is gone. She's just about to call out for her when the sound
of retching emerges from her ensuite bathroom.

"Gina?" She tosses the plate to the bed and makes her way towards her, "You okay?!"

Regina gags again, but nothing comes up and she takes the opportunity to turn towards her. "Do I look okay?!" She spits viciously.

Her eyes widen, unsure where this anger has come from. She watches as Regina's body lurches again, but nothing comes up.

"Well, uh, I don't think you have anything on your stomach. Let me grab you a pickle, that should-,

Regina's eyes are filled with tears and fire when she looks back over, "Absolutely not. Get those fucking pickles out of here."

"What? No, it's the ones you wanted, the large ones. Here let me just-,

She honestly never sees it coming. Until the pickle hits her square in the face, juice landing in her nose.

"That smell is what's making me sick Emma! Get them out of here! Get out!"

She sits in shock, still trying to absorb the fact that she's been hit with a rather hard pickle but as Regina leans forward again to vomit, she finally finds it in herself to get up, taking the plate and the still rolling pickle with her out of the room. She grabs the entire container and replaces the top before taking it all to the kitchen trash.

She rolls her eyes, but sighs and grabs paper towels anyway.

Some for Regina and one more for the pickle juice that's now starting to dry. On her face. Because she's been hit with a pickle.

The next time she wakes up, Regina is back on top of her, sipping a cup of coffee.

She sighs and turns her head to the side, hands coming up to clear the sleep from her eyes.

"That better be decaf."

"It is. I had to borrow it from Belle. You don't have any."

"You left?"

"I did."

"So…," she lets it live in the air, unsure if she's supposed to bring up last night's fiasco.

"How's your face?"
She lets out an airy laugh at Regina's clear hesitance, probably trying to gauge her anger.

"Probably still smells like pickle."

Regina leans down carefully and places a barely there kiss to her lips. "No, trust me, I would know. You're good."

She nods and yawns.

"What time is it?"

"11. You slept in late."

"I had just gotten to bed when you woke me up. Then with all the-," she waves her hands around, "I guess I was just totally worn out."

"I'm sure."

She arches an eyebrow, trying to silently ask why she's being so weird. "Uh, okay. Well, are you hungry? Do you wanna go get brunch?"

Regina narrows her eyes and for a moment, she thinks she's in trouble. "So we're not even going to talk about it?"

"About what? Last night?"

Regina faintly nods.

"I mean...it's an hour wasted and $9 down the drain, but I think we'll survive."

"That's not what I mean."

Her eyebrow lifts and she smirks. "Then what do you mean?"

Regina rolls her eyes, "I'm not going to say it out loud."

"Why not? It's not a big deal. In the moment, it sucked but looking back on it, it was actually kinda funny."

Regina's eyes widen. "No, it wasn't Emma. I threw something at you."

"Yeah, but I was asking for it. I kept trying to force you to eat the pickles, so don't worry about it."

Regina leans forward to set her nearly empty coffee cup down before attempting to crawl off the bed, but she grabs her waist to hold her in place.

"Hey hey, what's going on? Why does this feel so serious all of a sudden?"

"I hit you Emma," and the way she says it hurts more than the pickle she took to the face hours ago. "I got upset and I hit you."

"What? You didn't hit me, Gina."

"Semantics!"

She crinkles her brows, "I-I don't know what that means."
"It means that I may not have literally hit you, but I threw something that hit you and it still could've hurt you! I sit here and tell you I love you and tell you that you can trust that and then I lost my temper and I hit you."

"Regina, listen, it's okay. It's okay. I promise. Really." She tries to keep her smile and her eyes light and happy, not wanting to make this more than what it is.

"You're carrying a baby. You're feeling all over the place, craving pickles one minute, grossed out by them the next. I can't relate, but I do get it and I do know that it's not the same. You're not them. You weren't trying to hurt me. You didn't mean to and I know that because I-I know how you feel about me and I know you would never intentionally hurt me. So, if it makes you feel better to hear that I forgive you, then I do, but you have nothing to apologize for, baby. Okay?"

Fingers trace over her face, as if to make sure she's really okay, before she finally hears the confirmation.

"Okay."

It's quiet and shaky but she'll take it.

"Although...payback is a bitch." Before Regina even knows what hits her, she's changed their positions and her quick fingers make their way across the expanse of her plump stomach, tickling her and sending her into a fit of laughter.

"Em, stop! I'm going to pee my pants!"

"Say it. I'll stop when you say it."

"Uncle, uncle!"

"Oh no no, you know what I want to hear!" She smirks down at her, adding more pressure to her tickling.

"Come on Emma, stop!"

"Say it Regina! You know what I want to hear!"

"Oh my god! Oh my god! Okay, okay! I hit you with a pickle! I hit you with a pickle!"

She lets up immediately and they lock eyes for a split second before bursting into more laughter.

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"Okay, I'm going to go find a spot, but you go in and grab us a table. Doesn't look too packed, but I don't want you walking."

She rolls her eyes, feeling perfectly fine to walk, but gets out anyway.

"Okay, see you in a minute."

She watches Emma wait, out of her peripheral, until she sees her enter the restaurant and only then does she pull away from the curb.

"Table for two?"

"Yes please. A booth if possible."
"Of course, right this way. Have you dined with us before?"

"Once or twice."

"Perfect, then here's a menu to get you started and your server will be right with you."

"Thanks so much."

She gets situated and opens the menu, lost in all of her options, when she feels a presence join her.

"Oh, that was quick. You found-,

But the words die on her lips. And her heart stops beating for a moment.

Her eyes dart around the small restaurant, looking for Emma to save her, but when she comes up empty, her gaze inevitably makes its way back to him.

"Daniel."

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I couldn't let Pride Month pass without an update! Very excited for the next chapter to come. It's going to be a fun one. Thanks for reading and we look forward to your thoughts on this chapter!

Until next time! :)
"God, I can't believe how long it's been."

"You mean since you ended our relationship in the middle of dinner?"

The urge to cringe is absolutely overwhelming. Of all the times she imagined running into him, the last thing she ever wanted to leave her mouth, especially the first thing, was something that makes it sound like she's still hung up on that moment.

And his soft smirk, that he at least has the decency to fix back into a sad smile, tells her that's exactly what he got from that and she's desperate to change the topic.

"What brings you here?"

His brow crinkles. "This is my favorite place for Sunday brunch, you know that."

She looks around and, for the first time, she remembers that she did used to eat here with him. He does love this place.

And that feeling, the feeling of walking into a place they've been to several times and thinking nothing of him restores her confidence in this whole situation.

She had dreaded running into him for the first few weeks after they ended, but after a few weeks sleeping with Emma, which have ultimately turned into creating a family with her, she's forgotten about the common places in the neighborhood that they used to frequent. And she finds it in her to tell him that.

"Oh, yeah. I guess I forgot."

His smile falters and she grows stronger in that moment.

She even grows so bold as to be the first to ask, "So how have you been?"

He relaxes a little and tilts his head back and forth. "Oh you know, busy but good. You?"

"Really good, thanks."

"That's great," he nods and runs his hands over the menu in front of him and that makes her look up, wondering what's taking Emma so long.

He must get tired not being the center of attention because he loudly clears his throat, "Regina, did you hear me?"

She turns her attention back to him, already over this conversation. "What?"

"I said...I said it's good to see you. I didn't realize how much I missed you until now."

She nods slowly at that, not really sure what she's supposed to say.

"I think...I think the time for missing me was a year and a half ago."
She picks up the menu and starts looking over her options, desperately hungry now and growing more annoyed with him by the minute.

"Yeah, I know. I...," his hair is a little longer and he runs his fingers through it in a way that would've melted her heart two years ago.

"You know, I...I don't know if you remember, but I was headed to Beijing when we broke up. For two and a half weeks and it...it just seemed like such an easy decision at that table until I came back and...you were gone. And everytime I tried to pick up the phone, I kept telling myself that it was for the best but damn...it's hard to remember why I thought that now, sitting right in front of you. Have I mentioned you look good?"

"Mm. No need for that. I've already told her."

It's her voice first that startles him and then when he looks up at her, it's surely her height as she towers over him, sunglasses removed so that they can both see how unimpressed she looks.

She's more than grateful today that Emma decided that her usual frat boy look was insufficient. She stands in front of them in tight black jeans, ripped at the knees, with a long plain white shirt shirt and a red bomber jacket thrown on casually to give her a fashionable look that manages to seem, simultaneously, effortless. In short, she looks hot as hell.

"Oh gosh, I'm sorry. Regina, I didn't realize you were waiting on someone."

Equally unimpressed, she looks back down at her menu, opting to let Emma handle him.

"Well, she was and you're in my seat."

Daniel chuckles nervously, "Well maybe we can catch up later today? I'd love to talk more."

Emma clearly tires of standing and looks over at her, "Sorry, who is he?"

It takes everything in her to contain her own smirk because she knows what her next words are going to do. She doesn't think there's anything Emma hates more than this guy, the one she's only heard stories of.

"Emma, this is Daniel."

If she were an animal, she has no doubt Emma would've snarled.

"Oh yes, sorry. Daniel Woods, Regina and I used to date and I saw her sitting. Thought I'd come say hi."

He stands up and holds out his hand and Emma doesn't break eye contact for even a moment, but reaches out to shake it.

She can tell by the slight wince on his face that Emma has him in a death grip.

"Emma Swan. The girlfriend."

His eyebrows shoot up and honestly, hers do too. It's rare that Emma introduces her as her girlfriend, a precious title primarily reserved for close friends and family.

*Interesting that she chose to resurrect it now.*

Especially considering the past few months and how rocky they've been. But she makes no move to
correct her and, though Daniel does stumble over his own tongue, he manages to at least get out, "The-the girlfriend? Who's girlfriend?"

"Hers."

He looks to her for confirmation and she just smiles widely. More unsure of what to say than anything else.

"Well, gosh, I guess we have more to catch up on than I thought."

Emma says nothing in response to that, and maybe it's the clench of her jaw. Or maybe it's the grimace on his face that tells her she's only squeezing harder, the longer the handshake lasts, that makes her say it, even though she knows she'll regret it.

"Daniel, Emma and I have plans after this, so I'll have to pass, but...why don't you join us for lunch now and we can play catch up?"

They both shoot her a look that she ignores in lieu of perusing the menu once more.

"Uh, well, sure if you don't mind Emma?"

Emma finally lets his hand go and makes her way to her side of the booth.

"Yeah, well I clearly don't run things around here so please, join us."

Her tone is wildly sarcastic and she puts a hand on her thigh once she slides in to keep her from getting too grumpy.

"So, um, are you still with that art gallery? On third?"

"Oh, no actually. I decided to take a step back from the curating. Like I said it just...it was a lot of traveling and without someone to come home to, it just felt more meaningless than I remember. I actually...I actually bought my own gallery uptown. So...," he smiles shyly and shrugs sort of boyishly and she can remember how she fell for him, if she squints and turns her head to the side. And ignore the fact that he's a complete asshole.

When they first met, he wasn't all bad. He was sweet and nervous and thoughtful and she thought she'd spend the rest of her life with him.

But the fingers that lace with hers under the table, absentmindedly as Emma shares her menu, remind her that things change. Sometimes for the better.

"That's great, Daniel. That's what you always wanted to do."

He beams at her, clearly pleased that she remembered that goal of his.

"And how's teaching? You're still teaching right?"

"I am! The kids are great, I'm glad to almost be done though. Just another couple of months."

"Oh yeah? I heard all school were being forced to transition to 9-month now. And you guys just got done with spring break right? Katie was out of school a couple weeks ago."

She nods, and smiles fondly at the mention of his niece.
"How is she? She's probably so big now."

"Oh God, she's gotten taller and chattier. She came down to the studio for a few days during break and had a million questions but she's...she's perfect."

He shrugs again with another easy smile on his lips.

"I'll bet she loved that. Emma's little brother is the exact same way, growing up so fast right before our eyes. We actually went to Disney World with her family for spring break."

He doesn't hide his shocked face very well. "Oh, really? You?"

"Yes, her," Emma chimes in, unamused, without looking up.

"Yeah, just a little family vacation for a couple days."

He nods, but it's clear he's a little confused. "Uh, how long have you guys been together, if you don't mi."

"About a year and 3 months," Emma throws out casually and she wants to roll her eyes. That's Emma's biggest stretch so far and the squeeze of her fingers tells her Emma knows it.

He nods and looks down at the menu, pretending to casually read while muttering, "Wow...you uh, moved on a little quick huh?"

He runs his fingers through his hair, looking a bit frustrated and she wonders for a minute if he's not just feeding her lies. If he really has missed her.

"Well, it wasn't intentional. It...honestly felt more like fate. I actually met Em the same night we broke up."

His eyes widen and she squeezes Emma's hand now to let her know that the self satisfied smirk on her face is entirely inappropriate.

To distract from that rather heavy reveal, that he let her go and she immediately jumped into the arms of the love of her life, she wraps her hand around Emma's bicep, and lays her head on her arm to gaze at the menu with her, "What are you thinking of getting?"

"French toast," the change in Emma's tone is noticeable. For Daniel, it's been hard, short sentences and displeased glares, but Emma softens in every way at her touch.

"You?"

"Fruit maybe? Just trying to think of things that don't have too much of an aroma."

"So no pickles then?"

She laughs out loud and kisses her shoulder before shaking her head, "Absolutely not."

A waitress comes over shortly after and Emma orders her french toast and the fruit and plain toast she asked for. Daniel orders a kale omelet and Emma turns up her nose.

She can't tell if it's out of disgust for the kale or Daniel's pretentiousness in ordering it.

Once the menus are removed and it's just the three of them with no visible distractions, Daniel clears his throat.
"So, uh, Emma what is it that you do?"

"I'm a model," she asserts, finally looking him in the eyes, having nowhere else to look.

His eyebrows shoot up and she laughs internally at the idea that Emma's one modeling gig in her early 20's makes her a 'model', but she doesn't dare correct her. Surely Emma isn't going to flaunt to her ex how unemployed she really is.

"Wow, really?"

"Really."

"I've never met a model before. Should I get your autograph?"

He chuckles at his own awful joke and she wants to cover her face with her hands. It's astounding, the difference between her current and former lover. Emma doesn't give an inch and he swallows, clearly growing uncomfortable at her consistently unkind demeanor.

"She does a lot of underwear stuff so I don't think I'd feel comfortable with you taking home a signed picture of my girlfriend nearly nude."

She laughs and Emma chuckles too, probably just to show that she can laugh, she just doesn't for him.

"That's fair. So uh how's Kat? And Jeff?"

"They're both great."

He nods and licks his lips, clearly expecting more from her.

All of a sudden, he chuckles, "Do you-do you remember the first time we came here? We thought they had bottomless mimosas, but when we got here, we realized they only sold them by the glass."

She throws her head back, reliving that moment. "My goodness, yes! And so then we told them to just bring us a bottle of champagne and a carafe of orange juice and we'd make them ourselves."

He leans forward, "But you know us. One bottle of champagne turned into 4 and we were blasted by the time we finished our food. We couldn't even figure out how to get back to the subway. We had the hostess," he's laughing so hard now that he can barely finish his sentence.

"We had to have her order us a cab! Oh my gosh, I completely forgot about that."

She looks over at Emma smiling politely and she knows there's a world of insecurity brewing beneath the surface so she squeezes her arm and leans against her, "One day, we'll get mimosa drunk together, I've been told I'm unruly."

Daniel rolls his eyes, "Oh, yeah, 'unruly' is only accurate if you call leaving a 120% tip unruly. I, not kidding, had to pry the receipt from the bartenders hand during our second date."

Her eyes widen remembering that moment and she scoffs. "Would you really call it prying? If I remember, you called her 'Mademoiselle' about 20 times thinking you were being 'charming' until eventually she got annoyed and gave it back to us to fix."

"Yes, but remember, that was only after I agreed to leave her half that in cash so she wouldn't have to tax it that she agreed!"
She leans forward in laughter and -

She's growing so close to nauseated by the time their food arrives that she feels like she's the pregnant one.

The stories are never ending and while she loves the sound of Regina's laugh, she's getting tired of being ignored.

The only thing keeping her sane is the hand on her knee. It moves slowly, absentmindedly, up her thigh and back down towards her hand. It plays with her fingers and makes patterns along the inside of her wrist, even as Regina is knee deep is yet another 'hilarious' story.

With the way they're acting, it's hard to believe that this is the guy, the one that kept Regina so haunted.

She pictured running into him one day and kicking his ass.

She pictured seeing him on the street and Regina turning her in the opposite direction, desperate to get away from him. And yet, here they are, sharing a meal with him.

And it's not awkward silences and uncomfortable glances like she thought it would be.

Like it would be if we ran into anyone I've been with in the past, she muses.

It's laughter and endless stories and so many resurrected memories and, if she's being 100% real...it's cutting a little deep.

But, as if sensing her insecurity, the hand on her leg squeezes and she feels a firm kiss to her shoulder again.

And it grounds her.

The whispers against her shoulder asking how she likes her french toast, the open mouth that waits for a bite and the laugh that erupts from Regina as she nips her fingers while she feeds her a bite of fruit...they all sustain her throughout the rest of brunch and finally, as Regina finishes her last bite of toast, she feels like it's a safe time to motion for the check.

"Baby, I'm going to use the restroom before we go."

She stands quickly for her and then turns to offer her hand.

"Thank you, dear. Be right back," Regina rolls her eyes as she takes the offered assistance out of the booth and their hands stay connected until they're too far from each other and their fingers untangle from each other.

Regina turns back quickly to mouth what she suspects is, "be good" and she smirks.

As she slides back into the booth, she finds him staring right at the direction Regina has disappeared in.

She arches an eyebrow but says nothing.

When he finally looks back at her, he has a soft smirk on his face and the urge to Hulk smash his face in is too much. She puts her hands under the table to keep them from visually twitching.
"I can't believe how much I've missed her."

She hopes her eye isn't twitching too now. A little hard to be sure as the rage sets in.

"You know, I was just thinking about her the other day. I was thinking of maybe calling. Apologizing."

*She doesn't need you to do that.*

But she urges her mouth to stay shut. She knows what he's doing. He's baiting her. He wants her to get upset and jealous. And she refuses to give him the satisfaction. Because jealousy and anger implies that she's insecure and, at this point, she's not. At least not when it comes to him.

She has it all. She has the girl (sort of, she's working on that) and they share a child together. She reminds herself for the thousandth time today that there's no need to be jealous because she has it all. Everything he could've had, but didn't want.

"She was a little thinner when we were together though. But hey, what's wrong with a little more to hold onto, you know?"

He actually has the audacity to fucking *wink* at her and she's *sure* her eye twitches this time.

She takes a deep internal breath.

_Ugh, that did nothing._

_Okay, Em. Let's count up to 10 and back._

1. 2. _You're doing great Emma. You're on your best behavior._

3. 4. _You just need to manage your emotions._

5. 6. _Get rid of the feelings that don't belong. There's no need to be jealous. You know she loves you. That's constant and doesn't change just because he's here._

7. 8. _The doc would actually be pretty proud._

9. 1-

"You know, between me and you, I'm surprised you guys are together. Not just because you're a woman which is..." he shrugs to indicate his confusion, "I mean, don't get me wrong. I'm not _that_ guy. That thinks every girl needs a man, but I just mean, she's always been such an upper class queen, you seem like you wouldn't be into that at all."

"You don't know anything about me," she finally lets out.

He smiles wider and she sighs, knowing she caved.

At first, it was a little tough to reconcile the two Daniels, the one she’d heard stories of, the one who had demeaned Regina to her face and behind her back, and the one sitting in front of them.

But she sees it now. She sees the manipulative guy that Regina had described. The guy she vowed to be better than and so she swallows her pride and says nothing else.

"Yeah, but come on. We both know her and she's...anal," he leans forward, "and not in the fun way."
The urge to hit becomes overwhelming and she sits back in her seat to get as far away from him as possible.

"Stop," there's warning in her voice, and if he were smart, he wouldn't say another word.

But that's why he left Regina.

Because he's not smart.

"Come on. I just mean like...is she still a total pillow princess?"

"Listen, Daniel." Her force reverberates off the walls and a few people look their way and it causes her to lean forward because this isn't an appropriate public conversation they're about to have, but it clearly needs to be had.

"Look, first of all, you're way out of line. So stop while you're ahead. Second, I get it. I do. I can't imagine being in your position. I let her go for a few weeks and just about lost my mind so I get it dude, I really do. And if I were you, I'd probably do the exact same thing. Insert myself where I don't belong, bring up a bunch of old memories in the hopes that she'll forget all about the shitty things I did if I just make her laugh hard enough. I get it. You let her go and you've been regretting it ever since. At least once the other girls you're fucking have left and you're by yourself with just your long list of regrets." That makes his face twitch in a way that tells her she's right about him. "I know how you feel. But I also know how she feels. And I can promise you, this isn't working. Nothing you're doing right now is compensating for the shit you put her through."

He scoffs, "I'm not trying to compensate. I'm simply reminding her of what we had. And even she can't deny that despite our ups and down, we were good together."

She rolls her eyes. "Yeah? You think so? Because I've never heard one good thing about you."

He leans forward himself. "Look, I don't mean to be rude, but do you honestly think you're the one? I mean, really? The model? You don't strike me as much of an intellectual. You don't seem like the flowers and romantic gestures type. So, how long do you really think you're going to last?"

"Longer than you did," she replies firmly, but can't help but feel like he's asking the same question she asks herself everyday.

"Well, we shall see, won't we?"

He asks, smug smile stretched across his face, as the waitress brings the check. He makes no move to grab it and so she reaches out and puts her card in.

_What a cheap asshole._

"Here you go," she smiles politely at the waitress and hands the black book back.

They sit in silence for another moment and she starts wondering if she should check on Regina, but as she thinks about sliding out of the booth, he speaks.

"Look I'm not pretending it's a perfect love story, but we talked about a future together and I want to see that through."

They're not at all the same, but she looks at him...and if you get rid of his stupid, smug smile, she sees herself.
She wasn't kidding. She gets it. She gets feeling like Regina is everything and without her there's nothing. She gets why he might want to marry her because, if she believed in it, she would too. She gets why he wants a future with Regina because it's all she can think about these days.

Part of her feels for him because, if not for Regina's love and forgiveness, she would be him.

And it makes her sigh in sympathy. He doesn't deserve her sympathy, or any compassion at all really, but she thinks of all the things Regina has done for her that she hasn't deserved.

She thinks of the big things like the first, second, third and fourth chances.

She thinks of the little things like the bedroom light Regina left on last night as they made their way to bed, knowing that she can't sleep in the dark.

She thinks of the round of 20 questions they played in the car on the way here.

She thinks of the way Regina's hand never left her leg the entire ride.

And she can't blame him for wanting what she has. She's lucky and she knows it.

She leans forward and sighs.

"Look, like I said, if I were you, I'd probably do the same thing. But I also know that if I were you...I would want someone to level with me. So here's the reality. When she comes back, we can say our goodbyes and you can hug her close and tell her how great this was and how you should do it again sometime. She may give you a pretty non-committed shrug, but don't be deterred. Give it a couple days, not to look desperate, then text her to see if her number is still the same, which it is. You may get nervous because she won't respond right away, but she's a slow texter and she's got work during the day so just be patient. And when she finally gets back to you, maybe she'll say yes, maybe not. But if she does say yes, you should really think about where to take her because, despite swearing you're not compensating for anything, you do have a lot of making up to do. So pick a nice, quiet spot. Take her out and talk about old times and, for a while, you'll think you're winning some game because her phone's in her purse and she laughs at your jokes just like she used to, even the ones that are probably a little too far for a night out as 'just friends'. Plus, ultimately, there's no ring on her finger so you'll think there's still a chance. But, unlike 2 years ago, at the end of the night, after you pay the check, she'll get up, hop in a cab and come home...to me."

She whispers the last part, knowing that it'll sting.

And that it does. His lip twitches in anger and he rolls his eyes.

"Whatever."

She laughs a little as the waitress returns and she tips 120% as her own little inside joke and signs her name extravagantly.

"Yeah, exactly. Say whatever you want. Do whatever you want. Her hands aren't tied, Daniel. I'm not keeping her locked in a tower. Flirt if you want to. Ask her out for all I care. The story is always going to end the same. I don't know you very well, but I know her. Not every little detail yet, but I know her and she's as committed as they come. If she wanted to be with you, she would be with you."

Daniel opens his mouth to speak but he's cut off by what she assumes is Regina approaching.

Instead, he quickly mutters, "This isn't over," and she rolls her eyes at how childish he sounds just as
Regina comes back and places a hand on her back.

"Are we ready?"

"Yup, bill is paid and we're all good. Feeling okay?"

Regina nods and laces their fingers together again, and it's like all is right in the world again. They make their way out of the restaurant and, once outside, Regina breathes a deep breath and looks at her.

"It's a beautiful day, I'll walk to the car with you, Em."

And the way she says her name combined with *that* smile tells her that it's non-negotiable. The car could be a mile away and she'd still insist on walking.

"Well, this was nice. It was good running into you, Dan."

The shortened name and genuine smile must give him confidence and he leans down to hug Regina and she'd be more annoyed...if only their hands weren't still latched together forcing their hug to be loose and awkward.

When they pull apart, he runs his hands through his hair in a way that she suspects is supposed to be cute and adds, "Yeah, this was great. I'd love to see you again. I...I wasn't kidding when I said I missed you. It would be just as friends, obviously," he says gesturing towards her, "but I'd love to get lunch. Really talk, you know?"

"Oh uh, I meant it when I said it was good running into you and I'm glad you're doing well, but I don't really need anymore friends."

She can barely control her smirk and his mouth hangs open, probably surprised that his 'anal, pillow princess' had it in her to turn him down.

And she knows she should be better than him, but she thinks she's been doing that most of the meal, and that's what makes her say it. "You sure baby? Might be fun to catch up. I can leave you guys to it and hit the gym or something."

She shrugs easily as she slides on her sunglasses and Regina shoots her another glare.

"No, *really*, I'm fine. Plus we had those plans so..."

They don't have plans. But she knows a 'let's get out of here' face when she sees one and it fills her with unspeakable joy.

"Alright, well, you heard the woman."

She looks right at him as she says it and as he smiles politely back, she knows she's gotten her point across.

She could've taken him up on getting lunch some other time.

She could've taken Emma up on giving them some space.

Regina could've chosen him.

She didn't. And that means everything to her.
“Soooo….”

“So….”

“Just curious, do you like to see me nervous or do you like to see me jealous? Which one of those is the reason why you invited your trash ex to stick around for lunch?”

She sees Regina smile out of the corner of her eye and she’s glad she’s taking it as the (semi) joke it’s meant to be.

“Would you believe me if I said neither?”

“No.”

Regina smirks over at her and it somehow manages to turn her on while making her heart flutter.

“Fine. Maybe a mix of both. But...honestly, while I did partially invite him to stay to see you a little jealous…”

Regina sighs deeply, “You know, it’s funny. I imagined running into him a thousand times when we first broke up, even after you and I started sleeping together, and I used to wonder how I’d feel about it. It’s not like we had a perfect relationship, far from it really, but at the same time, we’d been together for so long that it was hard to picture my future without him. At first when he sat down, I was terrified. I’ll be honest, I felt a little bitter and hurt for a split second, until I remembered that I only found something better because he let me go. I guess I wanted him to stay because I wanted to prove I wasn’t holding onto him anymore. I wanted him to know that the things he said to me left a few bruises, but they didn’t turn into scars. I feel like I needed him to see that I’m not just fine without him. I’m happier. I can laugh with him about the past now because that’s all it is, the past. And all of it was just a stepping stone to get to you.”

Regina squeezes her hand and throws her a smile that makes her feel faint.

“I’m glad you’re happier. I’m glad I make you happier,” she doesn’t mean to practically whisper it out so gently, but that’s how it comes out.

“You really do,” Regina brings their hands up to her lips and kisses each knuckle and as their walk continues, Regina speaks again.

“You know what was the best part about him staying?”

“Mm?”

“The last time I saw him, he got to do the leaving. He got to decide it was over, even though I still had feelings for him...though please don’t ask me why. So it was nice to be the one in control this time. The one who gets to leave when I decide I’m done. That was so unbelievably satisfying.”

She laughs out loud at that. “Now that’s how I know you’re over him. Your petty is starting to show.”

“Well dear, I thought it was obvious I was over him when I left with you.”

She shrugs and pulls out her keys as they approach the car.

“Yeah, no I thought so but I like to hear you say it.”

“I know you do.”
They both stand by the passenger side door, waiting and she lets just a few seconds pass before she finally runs out of patience.

“Soooo, are you gonna say it?”

“Emma.”

“Regina.”

“Emma.”

“Gina,” she says as she finally opens the passenger side door.

Regina laughs with her head completely thrown back, a clear display of just how happy she is in this moment and just before getting into the car, Regina kisses her on the cheek.

“I choose you, Em, always.”

She can’t help it. She grins from ear to ear and Regina rolls her eyes as she reaches to close her own door.

And she hopes, really hopes, that her smile says the same thing right back.

"Okay, seriously baby. I'm about to start it. I'm serious."

"Emma, I seriously heard you and I'm seriously coming."

She throws herself back down on the couch and reaches blindly for the popcorn with one arm while the other covers her eyes.

She's not sleepy, but certainly tired out. Unsurprisingly, with Regina next to her, she fell asleep pretty fast last night and slept for almost 5 hours before waking up like she does every night. She'd worked out and managed to make her rendition of avocado toast and ultimately had managed to convince Regina to call in a sub for the day by promising her favorite thing: quality time.

Now she waits so that they can begin their first movie of what is sure to be many.

And waits and waits

"Alright, alright, I'm ready. Hit play while I grab a water."

She sighs and picks up the remote, not even daring to verbalize the "finally" that she's thinking.

Regina waltzes by in a pair of loose silk shorts and a tank top and she can't help but get distracted.

"Well don't you look sexy."

"Well, that's sweet of you but I feel bloated."

"Hmm, well, you may not have been going for it, but you definitely-,"

But the compliment dies on her lips as there's a knock on her door.

"Ugh. Fucking Ruby. I swear to God, if she comes to borrow one more thing. You went down there for coffee and now she's treating it like a thing we do. Did I tell you she came by this morning to see if we had Sweet n' low? Like, how cliche can you get? Borrowing sugar from you-"
Her thought is once again interrupted, but not by Ruby at all.

"Neal? What...what are you doing here?"

His face grows heated as he narrows his eyes at her. "What am I-Em, you haven't answered any of my texts. I came by to make sure you were alive. Which...," he gives her a once over, "you clearly are."

She sighs. "Yeah no I'm good. I'm fine. But this is literally the worst time, I was actually just-.

"What? Just what? Headed out? Getting in? What is it now, Emma? It's been the worst time for weeks. You haven't answered a single fucking call. You take days to text me back, if you respond at all."

"Yeah, I know but can we...can I call you later? It really isn't a good time."

"You said you'd call me last week. And the week before that. And a month ago, you said we'd grab drinks and no surprise, that didn't happen either..."

She doesn't know what to say. He's right. She's been blowing him off for almost two months. And it wasn't entirely intentional. She probably should, but she doesn't hate Neal. He's her best friend, right next to Ruby. They've been friends since high school and she can't imagine life without him, but now that she and Regina are really trying to make this work, she doesn't know how she can live with both of them.

"Look, if it's about that night," he lowers his voice as if he can barely stand to say it. "I told you I was sorry. I said I was outta line. I said that."

"Dude come on. Cheer up. You're free. You don't have to be home at a certain time. You don't have to worry about dates and all that other stuff she wanted. You should be happy."

"I didn't feel trapped, Neal. And even if it I was, I didn't want to be free."

He frowns at that. "Look, Em, I know she hurt you and everything and I'm sorry. I really am. But if she doesn't want to be with you, what's the point of dwelling on it? There are plenty of girls who would kill to spend one night with you. Just take your pick."

She could take her pick. She could easily take home anyone here. But she sighs.

"Neal, I'm good. I really don't want a replacement girl." She lays her head back but still hears him groan.

"Oh my fucking Jesus. Em, are you really gonna sit her all night being a pouty pussy about her? She left you. Just move on. You never used to be like this. You know the drill, we have fun with them, we fuck them and we move on. Step three shouldn't be that hard, especially considering she left you."

That reminder hits hard and she closes her eyes. And she doesn't know how or when, but she feels it fall off of her cheek, that's the moment when they both realize she's crying.

She leans forward and pinches her fingers to her eyes, willing them to stop watering.
She hears him mutter something that sounds like 'Jesus fucking Christ' to himself and she gives up.

"I'm going home."

He rolls his eyes. "What?! To cry? Over a girl?"

"Oh my fucking God Neal, she's not a girl. She's the girl. She's it! She's the one and I'm sorry that you haven't found her yet Neal. I'm sorry you haven't found a girl who changes everything for you, but when you do, if she ever hurts you, I hope to God someone's a better friend to you than you've been to me."

His beer is halted midway to his mouth and he looks both wounded and surprised all at once.

He lowers his drink and swallows and she can't help but feel bad because she knows that hurt him.

"You've gotta be kidding. I'm the bad friend? Me? The guy who's let you blow me off every weekend? The guy who's listened to you go on and on about some bitch who won't even-,"

"Stop. Just stop. This is exactly what I'm talking about. I'm telling you she's the girl and you still can't even be bothered to call her by name. Despite that shit you pulled at Thanksgiving, you know her name. And just so we're clear, she may have left because of me and I'll own that but we fought because of you. You were being such a...God, you were such a dick to her. And I didn't say anything and I should've. Ruby was right, I should've said something right then."

"Oh, so now you're taking advice from the relationship know-it-all we used to make fun of? Cool."

"Well should I take it from the lonely loser instead?"

His stare is cold as ice, "Go to hell."

She rolls her eyes. "You first," she says as she climbs out of the booth. "And I hope there are enough flames to keep you warm at night because I can promise you your fuck buddies won't."

It's hard to blame him. They both said shit they didn't mean in the heat of the moment.

And he had at least apologized.

But that didn't change the fact that he didn't get it. Couldn't get it.

She doesn't know how she can have a domesticated life with Regina while maintaining her friendship with Neal when all he wants to do is drink and fuck.

And while she doesn't want to lose him or push him away, she knows she's not getting anymore chances with Regina. There's no more room for error. Ruby is right, and always has been, she needs to shit or get off the pot.

Maybe down the road, maybe when he grows up, things will change, but for now, there's no room for him.

And she opens her mouth to try and say that, but nothing comes out. And in that moment of silence, Regina must come from the kitchen because he looks over her shoulder.

And his apologetic eyes grow cold.
"Is this because of her?"

"You need to go."

"No, I..I'm sorry, I can let you two talk."

"No. That's not necessary. We're done talking."

They both say her name at the same time and she feels chastised from both angles and it's annoying because she's trying to do the right thing. She's trying to be an adult about this. She doesn't want to talk. There's nothing else to say.

"You need to go."

"Em, I-come on, you're my best friend."

She swears she hears his voice crack and her heart sinks, but she knows for a fact that she'd rather it sink than shatter.

"Bye Neal."

It's been silent for over an hour. The movie is playing. They're both staring right at the screen, but they're not cuddled up like Emma had promised they'd be when she first convinced her to call in "sick".

But even a foot away from each other on the couch, the tension is palpable.

Emma hasn't said a word since she shut the door on Neal and now she's not sure if she's supposed to say something. If it would be welcomed at a time like this.

Emma had breezed right by her after the door lock clicked and had pressed play and they had just been sitting here ever since.

She desperately wants to pause the movie and ask what that was all about.

Their conversation had felt so stilted, and from what she could hear in the kitchen, this wasn't their first conversation after she and Emma had ended things.

But she refuses to push. She knows it's the wrong move. Neal has always been a particularly sore subject for them and she's hesitant to unpack what all just happened.

So she sits and as the credits start to play, Emma leans forward and grabs the remote, ending the on-demand movie.

"What do you want to watch next?"

Emma sounds a little tired, despite having sat in silence for almost two hours, and she's desperate to make her feel better.

They're still learning each other and so she doesn't know exactly what Emma likes when she's sad or stressed or even angry, but she knows now how she likes to be loved and that's something.

She takes a deep breath, hoping that she's doing this right and leans back against the armrest on the opposite side of the couch.
Emma watches her stretch out, her feet barely touching Emma's thighs and the smile that graces her face encourages her.

She finds a comfortable spot before opening her arms and smiling just as gently, afraid to frighten her.

"Wanna come lay? Just for a minute?"

There's hesitance.

She sees it in the way that Emma's fingers reach out, as if dying to touch her, but then coil back into a fist.

"Come lay with us, baby."

And if she didn't know it already, Emma proves once again that there's nothing she wouldn't do for Mango.

Emma shifts forward, careful not to hurt her, and lays her long body comfortably between her and the back of the couch.

The moment they settle down, with Regina's arms wrapped securely around Emma's shoulders, it hits her how perfectly and comfortably they fit together and it just makes her heart beat stronger for Emma Swan.

"I hate this," Emma mumbles into her neck.

"No you don't."

"No...I don't."

She turns her head and kisses her gently, sighing as she smells the familiar scent of Emma's shampoo.

"Wanna know a secret?" she whispers.

"Yeah."

She closes her eyes, but continues running her fingers over Emma's back.

"I love being the big spoon. I know it doesn't feel natural for you, but I like getting to feel like I'm taking care of you for a change."

"You take care of me all the time," is whispered back to her as she feels Emma's fingers splay out across her stomach.

"I guess. But making you eat veggies and picking up after you isn't exactly my favorite. This is my favorite."

Emma nods against her and she feels a long string of breath hit her neck. "It's kind of my favorite too."

She chuckles and kisses her hair again. "Your turn. Tell me a secret."

Emma snorts, "That was my secret."
"I already knew you were secretly a little spoon. Tell me something else. Something you've never told me before."

Emma shifts slightly so that they can make eye contact and she holds her breath, wondering if this is the moment where she finally says it.

"I...I..."

She wants to. She can see it in Emma's eyes, but she doesn't want to add any more pressure so she leans forward just enough to peck Emma on the lips and pulls back to put on a smirk.

"I already knew that. Tell me something else."

Emma rolls her eyes, "Someone's cocky."

She gives her one more quick kiss. "Come on. A secret please."

"Like what?"

"Like..." Emma lays her head back down and she smiles. "Like when you first knew?"

Emma's body tenses and she places yet another reassuring kiss to the top of her head.

Emma is silent for a long minute, but she's getting used to the time it takes her to process.

"I...don't really have a moment. I think over time, I just...I started missing your laugh so much it made me sad. At some point, I started wishing I was with you instead of wherever I was or wishing you were with me instead of wherever you were. And then just...all the late night talks and thinking about kids just made me want to keep you forever. Somehow it happened over time and still kinda all at once and the falling felt hard and soft all at the same time. I...I don't know. I know it doesn't make any sense, but that's how it felt."

She smiles and scratches Emma's back to say without words that she's allowed to feel however she wants.

She lets that marinate for a minute before pursing her lips. "Do you want to know when I knew?"

"When?"

She feels Emma looking up at her, but her eyes remain closed.

"When you hugged me that day in my bed. I loved how much you loved it. And then when you brought me flowers. And even though you sort of fumbled on the flowers, I remember thinking...there's more to her. She's got such a tough exterior but there's so much more inside of her which means...there could be more to us. The moment my head could wrap itself around the fact that your soft side was so sweet to me, it was like my heart just went all in. After that, I was a goner. After that day, every time you opened up to me, every time you kissed me or even smiled in my direction, I just kept falling harder and harder."

Emma places a kiss to her chin and she tilts her head down to ask for more, which she easily obliges.

Their lips press together so softly and she can't help but sigh into it as Emma's tongue licks along her bottom lip, needlessly asking permission.

As their kiss deepens, she wonders how far this will go and if she's comfortable with going much further at all.
But the decision is quickly taken out of her hands as Emma pulls back just enough to thank her.

"For what, dear?"

"I know I've joked about it a few times, with the song and everything, but I'm serious. You…," she watches Emma swallow, "You're having my baby. I know the nausea and the cravings haven't been easy for you. Plus I'm all for a woman's right to choose so you keeping this baby at all, especially when we weren't in a good place, means everything to me. You know that right?"

Emma pulls back a little further so they can really look at each other and her gaze penetrates deep. She brings her hands up to move the hair from Emma's face and pushes forward to kiss her even harder.

"I've never once regretted this baby," she says as they finally pull apart for air, "And I've never regretted you. You know that, right?"

Emma's forehead touches hers and together they lean back down to lay, Emma draped softly over her now.

"You're everything to me. You and Mango and my family are everything to me."

"I know but Em...you're allowed to have more than just me and our baby and your family. You don't have to choose between us."

And, as if knowing that all of the cuddles were just a ploy to get to this conversation, Emma replies right away. "Yes I do. I can't have both of you."

"Why not?"

"Because I tried and I failed and I can't fail at this." Fingers tense across her belly and she brings her hand down to cover Emma's over her stomach.

As if sensing both of her parents pouring all their love into her, Mango kicks softly and Emma smiles wide, adjusting so she can crawl downwards, stopping when her head is laying delicately on her baby bump.

"It seems like a lifetime ago, but I've survived on so much less. I can live without a lot of things, but not without this." She places a kiss to her stomach. "Not without Mango and not without you."

"I'm not asking you to choose."

"But he did."

"I don't think he means to, Em."

"Well it doesn't matter anyway. It's no competition."

"It's not supposed to be, Emma. He's your best friend, I'm...me," she rolls her eyes with a smile, almost finding it endearing the way Emma's eyes widen in terror for a moment, "All I'm saying is that you can have both of us. You can have all of the people you love in your life at once."

"Then...why does it feel like there's no room for him anymore?"

"Because he hurt you."

Her eyes narrow, but her tone remains soft. "Because he hurt you. You're the last person I expected
to be handing out condolences."

She laughs and lays her head back. "Believe me, I'm not saying this because I like him. I'm saying it because you love him. And because I love you, I'm telling you that you should try to work this out. I'm sure there's more to the story but he seemed really upset at the door."

Emma lays her head back down too and inches her hand up her shirt, but the way that she rubs her hands over her stomach is clearly not sexual.

"All he wants to do is go out and drink and have sex and he just doesn't get it."

"That sounds awfully familiar."

When she's met with silence, she picks up her head to find Emma staring at her.

"It's not the same," she retorts with an eye roll, but she refuses to by that.

"Is it not? You got a chance to change. Why doesn't he?"

"He's had chances, tons of them! I tried to talk to him about you when we first started dating and again after Thanksgiving. I just don't know how many more chances I'm supposed to give him. He doesn't get it because he's not even trying to get it or understand where I'm coming from." Emma has worked herself up and so she blindly places her own hand on her stomach and wiggles her fingers and Emma knowingly laces their hands together in no time at all.

"You know...my dad used to have a saying that he got from the bible. 'We love because he first loved us.' We weren't a particularly religious family or anything like that but it always stuck with me. My dad used to tell me all the time that we should always be willing to give to others anything someone once gave to us."

Emma's eyebrows knit and God does she ache to kiss them. "I don't know what that's supposed to mean."

"It means...I could've said the same thing about you. I could've looked at you and said you just didn't get it. I could've given up on you the first time we hit a snag and said I'm done giving you chances."

"But you didn't," she says earnestly, eye contact never wavering.

"I didn't. And all I'm saying is that maybe the forgiveness I gave you, that you didn't exactly deserve, maybe you can extend it to him now?"

Emma sighs and lays her head back down on her stomach.

"And, who knows? Maybe you can't work things out. Maybe you are just becoming different people and, maybe this is a moment where you naturally just drift apart and that's okay, Em. But I think you'll never forgive yourself if you end on bad terms with him."

"I..." Emma stops abruptly, and it isn't until she feels the water soak through her shirt that she realizes why.

"Oh baby, come here."

She sits up so that Emma's head is in her lap and she leans down as best she can to kiss her tear stained cheeks.
"I don't want to have to choose and I don't want us to grow apart."

Emma sounds absolutely torn and it makes her want to cry. She hates seeing her like this and that's what makes her say it. Because even though she doesn't love Neal, she can at least learn to live with him if living without him is going to leave Emma like this.

"I know, love. I know. If you don't want to grow apart, that just means you'll have to do what we did. You'll have to find a way to grow together. Okay?"

It takes what feels like forever for Emma's tears to subside and for her to find her voice, but sure enough, never one to give up, Emma nods.

"Okay."

Chapter End Notes

Whew. At 8.7K words, this was a beast to write. So many moments in this chapter so I'm dying to hear what you thought. I know a lot of people were thrown off by the appearance of Daniel, whom we'd never mentioned by name until last chapter, but we both thought it was an important scene. 31 chapters later, we just really wanted to showcase how much they've both grown as individuals and as a couple.

I promise, the next chapter will be (somewhat) less of an emotional roller coaster, we miiiiiiight even work in some smut to thank you for your patience with us. ;) As always, thank you for reading and reviewing. Until next time! :)

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